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District Attorney Warns of Possible Dangers of a New Social Networking Application

The District Attorney's Child Internet Sex Offender (CSOII) Unit reminds parents to talk to their kids about where they spend their time online, whether on a computer or their cell phone. New applications and programs for today's "smart phones" arrive on the scene almost weekly, each one bringing new challenges for parents.

A new social network application called "Friends Around Me" comes with features that are very attractive to kids. The application is designed for the iPhone and iPad. It combines the function of Facebook and Twitter and allows those using the site to pinpoint the precise physical location of others using the site.

<http://www.kdvr.com/news/kdvr-social-around-me-risks-042610,0,3310193.story>

The iPhone and iPad have GPS features that can be very valuable as a mapping tool. But, District Attorney Investigator Mike Harris warns, "The GPS feature is a huge security risk for young people. Often children and teens in chat rooms or in social networking sites don't really know the person they are talking to, now that stranger will know their exact location."

"Friends Around Me" is just one of thousands of mobile social network sites that are gaining in popularity for smart phone users. More and more social applications have the same GPS location software, many users don't even realize it's activated.

Investigator Harris and his CSOII Unit teach children not to communicate with strangers. In Internet Safety presentations they show parents and kids how easy it is for a stranger to locate a child based with very limited information.

"This application is a stalkers tool kit, it's a sexual predator's tool kit, it's a kidnapper's tool kit. It's all right there," says Investigator Harris.

"We strongly recommend that parents develop and open line of communication with their teens," says Harris, "Talk to them about where they go and what they do online. Who are they communicating with on their cell phones? Regarding this particular application, we recommend that users decline the use of the tracking software on the application. They can still enjoy the social interaction without a stranger knowing exactly where they are."

For more safety tips: http://jeffco.us/jeffco/da_uploads/cell_phone_safety_tips.doc