I. Introduction to this Guide

Scope and Purpose

Hate on the Internet: A Response Guide for Educators and Families is designed to assist educators and adult family members in preparing children of all ages for safe use of the Internet. As Americans have expanded their use of the Internet, hate groups have also increasingly used this technology to spread messages of hate and intolerance. Without question, the Internet has become a key force in the lives of young people, providing a rich resource for research, learning, communication, and entertainment. Increased use of the Internet has created the need for new skills for navigating this medium and for assessing online sources of information. This guide has been developed to assist educators and families in exploring these issues with students through discussion and activities.

The democratic right of free speech, articulated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, is built on an understanding of the benefits of a "marketplace of ideas," where the free expression of a variety of competing perspectives furthers the search for truth. By taking advantage of the protection offered by the First Amendment, hate groups are now using the Internet to quickly and inexpensively reach large numbers of Internet users, including children and teenagers who may not have yet developed the critical thinking skills necessary to assess sources of information or differentiate between reputable and disreputable Web sites.

The purpose of this guide is to provide families and educators with useful information about hate on the Internet and to provide strategies to help prepare children for the hate they may encounter as they navigate the World Wide Web. This guide provides background information on some of the hate groups that are currently utilizing the Web, the varied forms of hatred children may encounter online, and the resulting risks for children. *Hate on the Internet* includes practical tools and resources to teach children the skills for safe, productive, and educational use of the Internet.

Two basic assumptions guided the development of the content for this guide:

1. *Open, honest communication among family members is a key component in addressing concerns about children's online experiences.* Children of all ages will be comfortable sharing their feelings and experiences with adults in an atmosphere that promotes trust and communication. When children raise questions about online information that they don't understand or that is upsetting to them, adults will have opportunities to discuss the experience

and to brainstorm with children possible responses that promote safety. Parents and adult family members can regularly initiate and foster these dialogues, providing opportunities to raise concerns honestly and directly.

2. *Critical thinking skills assist children of all ages in making sound judgments and good decisions.* When children master critical thinking skills, they have learned how to think, rather than what to think. In the new information age, children are often bombarded with ideas and "facts" from a wide variety of sources. Adults cannot completely control or limit the information children receive. A recommended approach is to provide opportunities for children to develop skills to analyze the information they obtain. Critical thinking skills enable children to become active contributors in maintaining their own safety.

Intended Audience

Every day, more homes and schools initiate and expand their use of the Internet, providing access to increasing numbers of children and youth, and new opportunities and techniques to enhance their learning. The World Wide Web has increased accessibility to massive amounts of information on virtually every topic imaginable. Because online information is largely uncensored and unverified, the increasing use of the Internet poses new challenges to education professionals and family members who are responsible for the safety, education, and emotional development of children. *Hate on the Internet* has been designed primarily for families and educators; however, much of the material will also be relevant to librarians, a profession which has taken on increased responsibilities in the education of our youth.

Adult family members and teachers, primary influences in the daily lives of children, can play a key role in identifying situations that might put children at risk. The Internet, while providing young people with abundant information and resources, also brings some potential dangers. By understanding these dangers and providing opportunities for young people to develop effective safeguards, parents and educators can promote an online experience for children that is enjoyable, educational, and safe. This guide will assist educators and families in becoming informed about some of the potential dangers of this technology and provides strategies to prepare young people for safe navigation of the Internet.

Today, most public and academic libraries provide Internet access to their patron communities thereby expanding the traditional role of librarians to include educating library patrons to be independent online information seekers. The

American Library Association affirms that (ALA Council, 1996):

> "Freedom of expression is an inalienable human right and the foundation for self-government. Freedom of expression encompasses the freedom of speech and the corollary right to receive information. These rights extend to minors as well as adults. Libraries and librarians exist to facilitate the exercise of these rights by selecting, producing, providing access to, identifying, retrieving, organizing, providing instruction in the use of, and preserving recorded expression regardless of the format or technology."

Librarians are frequently called upon to assist in educating young patrons to assess the information they obtain via the Internet. This guide provides resources to assist librarians and media specialists in this process.

How to Use this Resource

In addition to this **Introduction,** the *Hate on the Internet: A Response Guide for Educators and Families* includes the following sections:

- **Defining the Problem: The Internet as a Tool of Hate** – this section provides a description of the historical and current hate activity on the Internet. This section details the ways children might encounter hate online, and includes specific examples.

- **Helping Children Navigate the Internet Safely** – this section details the growing influence of the Internet in the lives and education of youth, provides theoretical information about the dangers posed by hate groups, and includes recommended strategies to promote the online safety of children.

- **Practical Tools for Educators and Families** – included in this section are resources and tools for use with children of all ages, including *Internet Guidelines for Parents & Families, Educators, and Librarians* and *Internet Tips for Kids,* which can be used to stimulate discussion about the responsibilities that accompany the privilege of computer use. *Internet Tips for Kids* is suitable for posting and can provide a visual reminder of family discussions about these issues. Suggested discussion points and activities for families are also included in this section.

- **Bibliographies** – included in this section are recommended resources grouped as follows: "Suggested Resources for Families," "Suggested Resources for Educators," "Suggested Resources for Students," and "Additional Online Resources." These resources have been selected to promote a safe and educational online experience for children.

Increased awareness of the presence of hate on the Internet is an important first step in promoting the online safety of children. This publication is available in a .PDF format at the Partners Against Hate Web site, www.partnersagainsthate.org. Partners Against Hate invite you to share this resource with others interested in the online safety of young people. You may want to consider the following strategies:

1. Provide a brief synopsis of the issue of Internet safety at a staff meeting and share information about this resource and how it may be obtained.

2. Circulate the guide among colleagues in your organization. Attach a short note explaining why you feel the information is valuable for your work with children and youth.

3. Provide copies of the handout, *Internet Tips for Kids* (see **Practical Tools for Educators and Families**), and suggest the staff consider posting or distributing the handout and reviewing its content with students.