

Taunton Police Department

Chief Edward J. Walsh

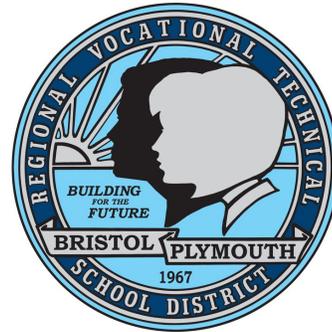
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Taunton Police Department, Bristol- Plymouth Regional Technical School Share Tips to Keep Children Safe While Using Social Media

TAUNTON — Taunton Police Chief Edward J. Walsh and Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School Superintendent-Director Dr. Alexandre Magalhaes would like to provide the public with important information to keep children safe while using social

media.

A trend has been seen recently on various social media platforms, where an individual will send a friend request to an underage user. In reality, the real motive for adding the child as a friend is so the individual can obtain the child's GPS location data.

A staff member at Bristol-Plymouth has received this type of suspicious friend request multiple times recently. She brought it to the attention of School Resource Officer Jayson LaPlante, who then shared it with Taunton Police Det. Lynn Pina.

The Taunton Police Department has implemented training over the past several years to address this type of suspicious activity, and has made it one of its focal points of School Resource Officer training over the past five years.

“This is a very disturbing trend that we have seen lately, and it is something we take very seriously,” SRO LaPlante said. “We are trained to recognize this type of suspicious behavior and work to swiftly apprehend suspected predators, but we can not do it alone. It is imperative that adults educate their children about the potential dangers of the internet and social media starting at a very early age.”

Due to school closings and remote learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, many children have had more opportunities to use social media and online resources than ever before. The Taunton Police Department and Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School would like to share the following [safety tips](#) for protecting children online, courtesy of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Project Safe Childhood initiative:

- Discuss internet safety and develop an online safety plan with children before they engage in online activity. Establish clear guidelines, teach children to spot red flags, and encourage children to have open communication with you.
- Supervise young children’s use of the internet, including periodically checking their social media profiles and posts. Keep electronic devices in open, common areas of the home and consider setting time limits for their use.
- Review games, apps, and social media sites before they are downloaded or used by children. Pay particular attention to apps and sites that feature end-to-end encryption, direct messaging, video chats, file uploads, and user anonymity, which are frequently relied upon by online child predators.
- Adjust privacy settings and use parental controls for online games, apps, social media sites, and electronic devices.

- Tell children to avoid sharing personal information, photos, and videos online in public forums or with people they do not know in real life. Explain to your children that images posted online will be permanently on the internet.
- Teach children about body safety and boundaries, including the importance of saying “no” to inappropriate requests both in the physical world and the virtual world.
- Be alert to potential signs of abuse, including changes in children’s use of electronic devices, attempts to conceal online activity, withdrawn behavior, angry outbursts, anxiety and depression.
- Encourage children to tell a parent, guardian or other trusted adult if anyone asks them to engage in sexual activity or other inappropriate behavior.

“We thank our local law enforcement partners for everything they do to keep our students safe, and for their commitment to preventing online predators from using social media as a way to engage in these types of dangerous and illegal activities,” Superintendent-Director Magalhaes said. “We encourage parents and guardians to have open and honest conversations with their children about using social media, and to always feel comfortable going to their student’s teacher or to the district administration should they ever have any questions or concerns.”

Parents are urged to immediately report suspected online enticement or sexual exploitation of a child by calling 911, contacting the FBI at tips.fbi.gov, or filing a report with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-843-5678. Additional concerns from members of the Bristol-Plymouth community can be sent to SRO LaPlante at the Taunton Police Department at 508-824-7522.

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A message from the Taunton Police Department and Bristol-Plymouth Regional Technical School

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