

Ideas for parents on Internet Safety (by Bill Pfohl, *Communique*, 37/5, National Association of School Psychologists, Bethesda, MD, Jan/Feb, '09)

- Set up your child's computer with parental blocking software. Most Internet Service Providers have software to do this. It is like a v-chip on your TV. Do not tell your child the password.
- Set up your computers in common areas of the living space. Everyone should be able to see them. No computers in their bedrooms.
- Know your child's password for all social networks (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, BeBo, etc.) and visit them regularly to see who is contacting your child.
- Instruct your child "not talk to strangers" or give out any personal information except first name. Some of the sexual predators can search for your address location from very limited information, including just a birthday.
- Instruct your child on the issues of cyberbullying and how to tell you about it.
- Monitor cell phone use and text messages for bullying and inappropriate contacts or chats.
- Wireless networks can enable others to monitor your computer or be used for criminal behavior. Bots are a significant issue. Set up your wireless network to block others from using it.
- Review the Internet and cell rules at least monthly with all family members.
- Software to obtain movies, music, etc. (e.g., Limewire) can corrupt your computer and leave your hard drive open for others to explore. It is called File Sharing. Your sensitive data can also be harvested. Some of these downloads are illegal, violate copyright, and can be traced to your specific computer. Universities are being hard hit and students are being sued.
- The Kentucky Attorney General's site notes that while 71% of parents report problems with children 6–18 on the Internet (including sexual content, bad language, etc.), only 10% stopped their child from using the Internet.
- If you have concerns about which sites your children are visiting, sit with them to look at sites or visit there first.
- Update your spyware, firewalls, and virus software at least monthly. Research shows most people do not do this: 87% had this software but fewer than 50% had updated it in the past month. Fewer than 15% of machines that have antivirus packages have that software enabled and almost 10% of those surveyed had had their identity stolen (NAAG Cybercrime Newsletter, Sept.–Oct. 2007).
- Have your child or teen sign an Internet Safety Pledge. They are located in many places but the Rules 'N Tools Youth Pledge from www.ProtectKids.com seems well written. Modify as needed.
- Social networks such as MySpace and Facebook have become the new means of social interaction for those from age 6 to adult. Whatever is on your child's site becomes their "picture" to others. Much of it can be inappropriate: posing with beer cans, being scantily dressed, gross or profane language, etc. Many colleges and employers are now checking these sites before admitting or hiring. Help your child "clean up" their site and install privacy settings.
- Taking videos for placing on the Internet is becoming more prevalent with YouTube. While some are instructional or humorous, some are dumb, dangerous,

and illegal. Again, monitoring your child's activity is essential for safe Internet use.

- Learn the language that your child uses when referring to technology. It expands regularly.