Raising Digital Citizens

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Teach your children to become good digital citizens with these resources.

The Internet is a wonderful place for learning and entertainment, but like the world around us, it can pose dangers if precautions are not taken. Allowing free access puts your child, your computer and your personal data at risk.

- **Remain positively engaged:** Pay attention to and know the online environments your children use. Surf the Internet with them. Appreciate your children's participation in their online communities and show interest in their friends. Try to react constructively when they encounter inappropriate material. Make it a teachable moment.

- **Support their good choices:** Expand your children's online experience and their autonomy when developmentally appropriate, as they demonstrate competence in safe and secure online behavior and good decision making.

- **Keep a clean machine:** Safety and security start with protecting all family computers with a security suite (anti-virus, anti-spyware, and firewall) that is set to update automatically. Keep your operating system, web browsers, and other software current as well, and back up computer files on a regular basis.

- **Know the protection features of the websites and software your children use:** All major Internet service providers (ISPs) have tools to help you manage young children's online experience (e.g., selecting approved websites, monitoring the amount of time they spend online, or limiting the people who can contact them) and may have other security features, such as pop-up blockers. Third-party tools are also available. But remember that your home isn't the only place they can go online.

- **Review privacy settings:** Look at the privacy settings available on social networking sites, cell phones, and other social tools your children use. Decide together which settings provide the appropriate amount of protection for each child.

- **Teach critical thinking:** Help your children identify safe, credible Web sites and other digital content, and be cautious about clicking on, downloading, posting, and uploading content.

- **Explain the implications:** Help your children understand the public nature of the Internet and its risks as well as benefits. Be sure they know that any digital info they share, such as emails, photos, or videos, can easily be copied and pasted elsewhere, and is almost impossible to take back. Things that could damage their reputation, friendships, or future prospects should not be shared electronically.

- **Help them be good digital citizens:** Remind your children to be good "digital friends" by respecting personal information of friends and family and not sharing anything about others that is potentially embarrassing or hurtful.

- **Just saying "no" rarely works:** Teach your children how to interact safely with people they "meet" online. Though it's preferable they make no in-person contact with online-only acquaintances, young people may not always follow this rule. So talk about maximizing safe conditions: meeting only in well-lit public places, always taking at least one friend, and telling a trusted adult about any plans they make – including the time, place, and acquaintance's contact information (at least a name and cell phone number). Remind them to limit sharing personal information with new friends.

- **Empower your children to handle issues:** Your children may deal with situations online such as bullying, unwanted contact, or hurtful comments. Work with them on strategies for when problems arise, such as talking to a trusted adult, not retaliating, calmly talking with the person, blocking the person, or filing a complaint. Agree on steps to take if the strategy fails.

- **Encourage your children to be "digital leaders:"** Help ensure they master the safety and security

techniques of all technology they use. Support their positive and safe engagement in online communities. Encourage them to help others accomplish their goals. Urge them to help if friends are making poor choices or being harmed.

More Ways to Keep Your Children Safer and More Secure Online

- **Keep your home computer in a central and open location:** If your computer is in the open, you can physically monitor your children while they are online.

- **Be aware of all the ways people connect to the Internet:** Young people have many options to connect to the Internet beyond a home computer. Phones, tablets, gaming systems and even TVs have become connected. Be aware of all the ways and devices (including what they do at friend's houses) your children are using and be sure they know how to use them safely and responsibly.

- **Talk to other parents:** When and how you decide to let your children use the Internet is a personal parenting decision. Knowing what other parents are thinking and allowing their children to do is important and can be helpful for making decisions about what your children do online.

- **Know the rules:** Not all online services are for kids. Even some of the most popular social networking services and other sites are meant only for use by people 13 and older. There are many terrific sites designed specifically for younger children that provide a safer, more secure and age-appropriate environment.

- **Stay current. Keep pace with new ways to stay safe online:** The online world is ever changing. New services with great features continually emerge. Knowing about them and how young people use them can help you better understand the digital life your children experience as well as any concerns you may have for your children.

- **Consider separate accounts on your computer:** Most operating systems allow you to create a different account for each user. Separate accounts can lessen the chance that your child might accidentally access, modify, change settings and/or delete your files. You can set up certain privileges (the things that can and can't be done) for each account.

For Emergencies

- **Know who to contact if you believe your child is in danger:** Visit http://kids.getnetwise.org/trouble/

- **If you know of a child in immediate risk or danger, call law enforcement right away** . Report instances of online child exploitation to the National Center For Missing and Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline. Reports may be made 24-hours a day, 7 days per week at www.cybertipline.com or by calling 1-800-843-5678.

Additional Resources

- ConnectSafely.org has basic guidelines for teens and parents about cyberbullying, sexting, social networking, and more.

- GetGameSmart.com provides information and resources to help families make smart choices about what they play, browse, and watch.

- GetNetWise.org is a useful resource for families to learn how to protect themselves from online danger and create the safest online experience possible.

- iKeepSafe.org seeks to give parents, educators, and policymakers the information and tools which power them to teach children the safe and healthy use of technology and the Internet.

- NetSmartz.org is a safety resource from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) for children aged 5 to 17, parents, guardians, educators, and law enforcement that uses activities to teach Internet safety.

- Lookout Mobile Security & The Online Mom's Generation Smartphone: A Guide for Parents of Tweens & Tweens has resources to help families talk to their kids about mobile security and safe smartphone use.

- OnGuardOnline.gov is the FTC's main consumer-facing page to educate everyone on staying safe and secure online.

- [NQ Mobile & National Cyber Security Alliance's Kids and Smartphones: a Guide to Mobile Safety](#) has resources for families who are considering giving their kids a smartphone.

- WebWiseKids.org is a unique organization that offers fun, challenging and interactive simulations based on real-life criminal cases. Each program has been designed specifically for use with young people in classrooms and computer labs and is guaranteed to be easy to use and flexible with your classroom schedule.

- Wired Safety.org provides help, information and education to Internet and mobile device users of all ages. They help victims of cyberabuse ranging from online fraud, cyberstalking and child safety, to hacking and malicious code attacks. They also help parents with issues, such as social networking and cyberbullying.