

# **Guidelines for Parents**

## **Talk with your Teens About What They Can and Cannot Do Online**

Set the rules up front! It is easier to follow rules that everyone clearly understands. Don't assume everyone understands what should and should not happen. Make this conversation an ongoing discussion!

## **Be reasonable and set reasonable expectations.**

There is a great deal to be gained from what is available online for students and adults. Guidelines that are too strict can be as harmful as no guidelines.

## **Be Open with Your Teens and Encourage Them to Come to You if They Encounter a Problem Online**

If they tell you about someone or something they encountered, your first response should not be to blame them or take away their Internet privileges. Work with them to help avoid problems in the future, and remember – your response will determine whether they confide you the next time they encounter a problem.

## **Learn Everything You Can About the Internet**

Ask your teens to show you what's cool. Have them show you great places for teens and fill you in on areas that you might benefit from as well. Make "surfing the net" a family experience. Use it to plan a vacation, pick out a movie, or check out other family activities. Make this one area where you get to be the student and your child gets to be the teacher.

## **Check Out Blocking, Filtering and Ratings Applications**

As you may know, there are now services that rate web sites for content as well as filtering programs and browsers that empower parents to block the types of sites they consider to be inappropriate. These programs work in different ways. Some block sites known to contain objectionable material. Some prevent users from entering certain types of information such as their name and address. Generally these programs can be configured by the parent to only block the types of sites that the parent considers to be objectionable.

The school uses a filter that blocks access to known sites that are inappropriate or have limited or no educational value.

Whether or not it is appropriate to use one of these programs is a personal decision. If you do use such a program, you'll probably need to explain to your teen why you feel it is necessary. You should also be careful to choose a program with criteria that reflects your family's values. Be sure to configure it so that it doesn't block sites that you want your teen to be able to visit.

It is important to realize that filtering programs cannot protect your child from all dangers in cyberspace. To begin with, no program can possibly block out every inappropriate site. What's more, it's possible, in some cases, for the programs to block sites that are appropriate. If you use a filtering program, you should re-evaluate it periodically to make sure it's working for your family.

Regardless of whether you use a filtering program, you should still be sure that your teen follows all of the basic rules you establish. Filtering programs are not a substitute for good judgment or critical thinking. With or without filters, children and their parents need to be "net savvy" and communicate with each other.

# **Basic Rules of Online Safety for Teens**

## **The Internet is public!**

The most important thing to remember is that when you're online, you're out in public and anyone can read whatever you post. You should never post anything on the Internet that you wouldn't want known to the public at large.

You should also remember that people you meet in cyberspace might not be who they seem to be. If you're in any type of public forum, avoid giving out your full name, your mailing address, your telephone number, the name of your school, or any other information that could help someone determine your actual identity. The same applies to your family and friends. Never reveal anything about other people that could possibly get them into trouble.

The biggest danger to your safety is if you get together with someone you "meet" online. Remember, you never know for certain if people you meet online are who they say they are. If you do feel it's appropriate

## **Keep Your Identity Private**

If you're in any type of public forum, avoid giving out your full name, your mailing address, your telephone number, the name of your school, or any other information that could help someone determine your actual identity. The same applies to your family and friends. Never reveal anything about other people that could possibly get them into trouble.

## **Never Get Together with Someone You "Meet" Online**

The biggest danger to your safety is if you get together with someone you "meet" online. Remember, you never know for certain if people you meet online are who they say they are. If you do feel it's appropriate to meet with someone, discuss it with your parents and never go to the meeting by yourself. Arrange to meet in a public place like a coffee shop or mall that you, not just the other person, are familiar and comfortable with, and never go alone. The safest procedure is to have your parents talk with the parents of the other person and for both of you to bring your parents along on the first meeting.

## **Never Respond To E-Mail, Chat Comments, Instant Messages or Other Messages That Are Hostile, Belligerent, Inappropriate or In Any Way Make You Feel Uncomfortable**

It isn't your fault if you get a message that is mean or in any way makes you feel uncomfortable. If you get such a message, don't respond. Instead, show it to your parents or a trusted adult to see if there is anything you can do to make it stop. Sending a response just encourages the person. If you do not know the person or the subject of the email is suspicious, do the smart thing and delete it without reading.

## **Talk with your Parents About Their Expectations and Ground Rules for Going Online**

It's important that you and your parents are on the same "channel" when it comes to your online activities. This includes when you can go online, how long you can stay online, and what activities you can do online. Communicating with your parents doesn't mean that you have to give up your privacy. It just means that you come to an agreement based on mutual trust and understanding. While you're at it, perhaps you can help your parents better understand the Internet, what it can be used for, and how it is helpful for teens.