Five Tips for Creating a Cybersafe Home.

This generation of parents is the first to face the challenge of helping our children make the most of their virtual space while keeping them safe in it. If you're still getting your footing in virtual parenting, don't worry. InternetSafety.com has the following tips to help ensure that your child's online experience remains positive.

1. Become a net-savvy parent

The best safeguard against online dangers is being informed. Jump in and learn the basics of the Internet—read articles, take a class, and talk to other parents. A good place to start with some basics is www.LearnTheNet.com. A good place to stay current with the latest in online technology is mashable.com. You don't have to be an expert to have a handle on your child's online world.

2. "Chat" with your kids

Develop an open dialogue so that you can talk with your kids about the benefits and dangers of the Internet. Cultivate an interest in their online activities—their favorite Web sites, online games, and interests. And don't be afraid to ask your children who they are talking to online and what they are talking about.

3. Agree on a game plan

Use an Internet game plan (see attached) to formally agree on your family's guidelines for using the Internet. Post them near the family computer as a reminder. Ensure that your kids know to never share personal information on the Internet and that they should tell you about any online activity or contact that makes them uncomfortable. Some good rules to have are:

- Tell your children never to give out their address telephone number password school name or any other personal information.
- Make sure your children know to never agree to meet face-to-face with someone they've met online without discussing it with you. Only if you decide that it's okay to meet their "cyber-friend" should they arrange to meet this person, and then the meeting should be in a familiar public place in the presence of a trusted adult.
- Tell your children never to respond to messages that have bad words, are scary, or just seem weird. This includes "cyberbullying." Encourage them to always report this sort of thing to you or their teacher.
- Tell your children never to enter an area that charges for services without asking you first.
- Tell children never send a picture of themselves to anyone without your permission.
- Make sure that access to the Internet at your children's school is monitored by adults.

4. Protect your computer

Take advantage of the software that exists to help parents manage their children's computer experience. In only a few minutes, parental control software like Safe Eyes can block inappropriate websites, restrict the amount of time that your kids use the Internet and monitor their Instant Messenger chats to protect against predators. For your protection, the protection of your computer and personal information, install, use and regularly update virus protection programs.

5. Explore the Internet as a family

With a game plan and a protected computer, you can now encourage your family to take advantage of all that the Internet has to offer. Take a genuine interest in what your kids are doing and stay engaged with them online. Keep the computer in a high-traffic area of your home so you can easily monitor -- and be an active part of -- your child's Internet experience.

Our Family's Internet Safety Game Plan

The following game plan establishes the online ground rules for our home. We will display this Gameplan and update it periodically as our children grow older.

1. We will never give out personal information such as our last name, address or phone number. We should also not give out the name of our school, our city, our siblings, our sports team or our parent's workplace.
2. We all agree to not give our passwords to anyone outside of our family. We have all agreed upon user names to use while we are on the Internet. I will not change the settings for my computer or my password without my parent's permission.
3. We all agree to limit our online time so that it doesn't interfere with other activities. We agree to follow the time limits that our family sets and not let the Internet take time away from homework, sports, face- to-face interactions or family time.
4. I will never meet an online friend in person. Just as I stay away from strangers on the street, I will be careful about strangers on the Internet. If anyone ever asks to meet with me offline, I will notify my parents immediately.
5. I will tell my mom or dad right away if I come across something that makes me feel uncomfortable. If anyone uses bad language or mentions things that make me uncomfortable, I will immediately log off and tell my parents.
6. I will not remain on or click on a page that says, "For Over 18 Years Only." If this happens, I will log off and I will let my parents know. I understand that I'm only a click away from bad sites and that these pages are definitely not for kids.
7. I will only download pictures and files with my parent's permission. Some of these files may contain inappropriate pictures or dangerous viruses that could mess up our computer.
8. I will not send pictures of my family or myself to anyone online. The only way that I am allowed to do this is if my parents say it is all right.
9. I will be safe everywhere. I will follow the same Internet safety rules at my friends' houses, at school and at the library that I do while I'm at home.
10. I understand that nothing is private on the Internet. I agree that my mom or dad can read my mail or check the sites that I have been visiting — not because they don't trust me but because they just want to make sure that I am safe.

We agree to the above Internet Safety Gameplan:

_____   _____

Child's Signature   Parent's Signature

Cell Phone Safety Tips

Today technology is mobile, so if your child has access to a cell phone you need to think about their safe use of that device too. Cell phones have grown from simple communication devices to mobile, miniature computers. For example, smartphones have operating systems similar to that of computers which allow users to download programs or "apps." These apps help users do things like access e-mail and play games. Also, most cell phones allow users to download and upload content from the Internet just as they would on a computer.

However, cell phones can be more difficult to monitor than a computer, and children often use them without adult supervision. Make sure to review your family's Internet safety rules with your children and become aware of the following risks before allowing them to own cell phones.

These tips will help you set rules for safer cell phone use:

- Before purchasing a cell phone, think about why you want your child to have one. If the intention is for you or your child to be able to contact one another to check-in or in case of emergency, than perhaps a basic phone -- rather than a smartphone -- is more appropriate.
- Establish rules for when they are allowed to use their cell phone, what websites they can visit, and what apps they can download.
- Review cell phone records for any unknown numbers and late night phone calls and texts.
- Remind your children that anything they send from their phones can be easily forwarded and shared.
- Teach your child never to reveal cell phone numbers or passwords online.
- Talk to your child about the possible consequences of sending sexually explicit or provocative images or text messages ("sexting").
- When shopping for a cell phone for your child, research the security settings that are available.

Start a discussion with your child

Use these discussion starters to get an Internet safety conversation going with your children. The more often you talk to them about online safety, the easier it will get, so don't get discouraged if they don't respond immediately!

- What features do you use on your cell phone? Could you show me how to use them?
- Have you ever gotten a text from someone you do not know? If so, what did you do about it?
- Have you ever sent a text that was rude or mean?
- How many numbers do you have stored in your phone? Do you know them all in person?
- Has anyone ever taken an embarrassing picture of you without your permission?
- Have you ever taken an embarrassing picture of someone else? What did you do with it?
- Have you ever talked with someone you first met online on your cell phone?
- What would you do if someone sent you a text or picture that was inappropriate?

Additional Resources

For more information about cellphone and Internet safety, visit the Netsmartz website and their tip sheets page: http://www.netsmartz.org/TipSheets.