

Knock, Knock...Who's There? Making Serious Choices About Who Has Access to Your Family.

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Picture the following scenario: Your family is just sitting down to dinner when suddenly you hear a loud “knock, knock” at your front door. On your doorstep is a stranger who demands to come into your home and spend some time with you and your family. The stranger wants to have a sexual encounter with his girlfriend in your living room, or a violent shootout in your family room, or may even want to talk to your children about sex and arrange to meet with them outside your home.

What would your reaction be? Would you think it was a joke? Would you be stunned, afraid and angry? Would you turn the lock and open the door so that this stranger can have access to your family? Or would you instead slam and lock the door, call the police and protect your loved ones?

This may sound melodramatic, but this is virtually what is happening in homes every day. Whenever you or a family member turns on the television, you are potentially allowing such images to invade your home. When anyone in your family clicks on a computer or uses a cell phone, a "virtual door" to your home opens and you are inviting in a world of strangers and images that are potentially harmful to your children and family life. **Are you stopping to ask, “Who’s there?”** Chris Hansen from ABC Dateline has done eleven dramatic hidden camera investigations that have exposed over 250 men who target young teenagers over the Internet. Yet teens and parents alike are still in denial that this can happen to them.

This phenomenon was first addressed by Mary Pipher, Ph.D. in her 1996, New York Times bestseller, *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families*, in which she wrote about the

rise of the "electronic community" and its effect on family life.¹ She very astutely pointed out, "Any one invention probably wouldn't do that much damage. The problem is the whole pile. It's the cumulative effect of all this technology that has changed the very ways we live in families. Eventually the quantity becomes quality and the integrity of our lives is altered."²

Do you know who is virtually in your home right now, in your family room or even your child's bedroom? Technology is here to stay; however, we must be aware of the effects it has on our lives. It is up to each of us to make responsible and conscious choices, and it is up to parents to protect and guide their children. What will you do the next time a sexual or violent image appears on a TV or computer in your home? Do you know who your child is text messaging or what information they are posting on "My Space?" Will you recognize a teachable moment with your child when they or someone in their class is being bullied over the Internet?

There are many excellent online resources such as: <http://www.virtusonline.org/virtus/>, <http://www.kidsafenetwork.com>, <http://www.netsmartz.org> as well as other free resources from your local police department and agencies that can help to increase your knowledge and awareness as well as give you the tools you need to control access to the "virtual door" of your home. Learning to make the right choices can make a profound difference in protecting yourself and your children.

¹ Mary Pipher, Ph.D., *The Shelter of Each Other*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1996, pg. 7

² Mary Pipher, Ph.D., *The Shelter of Each Other*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1996, pg. 11