

Internet Safety Information

As our children's primary teacher, parents have a responsibility to know how to navigate the Internet safely. Following is information to empower parents to discuss Internet safety with their children. (Turn to the Tip Sheets in the *Toolbox* for more important Internet safety tips.)

Cyber Community Citizenship

Youth tend to view their actions on the Internet as anonymous and distinct from our physical community. It is important for parents to help them understand that the rules that apply in the real world also apply in the cyber world. Children must be told directly that they will be held accountable for their actions and interactions online.

Physical vs. Cyber Community

Discuss the similarities between the physical and cyber communities, including actions, responsibilities, and obligations that we have in both. Point out how you get letters in the mailbox and e-mail in your inbox, or how kids may chat on the phone or over instant messenger. Explain that just as in their physical community, online there are rules they are expected to follow and places that they are not to go alone.

Inappropriate Sites

Internet technology places much fewer restrictions on kids, so it is important for parents to underscore that the rules still apply while online. For example, children in the physical community are kept from entering adult-only venues like casinos and bars, and from reading adult-oriented literature. Explain to your child your expectations for their online behavior and also let them know that you are available to assist them if they accidentally find themselves in an inappropriate site or situation.

Inappropriate Behavior

There are rules and social covenants children learn early with their family and later on the playground that helps them conduct themselves in a socially acceptable way. These same rules apply when communicating with people on the Internet. Kids and teens should not send mean, hurtful, or threatening correspondence to anyone, and if they receive anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, they need to let you know immediately. Threats should be reported to your local law enforcement.

To protect themselves and others from harm, make certain your child understands how a responsible cyber citizen should act online. Teach children that they are not anonymous online and are responsible for their actions.

Personal Safety

Before entering into Internet chat rooms or instant message conversations, it is essential that all children:

- **Have the knowledge to independently identify and avoid dangerous situations.**
- **Know how to safely interact with people online.**
- **Use critical-thinking skills to constantly evaluate people they meet online.**
- **React swiftly and appropriately in uncomfortable, compromising, or threatening situations.**

Parents should teach their children the 4 Rs: Recognize, Refuse, Respond, and Report.

Recognize techniques used by Internet predators to groom and deceive their victims.

Refuse all requests for personal information (name, address, phone, school name, or family information), to keep the relationship secret, or to meet anywhere.

Respond assertively by exiting the program (chat room, instant messenger, online game), logging off, or turning off the computer.

Report suspicious or dangerous contact that makes you or your child feel uncomfortable.

Internet Predators

Internet predators trick their prey into trusting them by “grooming” them. The ultimate goal of an Internet predator is to meet the student face-to-face, and they will say and/or do just about anything to make that happen. Discuss the grooming process with children in order that they can avoid, and if need be report, Internet predators.

Steps in the Grooming Process

Appears familiar. A predator will mold himself or herself into someone appealing and interesting to students. They will chat about sports, music, and other common interests, even about the student’s friends and enemies.

Develops trust. The predator will listen to the student, sympathize with complaints about family, friends, or trouble at school, even encourage him/her to share any fears that they may have and respond in ways that reinforce feelings of intimacy.

Establishes secrecy. As the relationship evolves, the predator will encourage the student to keep their “friendship” secret by stating that other people, especially parents, won’t understand and would seek to put an end to their communication. This is an important turning point in the relationship as the parent is purposely isolated from the relationship between predator and victim.

Erodes barriers. The predator takes advantage of a young person’s sexual curiosity and slowly introduces sexual content and pictures into the conversation. Over time the student becomes less uncomfortable with inappropriate statements and photos to the point that the predator may try to make the student think sex between adults and minors is normal.



Direct intimidation. The predator may make threats if the child stops communicating or refuses to meet in person. By this point the child may feel powerless against their online “friend.” They may have no one to turn to out of fear of the predator’s threats and their parents’ anger about the situation.

Face-to-face meeting. In some cases, the predator may use threats as indicated above. Other times, the student goes willingly. Regardless of how or why the two meet, the child is the victim.

Cyber Security

Some of the most destructive elements in cyber space are computer viruses and worms. Referred to as “malicious code” because the computer software code itself is destructive, they are often passed unwittingly from user to user. Teens and

parents must be careful to not accidentally allow malicious code into their computers or spread the code to others.

You cannot get a virus from an e-mail. However, you can get a virus from downloading a file attached to an e-mail. It is important to always know the person who sent you an e-mail if it has an attachment. Never open an unsolicited file from a stranger. Delete it. There are viruses that “spoof” addresses to make it appear that a friend sent you a file, so if it looks suspicious check with your friend before opening the attachment.

Make certain you are using updated, anti-virus software as your first line of defense, and be sure to keep it updated. It is also recommended that you install a firewall on your computer—especially if you have “always on” high-speed Internet access.

No one—not even the most advanced computer software security companies—can guarantee you won’t get a virus if you download files from their website or use their products. New viruses are created each day that cause tremendous damage financially to both corporations and the personal user. The creators of malicious code are clever. Some use “Trojan horses” which appear to be safe files, but which actually contain a virus. Be especially careful of downloading screen savers, which are notorious for disguising viruses.



Teach everyone who uses your computer about the dangers of opening e-mail attachments and downloading from the Internet.

Intellectual Property

Internet technology makes access to music, videos, video games, photos, and documents incredibly easy. For teens, this availability often equates to “free for the taking.”

There are acceptable, legal, and ethical behaviors that must be adhered to when downloading intellectual property. Just as students are taught to not plagiarize from a book in the library, they need to be taught that they should not copy and paste from someone else’s work posted on a website. Students must adhere to the appropriate methods for referencing research material at all times.

Parents should also stress to their children the laws that apply to downloading music from the Internet. Just as a child should not steal a CD from the store or illegally make a copy of a friend’s CD, they need to refrain from illegally downloading music in order to avoid criminal prosecution.

Today, there is a growing number of legal, free sites where artists allow their music to be downloaded, as well as an increased number of legal pay-for music sites. These legal sites obtain a license from the copyright owner (generally the record company), which allows them to distribute songs to customers. Keep in mind that simply paying for music does not guarantee the site is legal; you will need to research the site before downloading.