Volume 11

ONLINE SAFETY IN THE REAL WORLD

Whether it be at home, in school, at the library, at their friends' houses or at the corner store, the Internet is now more than ever, prevalent in the lives of young children and teenagers. There is no doubt that the Internet has numerous advantages but it may also contain hidden risks.

As parents, it is essential that you understand these risks and make sure that your children are aware of the hidden dangers as well, in order for them to be safe in this virtual world of ours. The safety tips that follow will help you achieve your objective of keeping your children safe:

- Create a list of Internet house rules with input from your kids.
- Keep Internet-connected computers in an open area where you can easily monitor them.
- Encourage your children to come to you if they come across anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.
- Start teaching kids about privacy. Tell them to never give out information about themselves, their family or their friends while online. Have your kids use an online nickname if a site encourages them to submit their names to "personalize" the Web content.
- Consider Internet-filtering tools as a complement – not a replacement – for parental supervision.

Keep in mind your children's age when teaching them about Internet safety:

Ages 5-7

- Always sit with your kids when they are online.
- Create a personalized online environment by limiting your kids to their list of favourite or "bookmarked" sites.
- Don't let your kids use instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or message boards at this age.

Ages 8-10

- Establish a shared family e-mail account with your Internet Service Provider rather than letting your kids have their own accounts.
- Talk to your kids about their online friends and activities just as you would about their other activities.

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- Discuss sexuality with your children and the importance of developing a healthy and respectful attitude towards it. More than likely your child will accidently come across some online pornography during their Internet surfing and it is important for them to know how to deal with this kind of content.

- Instant messaging at this age should not be allowed.

Ages 11-13 / 14-17

- Talk with your kids about their online friends and activities just as you would about their other activities.

- Insist that your kids tell you first if they are considering meeting an "online friend."

- Talk to your kids about online pornography and direct them to appropriate sites about health and sexuality.

- Be aware of the Websites that your teens frequent, and check them for any offensive content.

- Teach your kids responsible online behaviour. File-sharing and taking text, images or artwork from the Internet may infringe on copyright laws.

- Talk to them about ethical behaviour. They should not be using the Internet to spread gossip, bully or make threats against others.

- Remind them that the Internet is a public domain and that they should be very cautious when exchanging private information, photos and videos on any of the social networks, such as Facebook.

- Make sure your teens check with you before making any financial transactions online, including ordering, buying or selling items. (Ages 14-17)

- Discuss gambling and its potential risks and remind your teens that it is illegal for minors to gamble. (Ages 14-17)

For more information regarding the Missing Children's Network personal safety workshops, offered year-round, please contact our offices at 514 843-4333 or visit our website at www.missing**childrens**network.ngo