

Cyber Savvy Teens

A Guide for Parents



Introduction

The Internet is a great place for young people to spend time. As long as their time online is balanced with other important activities - playing outside, reading, creativity, time with friends and family - the Internet can be fun and beneficial. Teens are also active users of cell phones.

This brief guide will provide suggestions for parents of teens (and tweens) on the important steps you can take to ensure their time spent online is safe and fun.

Active & Positive Parenting

Research has shown that teens whose parents are actively and positively involved in their online activities engage in less risk-taking behavior. These are steps you can take:

- ✓ Appreciate your child's online activities. Show interest in your child's online friends. Work in partnership to address any concerns.
- ✓ Make sure you have implemented appropriate security against malware, use a spam blocker, block pop-up ads, and use safe search features. Never allow peer-to-peer software.
- ✓ Encourage your teen to always use the protective features on social networking sites and instant messaging to control who can view information and communicate in these personal environments.
- ✓ Pay attention to what your child is doing online. But balance your supervision with your child's legitimate interests in personal privacy. Positive interactions will encourage your child to share.
- ✓ Never overreact if your child reports an online concern. Fear of overreaction and loss of access is leading many teens not to report.
- ✓ If your child engages in inappropriate or harmful actions online or using a cell phone, impose a consequence that will focus attention on why those actions caused or could cause harmful consequences. Require a remedy for any harm.
- ✓ Pay attention to "red flags" ~ appearing emotionally upset during or after use, disturbed relationships, too much time online, excessively secretive behavior, and subtle comments about online concerns. Carefully try to engage your child in discussion.
- ✓ Encourage your child to help others directly or report to an adult if he or she witnesses someone being harmed or at risk online.
- ✓ Help your child learn to make good choices. "What you do online reflects on you."

Cyber Savvy Teens

- ✦ Keep themselves safe.
 - They understand the risks. They know how to prevent themselves from risk, detect if they are at risk, and effectively respond, including asking for help.
- ✦ Do the right things.
 - They do not harm others. They respect the rights, privacy, and property of others.
- ✦ Take responsibility for others and the digital community.
 - They help others online. They report concerns to a responsible adult or site. They promote digital civility.

Making Good Choices

Addressing Harmful Influences on Online Behavior

The following are common influences that support harmful online behavior ~ and strategies you can use to address these influences.

- ✦ You Can't See Me ~ the perception of invisibility makes detection and punishment less of a concern.
 - ✓ Encourage your child to make choices based on internalized values and understand that online actions can be traced.
- ✦ I Can't See You ~ the lack of tangible feedback interferes with the ability to recognize the harmful consequences to self or others.
 - ✓ Focus attention on harmful consequences.
- ✦ Didn't Think ~ teen's brains are not full developed, which results in ineffective problem-solving, especially if they are emotionally upset.
 - ✓ Discuss strategies for effective problem-solving.
- ✦ Who Am I? ~ exploring personal identity online can foster inappropriate or unsafe personal disclosure.
 - ✓ Encourage your child to pay attention his or her online "image" and reputation. "What you post tells people who you are."
- ✦ Am I Hot? ~ when teens are exploring sexuality and relationships this can lead to sexy images, sexual discussions, and fantasy love.
 - ✓ Honestly discuss issues of maturing sexuality and how to safely and kindly form, engage in, and end personal relationships.
- ✦ If I Can Do It, It Must Be Okay ~ the easy ability to do something appears to create the permission to do so.
 - ✓ Tell your child: "Just because you can, doesn't make it right."
- ✦ Everybody Does It ~ teens follow others who make bad choices.
 - ✓ Tell your child: "Just because they do it, doesn't make it right."
- ✦ How Far Can I Go? ~ teens test boundaries to find out about limits.
 - ✓ Discuss risks, consequences, boundaries, and values.
- ✦ Doing What They Say ~ they may be manipulation by others.
 - ✓ Teach your child to recognize signs of attempted manipulation ~ including overly friendly messages.
- ✦ Looking for Love ~ teens who face Real World personal challenges are at higher risk online.
 - ✓ If your child is at higher risk, it is essential that you pay close attention to online activities and dangerous "friends."

Cyber Savvy Teens

What You Do Reflects on You Make Good Choices Online

Think carefully about online situations. Consider the possible outcomes ~ especially possible harmful outcomes for yourself or others. Make decisions that will reflect well on you. Pay attention to the well-being of others.

Think Before You Post

Protect Your Personal Information & Reputation

Anything you post or send is ~ or easily could become ~ public and possibly permanent. Be very careful posting information that could allow others to find you in the Real World. Remember the more embarrassing or damaging the material you post, the more likely it will become very public and be seen by people who will judge you badly. Be respectful of others.

Keep Your Life in Balance

Avoid Addictive Access

Don't let the time you spend online take the place of all of the other activities that also can make your life happy and healthy. Make a commitment to spend Real Time with Real Friends in the Real World ~ as well as homework, chores, time with family, physical activities, and sleep.

Connect Safely

Interact Safely with Others Online

Take time to get to know people online ~ remember people can easily create false profiles or impressions. Watch out for anyone who is overly friendly and wants to establish a special relationship. If you want to meet in person, do so only with parent approval, in a public place, with your friends present ~ with a well thought out "escape plan." Be careful if you are looking for friends online ~ you could end up with the wrong kinds of friends. Watch out for the well-being of your friends as they interact with others.

Keep it Secure

Implement Security & Protections

Make sure your computer is secure with security software, use a spam blocker, block pop-ups, don't install peer-to-peer networking, and filter search returns. Use the protective features of sites to restrict who can view your information and communicate.

Know Your Place

Distinguish Work & Social Use

Some Internet services ~ including school and employers ~ have limited uses. Do not engage in social or personal activities on these systems.

Don't Sell Yourself

Protect Yourself from Aggressive Profilers & Advertisers

Wherever you go online you are tracked, tricked, and targeted by market profilers and advertisers. They want to know all about you so they can display ads that are more likely to attract your interest ~ and convince you to purchase. Read the privacy policies. Do not respond to profiling tricks like personality quizzes, contests, and surveys. Pay attention to how advertisers try to influence you. Make wise decisions about how much information you will share, to whom, and what kinds of companies deserve your business.

Protect Your Face & Friends

Protect Your Reputation & Circle of Friends When Social Networking

Social networking sites are great places to share who you are and connect with friends. Use the protective features ~ but always remember "protected" does not mean "private." Think of your profile as your public image ~ not your private journal. Don't let creeps into your circle of friends ~ your friends might trust someone because you have linked and end up getting harmed.

Avoid Fantasy Love ~ Online Creeps

~ Abusers

Avoid Risky Relationships & Activities

Watch out for fantasy love. Electronic interactions can lead you to think you are in love ~ but it is really not real! Don't post sexy images online or talk about sex with people ~ this can attract online creeps. Meeting in person with an online creep can lead to very bad outcomes. Abusive partners frequently use the Internet and cell phones to control their partner ~ ask for help to leave this relationship. Never ask for, create, keep, send or post nude or sexy images of teens ~ this could be criminal child pornography. If you are being harassed online ~ say "stop," ignore, block, complain, or ask for help.

Stay Out of the Garbage

Keep Clear of Online Pornography & Other Gross Stuff

You can avoid accidentally accessing pornography and other gross stuff through effective computer security and safe searching. Read, think, then click ~ don't click if you don't know what you will access. Don't fall for traps ~ don't type URLs, use a search engine. Can the porn spam ~ never click on links in suspicious messages. If gross stuff appears ~ turn it off and tell.

Effectively Handle Mean Kids Online

~ Don't Be One

Prevent Cyberbullying

Cyberbullies use the Internet or cell phones to send hurtful messages or post information to damage people's reputation and friendships. Don't post material or engage in interactions that could place you at risk. If targeted ~ never retaliate. If you are on a public site ~ leave or ignore. Otherwise ~ say "stop," block communications, remove friendship links, file a complaint, or ask a friend for advise or help. If this does not stop the harm, get help from an adult. Being a cyberbully is not cool ~ it is cruel. Be a helpful friend ~ help the person being harmed, tell an adult, file an abuse report or complaint, or tell the cyberbully to stop, if you can do so safely.



To the person reviewing this document for possible reproduction:

The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use is pleased to provide two documents for schools and other non-profit organizations - with permission granted to reproduce and provide to parents. One document is appropriate for parents of children. The second is appropriate for parents of tweens and teens. I would like to provide the person considering this document with some additional insight into my background, the contents, and approach taken.

I have degrees in special education and law. I taught "at risk" students, practiced in the area of technology law, and was an educational technology consultant prior to turning my attention to Internet use management in schools and youth risk online in 1995. It has always been my perspective that scare tactics and fear-based messages are not effective in preventing risk or encouraging effective parenting. It is also essential to ground guidance on youth risk online in the research insight, which fortunately is now emerging.

It is of significant concern to me that many of the current Internet safety messages are not grounded in fact, especially in the area of sexual predation. The research of the Crimes Against Children Research Center has demonstrated that these incidents are rare - constituting only 1% of all arrests for sexual abuse of minors. Predators are not targeting children. They form relationships with teens who are willing to talk about sex with strangers. There is no known incident where a predator tracked down and abducted a teen based on personal contact information posted online. Teens meet willingly knowing they have been communicating with an adult and intending to engage in sex. These predators are taking advantage of "at risk" teens.

Cyberbullying and other forms of electronic aggression are a significant concern. The relationship altercations that have traditionally been faced by teens are now also occurring online or through use of cell phones. This appears to be increasing the harm because these altercations are ongoing, frequently involve groups, and sometimes involve anonymous communications. A concern that has not yet reached public awareness is that "at risk" youth are becoming involved in online communities with other "at risk" youth, which is leading to contagion of risky behaviors.

The young people who are at the greatest risk online are the ones who are already at greater risk in the Real World. We have to address these issues in the context of school and community youth risk prevention programs.

The majority of young people are generally making good choices online and effectively handling the negative incidents that occur. This means that we can effectively address concerns using the social norms risk prevention approach - encouraging young people to follow the lead of their savvy peers and making sure that all young people understand the risks and effective protective strategies. Social norms risk prevention is highly effective.

Research has also demonstrated that many parents are "clueless" when it comes to what their teens are doing online. But teens whose parents are actively and positively involved in their online activities engage in less online risk taking. My approach to parenting is ages old. When children are young, parents must ensure they are in safe places and understand the simple guidelines they need to keep themselves safe in these places. But as they become teens, they need a comprehensive understanding of the risks, harmful consequences, and how they can independently protect themselves, engage in ethical behavior, and take responsibility for the well-being of others.

The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use is pleased to announce that other materials will soon be available. Narrated slides presentations are available for parent workshops - one for parents of children and the other for parents of tweens and teens - and a 45 minute presentation for tweens and teens - narrated by my two teens. More extensive handouts for parents and teens are also provided. The teen material can support a wide range of instructional activities. Additional materials are under development to address consuming and creating in Web 2.0.

The Center will also provide material for professional development for educators and other professionals who work with youth. This includes narrated slides presentations and comprehensive handouts that set forth important information in an easy-to-read outline format. The Center has made arrangements with the University of Oregon Continuing Education Center for professionals to receive Continuing Education Units for viewing these materials. Material that will soon be available includes: Cyber Safe and Savvy Youth: A Guide for Educators (important insight for all educators); Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Electronic Aggression (safe school professionals); Web 2.0 in Schools: Effective Internet Use Management and Legal Issues (educational technology professionals and administrators); Youth Risk Online (Insight for Health and Mental Health Professionals). Additional titles and online classes for graduate credit will soon be available.

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