

EDITOR'S DESK

# Protecting children starts at home

The evils of human trafficking and child abuse have seen increased attention in recent weeks, including a march in Hermiston last weekend to raise awareness of the issue.

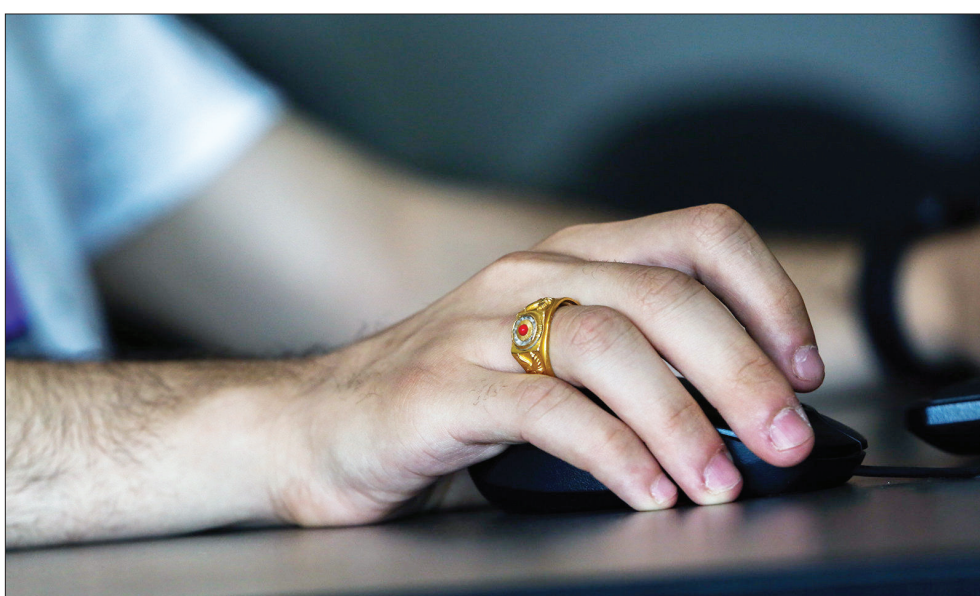


**Jade McDowell**  
NEWS EDITOR

Increased awareness of such problems is good, because myths and misconceptions abound.

I frequently see posts online cautioning women that sex traffickers are using tactics, such as placing a flier on their windshield while they are in the grocery store, so that kidnappers can nab them when they remove the paper. While it is always good to take safety precautions against kidnapping, the truth is that few victims of human trafficking are forced into a van in a busy parking lot. Instead, traffickers often lure people in through tactics, such as a false romantic relationship, an offer of a modeling contract or job.

In the documentary "Chosen," one sex trafficking survivor tells of how as a teenager she felt flattered by the attentions of a man in his twenties. Eventually, she lied to her parents about a sleepover to in order to spend the weekend with her "boyfriend" and he convinced her to do him a huge favor by dancing a night at a strip club to make the money he supposedly needed to pay his rent the



HH file photo

**A Hermiston High School student uses a computer at school in this 2018 file photo. According to law enforcement, it is important for parents to have conversations about online safety with their children.**

next day. He used photos from the night to blackmail her.

Polaris, the nonprofit that runs the the U.S. Human Trafficking National Hotline, states on its website that the most pervasive myth about human trafficking is that traffickers use physical force to kidnap their victims.

"In reality, most traffickers use psychological means such as tricking, defrauding, manipulating or threatening victims into providing commercial sex or exploitative labor," it states.

Such predators used to have to hang out at malls or parks to build a

relationship with their victims, but these days the internet provides easy access into almost every home in America. And unfortunately, many parents are unaware of large portions of their child's online life.

Police have the ability to retrieve photos and messages from phones after they have already been deleted, and last year, when I interviewed Umatilla County Sheriff's Office Detective Kasey Ward about online safety, he told me that parents are often shocked to learn what files or browsing history he retrieved from their child's phone in the course of an investigation.

Some parents don't check their child's phone, but others thought they were doing a good job of checking up on their child. Their teen was two steps ahead of them though — using apps like Snapchat that delete photo messages after a few seconds, using incognito mode on their web browser or using messaging apps meant to fool parents by appearing to be something innocuous like a calculator.

Having conversations with your child about online safety is vital. A friend recently had to have that conversation with a child in her family, letting him know the "12-year-old girl" she discovered was asking him for explicit photos through the video game Fortnite may not be 12 or a girl.

Just as crucially, it is important to remember that unfortunately the vast majority of all sexual abuse cases come not from strangers met online, but from people that the child (and their parents) know and trust. Conversations about appropriate touching, consent, and talking to you about anything that doesn't feel right are as important as conversations about the fact that once you hit "send" on a photo or video you have no control over where it might show up next.

These aren't easy conversations to have, but solving the world's problems usually starts at home.

COLUMN

## Reading advice to start the school year

Have you seen the preschooler or kindergartner who reads without a problem?

Over the years I have seen many of these great little readers head off to school appearing as readers. Quite often they are very smart and are very aware of their surroundings. But are they really readers? How's their spelling? More often than not they are fooling the adults.



**Scott Smith**

What has happened is that they are smart, there is no question. And what they have been able to do at their age is memorize enough words that, within their level of books, they had no difficulty reading. Parents get frustrated when their teachers are teaching the letter sounds and blending because they feel their child is already a reader. Without the understanding of how the words are made, once they hit more difficult reading materials with increasingly higher vocabulary levels, they may begin to struggle.

With most children, they are able to memorize roughly 70 to 80 words and be able to understand how they are used. By the middle of second grade, we often see students begin to struggle. This is because they are unable to decode unknown words or multisyllabic words. Now, they have to step back and learn the skills their kindergarten and first-grade teachers were presenting, which may cause them to slow down.

By no means am I saying to stop encouraging your preschooler from reading, but make sure they also know

the letter names and sounds. By building those passageways in your child's brain they will be able to transfer them later in their decoding of words with strong foundational skills they will be applying as their reading increases.

### Increasing reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is a transfer skill that happens after the development of language comprehension. It is the ability to remember things and explain things through retelling. This process begins building pathways in the brain early in life.

Understanding what we read is so important in our culture, but comprehending starts long before we learn to read. Growing up in the 1960s in a very traditional home, it was common to have dinner together. I can remember my parents asking about our day along with them sharing about theirs. Without really realizing it, they were teaching my sister and me how to use our memories to recall and retell information we had gained during the day.

Such an easy thing to do — having your child tell you about something they did during the day — can have an immense impact on your child's ability to build an understanding of what they read later. If a child cannot tell about events in their lives there is a strong probability they will struggle with reading comprehension later.

Take the time to have your children tell about activities and events during their day. If they are like many kids they will begin by saying, "Oh, nothing," or "I don't know." That is a cue they may be struggling with the skill and you will need to give them some

guided assistance. Stay calm, and use questions: "Well, didn't you have lunch?" Help them trigger memories so they can talk about the day. They will build the brain pathways and soon they will be able to tell you all about their day.

Today's kids have access to so many devices, so use them. Give them your phone and send them out to make a video about an object, flower, animal, or the beach. Have them watch it and try not to give feedback other than things like, "What a great job." They will see faults and take the initiative to make changes. Even if they do something different they will build their skills. You can have them give you feedback about their video. Ask "What did you like?" or "What bothered you about your video?"

Along that same line, have them retell a story in selfie-style. Preschoolers love to retell stories you read to them; just have them record/video it. You will be building stronger pathways in their brain, so they will be able to apply them later when they start reading.

Asking students simple questions about their day or having them tell you about a family event will quickly give you an idea of their language comprehension. Until their language comprehension is strong, they will struggle with reading comprehension.

*Dr. Scott Smith taught at Umatilla at McNary Heights Elementary School and for Eastern Oregon University in their teacher education program at BMCC. He serves on the Decoding Dyslexia — OR board.*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### The president ignored the warning signs

At the beginning of this pandemic I wrote the White House to President Donald J. Trump at the beginning of his plan to reopen the states.

I wrote him a long suggestion letter to not open up all states, and open up two states at a time each month. This way all medical personnel can be deployed to these, opening up states from across the United States. This would have avoided many unwanted deaths across our nation.

I wrote the White House twice recommending this method, and opening up two states every month or two, so that hospitals do not get overrun by this virus. I warned the administration twice about what would happen, and I was ignored.

I had the gut feeling we needed to open up at least two states maybe every month or two. Now can you see if we would have taken this route? But most likely, because I am another incarcerated person, I was ignored.

**Jose Castro Umatilla**

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Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.