Trust No One, by Julie Martin
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No, this article isn't about **The X-Files**. This article is a serious message to every chatter out there, regardless of age or gender. I want to talk to you today about safety in chatting.

No, don't roll your eyes at me. There are real, actual **dangers** out there. I know, it's hard to understand that you might actually be in danger if you're sitting in front of your computer, talking to people in a chatroom, because you think you're anonymous.

I have news for anyone who thinks they're anonymous when they're online -- you're not.

If you chat on **IRC** most networks let people get your **IP address**. [Note: Only chatroom administrators and their chat hosts can see this information in the About.com chatrooms, regular users cannot see IP addresses.] Using your IP address, people can then figure out which Internet provider you use -- and even what town you're calling from. Look at this:

IP Address: 38.30.206.155
Resolved Hostname: ip155.fort-myers3.fl.pub-ip.psi.net

Just from looking at the resolved hostname, I can tell that the person on this IP address right now is calling from Fort Myers in Florida. If I were chatting with this person, and happened to find out their first name, their age, the school they went to or where they worked, I probably wouldn't have too much trouble finding them in real life, if I wanted to.

What a lot of people don't understand is that even the smallest bit of personal information, casually given away in the most off-hand manner, can be very dangerous. That's why it's extremely important for chatters (especially the young chatters) to follow the **Rules for Safety Online**, which include:

"I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother or father along."

and:

I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission."

That's mainly for **kids**, of course. But what about adults? We're not immune, not by any means of the imagination. In fact, just the other day, I saw someone in my very own **chatroom** give out his real first name and his phone number to someone else, in front of over thirty other chatters! This could have led to someone finding out where he lived. If that had happened, anything could have happened to him. He could have been physically harmed, or maybe something less painful, but more sinister -- he could have been stalked.

What we need to remember is that every bit of information we give out can be used against us, can be used to find us. You all know my name is Julie Martin. Do you know where I live? If you've read my articles, you know I'm a **Canadian**, from Montreal, Quebec. Do you know how old I am? No, because I don't give out my age. I tell people I'm in my twenties. That

could mean 20 or 29. Do you know where I hang out? Who my family members and friends are? No and no. I can afford to give out my name because I don't give out other information that can be used to locate me. If someone did a search on "*Julie Martin*" in Montreal, they'd have a hard time finding me without any additional information. After all, Julie Martin is hardly an uncommon name.

My point is... Be careful. **Chat safely**. Trust no one. You never know who's watching.

Want to discuss this serious matter with others? Post about it on our **forum**. Or if you just want to chat with folks from around the world, you can chat in our **chatroom**. Don't forget about **Tuesday Night Trivia**! You could be June's Grand Champion and win a prize.

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