

Crucial and Timely Internet Safety Tips for Families with Children

During this time when children of all ages are directed to use the internet more than ever for education, it is critical for parents to take action to make sure that you and your child know how to use the internet and social media safely. Talking to your child about the difference between making appropriate and positive connections and experiencing inappropriate contact is crucial.

1. Help your children engage in critical thinking, use common sense, and trust their “gut” feeling. Elementary children need conversations about how uncomfortable feelings can be like God-given traffic signals to avoid or stop certain activities. Just like in real life situations, virtual predators are sometimes people the children know and trust or friends they think they know.
2. While young teens may be the most likely to receive online solicitations, children also need to understand the importance of avoiding risky behavior. Discuss what they should do if someone sends pictures of themselves, asks them to keep a secret, or dialogs about inappropriate things, including sexual topics or body parts. Empower children by telling them they have the right to say they can’t talk any longer, to end the conversation, get off the internet, and tell their parent. Reassure the child who may be shy or encourage the child that if he or she feels embarrassed by what happened, the right thing to do is always tell their parent(s). In addition, if a friend tells a child of an incident, the child should tell their parent(s). These apply for bullying incidents as well.
3. Parents should check with their internet service provider about parental control options. If you have not thought about internet protection software, now is a good time to shop around for a product that will block site access, keep personal information secure, and monitor or track online usage.
4. Set some family rules. For instance:
 - a. Use the computer in a common family area.
 - b. Only use approved sites.
 - c. Do not click on pop ups or URLs until a parent has approved it.
 - d. No downloading without a parent’s permission.
 - e. Monitor and limit screen time on tablets and smart phones.
 - f. Collect all phones and tablets at bedtime.
 - g. Never share pictures of yourself.
 - h. Do not give anyone your phone number, address, or school information.
 - i. Never agree to meet anyone in person that you met online without your parent(s) being present.
 - j. Use a screen name only, and share passwords with parents only.
 - k. Always tell a parent if a message or conversation is scary or uncomfortable in any way.

Open communication with your children is critical to fighting back against this insidious foe. Let’s be vigilant in this effort!