

Parenting Suggestions Regarding Technology

Become involved in your child's cyberspace. Sit at the computer and let them teach you how they use the Internet:

- Ask them to take you places they frequently visit and show you what they do. Three types of sites children commonly utilize are:
 - Instant messaging services (e.g. Yahoo, AOL IM and Messenger)
 - Social networking sites (e.g. Face Book and MySpace)
 - Video Posting (e.g. You Tube, AOL Video)
- Open up your own accounts where they have accounts. Have your child guide you through the process.
- If you child is under 13, you do have the option to have these accounts deleted since most of these services have an age and/or parental consent requirements.
- Have them share with you all their user account names and passwords. If this is creating a trust issue, perhaps a good compromise is to have your child write down all the user account names and passwords on a sheet of paper and place this in a sealed envelope to only be opened by the parent in case of an emergency.
- Make certain they have never and will never share their passwords with anyone, even a friend. Explain the risk of someone impersonating them and ruining their reputation.
- Have them show you what they have in their profiles/pages. How do they describe themselves? Is it all accurate and appropriate? Does it show too much detail about your child? Are they protecting and sustaining a positive reputation?
- Scrutinize their friend lists on these accounts. It is very important to recognize the identity of each person. If they don't know the real name of an on-line friend, then consider that persona a stranger. Request they delete and block that person.
- Ask your child if they have ever been ridiculed, intimidated and/or humiliated on the Internet (cyber bullied). Encourage them to come to you for support if they are being bullied. Both of you should learn how to use the print screen option to save evidence of the cyber bullying.
- Ask whether they have bullied anyone. It's important for them to appreciate how much emotional pain can be inflicted by unkind words or images, and that the reach of the Internet makes it far more destructive. Use Ryan's story to make the point.

- Also explain that this is a particularly difficult emotional period for many children and what may seem to be harmless teasing, can be devastating to the person being teased.
- Share with them that the Internet is a public forum so anything can be shared with other people without their knowledge or consent. They should be very discreet in what they say and do on-line. They need to always be vigilant in protecting their reputations. Things said and done on the internet can come back to bite them many year later.
- Have a very pointed conversation about “sexting”, the risky practice of sending sexually explicit photos and/or messages which can be easily forwarded on to others and damage their reputation.

Establish clear and enforceable guidelines:

- Establish your own family policy for acceptable computer use. List what may or may not be allowed including clear rules about time limits.
- Be upfront with your child, that this policy will be enforced and monitored. Try to set a policy that respects your child’s privacy while also considering their age, maturity level and inclination towards risky behavior.
- Purchase monitoring/time control software to help enforce your family’s policy.
 - Search “parental control software reviews” to find the latest products, features, and reviews.
- Do not allow a computer to be in a child’s bedroom. Keep it in a public area such as the kitchen or den.

How much technology and access does your child really need?

- Does a middle school child or younger possess the maturity, judgment, and social skills to use instant text messaging and social websites responsibly? Do their peers?
- Does your child really need a cell phone, particularly with text messaging and/or photo/video features? Are they mature enough to handle these options responsibly?
- When does too much technology begin to hurt a child? You need to find the right balance with other activities.
- Is it healthy for them to come home and plug right back into their social network versus having some quiet, reflective and regenerative time with their family?

Please visit <http://www.RyanPatrickHalligan.org> for more information about these topics and to also learn more about bullying and teen suicide prevention.