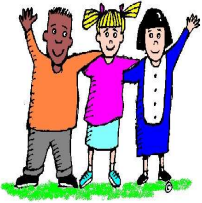


Linking School and Family



Connected Technology: Keeping Kids Safe



Did You Know?

- **About one-third of youth (34%) admit to regularly communicating online with people they did not know in person** (Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D. (2006).
- **96% of students ages 9 to 17 who have access to the Internet have used social networking technologies and 71% use this technology weekly.** (Grunwald Associates, "Creating & Connecting Research and Guidelines on Online Social and Educational Networking," July 2007).
- **One out of every 3 youth has encountered unwanted sexual material while online** (Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D. (2006).

THE LINK

June 2010

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Do your kids know more than you about connected technology such as chatrooms, text and instant messaging, online computer games, webcams, social networking, and iPods? While you certainly wouldn't let your kids play in traffic, you may unintentionally be letting them play in cyberspace without your guidance. Don't forget that while your kids may know more than you do about technology, you know more about life.

Specific technology has specific risks. Many youth today have cell phones, are interested in social networking, and participate in online gaming. Others may be the victim of sexting or cyberbullying. Here's what you need to know about each.

Social Networking

Social networking websites function like an online community of Internet users. Parents need to familiarize themselves with the terminology and communication methods used on each website (Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter). Most information for parents is easily accessible from the homepage. Make sure to review the security policy of each site that your child wants to join and then set ground rules.

Don't allow your child to use his/her complete name. Have him/her use first name and last initial or whatever makes you feel comfortable. Don't allow your child to post any address, or home or cell phone number. Establish daily time limits on how long your child may be on the social networking sites. Tell your child he or she can only post pictures approved by you. Make sure they know that they are not allowed to meet anybody from the site you don't personally know. Always have the maximum privacy settings in place for your child to ensure that he/she cannot be contacted by an unknown individual.

Parents should create an account on the social networking site their child wants to join, and tell their child that he or she can't have an account unless they make you a friend. This actually is the most critical rule for all parents to follow. Online predators could be contacting your child without you knowing. Messages can be removed from "walls", so checking your child's page before messages are removed will keep you one step ahead of online predators. You can also review your child's friend list and review pictures being posted online and make sure they are appropriate.

Lastly, advise your children that information posted on social networking sites are public domain. This means the information posted could later haunt your child. If they are looking for a job or getting ready to apply for college, it is not all that uncommon for employers and colleges admissions officers to search for an applicant on social networking sites.
(Source: *The Parents Learning Center section of the Internet Safety Center - internetsafetycenter.com)*



Cell Phones

Tell your kids what your expectations are for cell phone usage. Cell phones today permit kids to check their profiles on social networking sites and post comments from their phones. That means some “tweens” can do social networking literally anywhere, in which case any filter you may have installed on a home computer does nothing to block social networking. Smart- or 3G-phones usually include access to the Web, and parents may want to turn on filtering if concerned about access to adult content.

Most mobile phones used today have cameras and/or video cams. Youth love to share media with friends on all types of mobile devices, but they give little thought to the risks to their safety and their reputation. Talk with your children about never letting other people photograph or film them in embarrassing or inappropriate situations (and vice versa). “Sexting” usually refers to the sharing of nude photos via cell phone (and other devices). This behavior is illegal, and passing along a photo could lead to a charge of distributing child pornography. Keeping a nude photo on your phone is possession, and sending it across state lines is a federal felony.

Tell your kids to only give their mobile number to people they know and can trust. Remind them to never reply to text messages from people they don’t know. Make sure they (and you) know how to block others from calling their phone. Check with your cell phone provider regarding other controls you can put on your child’s phone; for example, only allowing them to place, receive calls, and text at certain times of the day. (*Source: wiresafety.org and ConnectSafely.org*)

Video Networking

Video Networking is new technology that allows anyone to upload and share videos they produce, copy or find. YouTube is the most well-know video networking site, and chances are your child has already viewed a video from the site.

What do parents need to know? Parents need to get up to speed on the kind of things their kids can see online. Most sites do not require any sort of identity verification to become registered, so there is no age restriction to access "adult" material on the site. The content can be quite graphic. There are documented incidents of graphic combat video from the Iraq war, beheadings, pornography, graphic fights, pedophilia, and other highly objectionable material has been posted to the various sharing sites. At the worst, predators use video networking to victimize children.

Most of the larger sites use some sort of member review and flagging system. YouTube for instance (recently acquired by Google) allows their registered members to 'flag' videos with potentially graphic content. They also restrict access to those videos to those who have registered and stated they were of legal age. Still, parents need to be the protectors of their kids online and not rely on the sites to do their jobs for them. Parents need to explain to their kids that videos posted online could lead to potential problems. For example, posting a video could give an online predator information that could lead to the predator finding your child online. Certain videos perhaps posted as being "funny" could be used later on for blackmail purposes, and there can be legal problems if the videos being posted violate copyright law.

Work with your kids and teach them what is appropriate and what is inappropriate activity online. **Set down rules, and ENFORCE them.** Keeping your family safe online is the responsibility of everyone in your family, but as parents, your kids are looking to you for your experience and your guidance (*Source: wiresafety.org*)

www.safekids.com lists 10 common rules and guideline for you to establish with your children regarding connected technology safety. Review these rules together and have your child sign them as a contract. There are many other valuable websites dedicated to educating parents about connected technology and child safety online.

- www.netsmartz411.org - a website for answering questions about Internet safety, computers and the web.
- www.netsmartz.org - protecting children from the dangers of the Internet.
- www.ikeepSAFE.org - a website that offers free video tutorials about social networking basics, cyber-bullying, and keeping teens and “tweens” safe online
- www.safekids.com - Internet safety tips for parents and children
- www.commonSense.com - Internet survival arranged by age
- www.webwisekids.org - Uses games to teach about internet safety
- www.internetsafetycenter.com - Provides information on making the internet safe for your family
- www.wiresafety.org - Internet safety, help and education resource

