Keeping Your Family Internet Safe and Smart

The Internet gets more portable every day, which makes it easier for our kids to be online more of the time. Today your child may go online from a computer or even a mobile phone, but tomorrow? Who Knows! It could be via something not invented yet. **Parents need to help their children learn about safe and appropriate behavior, not just safe and appropriate sites.**

The majority of kids report that their parents have no rules about the Internet. The result is that kids visit sites, create accounts, e

-mail, and communicate free of supervision. **Parents need to be involved in their children's online lives.**

Our kids know way more than we do. They have grown up online. They know how to search places and do things we can't. **Adults must still teach them codes of conduct,** even when their kids' form of communicating (cu l8r) may be downright baffling to us.

Those using the Internet are also creating its content. Kids post and receive pictures, stream videos, and read and write things that are visible to anyone online. They can also receive unedited, unfiltered information. **We need to help our kids think critically about what they post, read, and see online.**

Social Networking:

The good thing about social networking sites is that they create online communities. They provide a way for young adults to test out different identities, and they provide a good way for then to express themselves.

Your child may think the personal things they post are private or just for their friends, but ultimately things posted online can be viewed by college admission staff or potential employers, who may make decisions based upon those postings. Just because a post is taken down does not mean it hasn't been captured and archived forever somewhere.

Profiles, likes, dislikes, and locations become available to view by sexual predators, and others who use the anonymous nature of the online world to their advantage. While some 'friends' are just who they say they are, there are no guarantees.

TIPS:
1) **Balance your child's need for privacy and self–expression with concerns about safety and responsibility**—forbidding social networking sites probably won't work, so focus your energies on appropriate postings and safety information.
2) **Create safe privacy settings**—make sure they're on "friends only"
3) **Tell kids to thing about their photos and entries BEFORE they post them!**—Since

Downloading:

entries BEFORE they post them! - Since anything can be downloaded and forwarded, ask your children if they want the world to see what they post. Remind them that future colleges and employers could be checking them out one day.

4) **Make sure they avoid all personal identifiers**—and avoid posting about parties, events, or activities where a stranger could find them.

Because most content requires a credit card to download, parents should be more involved in what is downloaded than with any other Internet activities.

Most sites allow access to music, video, and games with no ratings involved. You might not know the content of what your child is downloading. Sites can get around credit card issues by offering "allowances", kids can download video and music that you might not want them seeing or hearing.

Illegal peer to peer software (such as LimeWire and Kazaa) that allows people to share music and video files is strictly illegal.

TIPS:
1) **Set rules with your child about what you will and will not let them download.**
2) **Check your computer** for LimeWire, Kazaa, or other peer-to-peer file sharing systems—Delete them immediately.
3) **Remember, many downloads cost money**—because that cost is invisible to your kids, they might not realize the connection between the impulse to click and the consequence of cost; make that connection.
4) Make sure you check ratings and content information. This site: www.commonsensemedia.org contains ratings and review information on various movies, music, and games that can be downloaded.

Online Gaming:

Free online games can be fun and pass the time. Some games are educational and sharpen reading, math, and decision-making skills.

Privacy, safety, and age-appropriate content are all a concern with games. Also, games are highly addictive time consumers. They're built so that your children either want more or can't get far in a short period of time. This will frustrate your attempts to limit game time—but game limits are a must, as they teach kids how and when to say "enough".

Violence, bad language, and anti-social behavior are common elements for many games. Part of this world's appeal (especially for young boys) lies in the edginess of its content. These addictive games will chew up you kid's days and nights if you do not intervene now.

TIPS:
1) **Do your homework**—know the game ratings and know what games your kids play.
2) **Set time limits BEFORE they go online**.
3) **Enforce privacy rules**. Tell your kids never to give out their e-mail addresses, name, phone number, school, or home address when they sign in for a game

Web Surfing:

The best thing about Web surfing is that it puts a world of information at your finger-

and never to tell their passwords.

4) **Teach your kids how to shut down cyber bullies** by alerting you, the gaming company, or your Internet service provider. Make sure you tell them not to engage with or respond to a bully.

tips. Kids can research anything anywhere in the world almost instantaneously . As a parent, you can track the history of where you kids have been.

In an unfiltered environment, they can (and will) type "sex" or "drugs" or "Paris Hilton" into Google and come up with all sorts of sites you would rather they never visited. This urge for exploration is entirely age-appropriate for middle schoolers and older. Give the explicit nature of some sites, you might want to investigate **filters** or content **blocks**.

Surfing also means **pop-ups**—these are unsolicited ads that often look "official". Clicking on one opens unwelcome sites and can also install worms, viruses, spyware, and adware.

TIPS:
1) **Make sure the computer is centrally located**, and keep computers with Internet access out of kids' bedrooms.
2) **Check the history to see what sites they're visiting**.
3) **Never click on pop-ups**!
4) **Investigate Internet safety software** that includes filters and blocks.
5) Explain to your children that what is seen and read on the Web isn't always accurate.
6) **Keep Internet browsers up to date** for viruses, adware, and spyware protection.

For more information, check out the following sites:

http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide/parent-guide

http://www.commonsense.com/internet-safety-guide/

http://www.brighthub.com/internet/security-privacy/