

Technology and Our Children

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Technology can enhance or destroy our children's lives. To keep them safe, we need to teach them responsible digital citizenship and respectful netiquette.

Information Every Parent Needs to Know

- The ONLY key to keeping kids safe online is by talking to them and by being involved in their online (and cell phone) experiences. Talk to them when they are young and keep conversations ongoing.
- You can say NO when it comes to the Internet and other electronic devices! They are privileges not rights.
- Kids do not *NEED* a MySpace, Facebook or other social networking profile. They won't become social outcasts if they don't participate in social media. Communicating in real time will prepare them for healthy relationships and will challenge them.
- Most kids will learn about sexuality online if parents don't talk to them about it first. Create with your child a plan of action for when he/she is exposed to inappropriate material.
- Talking to your kids in a frank, age-appropriate manner about sex and the dangers of pornography will NOT cause them to engage in it.
- Parents need to know how to navigate the Internet, chat rooms and social networking sites. Know what your child is looking at and with whom they are communicating.
- Use Internet filtering software and tell your child you are doing so to foster trust and open communication (especially adolescents). Filters do not protect children completely (especially from images).
- Kids can access pornography on their cell phone, gaming device or through file sharing (without ever visiting the Internet).
- Don't be naive! Good kids are curious and often times lured into the trap of pornography, sexting and other inappropriate behaviors.

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Solutions for Parents

Internet

Create clear Internet rules that answer the following questions. How much time is allowed online? What sites are allowed? What is the plan should an inappropriate image appear? Are chat rooms, instant messaging or social networking sites allowed? Who is responsible for enforcing the rules?

Purchase a laptop computer instead of a desktop. Many kids surf the net in the middle of the night when parents are asleep. A laptop can be shut off and locked away in a safe place at night.

Purchase Internet filtering software BUT don't rely on it to keep your child safe. **ALWAYS MONITOR YOUR CHILD WHEN ONLINE!** Be in the room, looking over their shoulder at all times.

Consider Internet monitoring software such as Content Watch, or age-appropriate, safe social networking software like Dolphin Secure.

Know how to navigate sites like Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. It's vital to know what your kids are exposed to and where they spend their virtual time.

Know your children's screen names and passwords and make sure that they do not include personal information in their profiles.

Regularly check their instant messenger "buddy list". Know who your child's Internet 'friends' are.

Cell Phones & Etiquette

Instead of individual phones for your children, consider family phones. Each child is allowed to take a phone with pre-programmed important numbers as they leave the house. Phones must be returned to a parent when kids return home. This preserves family time and helps to cut down on inappropriate cell phone use, loss of sleep, distraction, sexting and cyber bullying.

Do not purchase cell phones that have camera, text or Internet capabilities.

Check your child's phone for incoming/outgoing calls, texts and images. Frequent monitoring should come with the privilege of using a cell phone.

Enforce excellent cell etiquette. No phones during homework, dinner, church, movies, or during family time. Teach kids to value face-to-face communication over digital communication. This teaches respect and helps to curb cyber bullying, disrespect and bad manners.

If you buy a cell phone for your child, consider the following:

Purchase a very basic phone without text, camera or Internet capabilities.

Use the phone to teach manners, boundaries, rules and responsibility.

Consider asking your child to do extra jobs around the house to pay for the privilege of a cell phone.

Can you set and enforce firm limits and boundaries? If not, buying a cell phone for your child may not be the best idea and can even be a source of stress.

Discuss with your child that the phone is not theirs, but is theirs only to use. Remind them that you will be monitoring all incoming/outgoing calls, texts and images and will be reviewing the bill with them each month.

Model responsible cell phone etiquette. Don't text and drive, talk at a restaurant, in a movie or out with friends. We are our children's best example.

Cyber Bullying

The number one reason children do not tell anyone they are being bullied is that they fear their online privileges will be taken away.

Warning signs that your child may be cyber bullied:

- Reluctance to use the computer or electronic device
- Avoids discussion about what they are doing on the computer, or other electronic device
- Appears nervous, anxious or jumpy when receiving an email, IM or text
- Displays unusual anger, sadness, and depression after using the computer or electronic device
- Talks about revenge
- Exits out of whatever they are doing, if a person walks by
- May be having trouble sleeping or changes in eating habits
- Sudden decline in school homework or grades
- Unusual interest in self-harm or in suicide. Moody or withdrawn.
- More physical complaints such as headache and upset stomach
- Reclusive, anti-social and/or is losing friends
- Does not want to be involved in family or school activities

Warning signs that your child may be a bully:

- He has numerous online accounts and aims to keep them secret
- When using the computer or electronic device, he excessively laughs
- May avoid discussion or conversations regarding online activities
- May close or click out of whatever he is doing when a person walks by
- May frequently use the computer, especially at night
- May become upset if computer access or other electronic device is denied

**According to Internet Safety Advisor, Symantec & Project Safe Kids*

What Can You Do If Your Child Is Bullied:

Encourage your child to talk. Remain calm, listen in a loving manner and support your child's feelings. Express understanding and concern and don't blame your child.

Learn as much as you can about the situation. Ask your child to describe how and when the bullying occurs and who is involved. Ask if other children or adults have witnessed any bullying incidents or viewed electronic messages. Find out what your child may have already tried to stop the bullying.

Teach your child how to respond to the bullying. Don't promote retaliation or fighting back against a bully. Log off of social networking sites or chat rooms and block those who are harassing you.

Contact school officials and/or police. Talk to your child's teacher, counselor and principal, especially if bullying has taken place during school hours. If your child has been physically attacked or threatened the police may need to be involved. Don't contact the bully's parents yourself. Push school officials to adopt a no-bullying policy with swift consequences.

Follow up. Be persistent with school officials and law enforcement.

Boost your child's self-confidence. Help your child get involved in activities that raise self-esteem, such as sports, music or art. Encourage your child to make safe friends and to develop his social skills.

Know when to seek professional help. Consider professional or school counseling for your child if her fear or anxiety becomes overwhelming or disabling.

According to www.mayoclinic.com.

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Parent & Educator Resource List

www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/8010.pdf	2010 Kaiser Family Foundation study on media and the family.
www.commonensemedia.org	A wealth of information on all media issues.
www.netlingo.com	Learn teen text lingo, slang and new terms.
www.internet-filter-review.com	Reviews on the best Internet filters.
www.ikeepSAFE.org	Resources for parents and educators. Tools to help kids use technology safely.
www.enough.org	Enough is Enough. Get stats, research, products and tools for Internet safety.
www.internetsafety101.org	New Internet safety program.
www.mymobilewatchdog.com	Cell phone safeguard. Alerts you if unapproved email, text messages or phone calls are received.
www.familysafemedia.com	Parental control solutions and filters.
www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov	By the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services to prevent bullying.
www.bullying.org	A site dedicated to education about bullying.
www.wiredkids.org	Protects the privacy & safety of Internet users.
www.teenangels.com	Teenage volunteers trained in online safety. Peers helping peers.
www.dolphinsecure.com	Social networking sites for children and young adults. Fingerprint technology.
www.mobile-spy.com	Monitor teen cell phone use.
www.wiredsafety.org	World's largest Internet education resource.
www.pewinternet.org	Research on the impact of the Internet on families.
www.eblaster.com	Know EVERYTHING your kids do online.

The Safe-Surfing Contract

My Agreement About Using the Internet

I want to use the Internet. I know that there are certain rules about what I should do online. I agree to follow these rules and my parents agree to help me follow these rules:

1. I will not give my name, address, telephone number, school, or my parents' names, addresses, or telephone numbers, or anything else that would help anyone find me offline (like the name of my sports team) to anyone I meet on the computer.
2. I understand that some people online pretend to be someone else. Sometimes they pretend to be kids, when they're really grown-ups. I will tell my parents about people I meet online. I will also tell my parents before I answer any e-mails or instant messages I get from, or send e-mail or instant messages to, new people I meet online.
3. I will not buy or order anything online or give out any credit card information without asking my parents.
4. I will not fill out any form online that asks me for any information about myself or my family without asking my parents first. This includes forms for contests or registering at a site. I'll also check to see if the sites have a privacy policy and if they promise to keep my private information private. If they don't promise to keep my private information private, I won't give them any private information. (I will talk to my parents about what "private information" is.)
5. I will not get into arguments or fights online. If someone tries to start an argument or fight with me, I won't answer him or her and will tell my parents.
6. If I see something I do not like or that makes me uncomfortable or that I know my parents don't want me to see, I will click on the "Back" button or log off.
7. If I see people doing things or saying things to other kids online I know they're not supposed to do or say, I'll tell my parents.
8. I won't keep online secrets from my parents.
9. If someone sends me any pictures, links to sites I know I shouldn't be going to, or any e-mail or instant messaging using bad language, I will tell my parents.
10. If someone asks me to do something I am not supposed to do, I will tell my parents.
11. I will not call anyone I met online unless my parents say it's OK. (Even then I will block caller ID on my phone.)
12. I will never meet in person anyone I met online, unless my parents say it's OK and they are with me.
13. I will never send anything to anyone I met online, unless my parents say it's OK.
14. If anyone I met online sends me anything, I will tell my parents.
15. I will not use something I found online and pretend it's mine.

16. I won't say bad things about people online, and I will practice good Netiquette.

17. I won't use bad language online or threaten anyone, even if I'm only kidding.

18. I know that my parents want to make sure I'm safe online, and I will listen to them when they ask me not to do something.

19. I will help teach my parents more about computers and the Internet.

20. I will practice safe computing, and check for viruses whenever I borrow a disk from someone or download something or open any attachment, even from someone I know.

21. I will tell my parents when something bad happens online, because they promise not to overreact if something bad happens online. And I will remember that it's not my fault if others do bad things online!

I promise to follow these rules. (signed by child/teen)

I promise to help my child follow these rules and not to overreact if my child tells me about bad things that happen in cyberspace. (Signed by parent)