ONLINE GAMING, VIDEO GAME CONSOLES AND INSTANT MESSAGING

Online gaming has never been so popular. According to a recent Ipsos Reid Survey, more than half of young Canadians stated that they visit gaming sites and play online games several times a week.

Many people think that on-line gaming is harmless for their child. However, it is always better to be cautious, as many of these games have a chat module that allows children to communicate with other people playing the game.
For example, multi-player online games permit players to interact and take part inactual adventures (against an opponent) from all over the world.

Online Gaming and Video Game Consoles

The following safety rules allow you to keep an eye on what your child is doing and be able to supervise your child's activities when they are online or playing on their game console:

- Familiarize yourself with the games your child plays and make sure you understand the rating system used in order to determine if they are age-appropriate.

- When initially setting up any video game console, make sure to activate any parental controls and create passwords for the parental control features.

- When your child begins playing a new game, assist him in creating his online profile. Only fill in the necessary information, leaving out any identifying or revealing facts.

- Know your child's login information.

- Be involved and show interest in the games your child plays. If possible, play the game with your child.

- Reinforce the idea that not everyone online is who they say they are. People often pretend to be older or younger than they actually are.

- Tell your child to trust his instincts and block/ignore anyone that asks him questions that may seem "weird" (e.g. questions about puberty, sexuality, etc.).

- Explain to your child that it's illegal to be threatened by someone, and if this ever happens they should immediately tell a safe adult.

- Ensure that your child only plays games with approved individuals (i.e. family and offline friends) by using features such as Nintendo's "Friend Code" or Xbox and PlayStation Network's "buddy list" options.

- Monitor your child's text and voice chat while they are playing.

Volume 12

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- Seek games that offer the ability to block or restrict individuals who can play with your child and allow you to prevent other individuals from chatting with your child.

- If the game provides more options for older players, make sure your child doesn't lie about his age in order to access these options.

Instant Messaging

Most young people (74%) use instant messaging on a regular basis. For kids, it is an incredible, free tool that lets them chat with friends, coordinate school projects and plan activities.

Here are some tips to help you effectively manage instant messaging in the home:

- Set ground rules before giving your kids permission to use instant messaging. Tell them you will be saving their chat logs and address any privacy concerns they might have by agreeing to not read their logs unless you have serious concerns regarding their safety.

- Ensure that your kids are not revealing too much personal information in their profiles, and for the younger ones, make sure that they know everyone on their contact list.

- Instant messaging is one of the main ways through which young people experience cyberbullying and sexual harassment online. Discuss the ethical questions surrounding online bullying behaviour and how the physical anonymity of the technology encourages kids to say and do things that they would never do face-to-face.

- Teach your kids that if they are being harassed through IM to stop the activity immediately and block the sender's messages – they should never reply to harassing messages. Make sure your IM program is automatically saving the IM chat logs so you have physical evidence of the harassment should you need to report it to the school or police.

- IM programs also offer the option of video-conferencing. It is important to discuss with your children the ramifications of using a webcam and to always be cautious when using one.

Would you like to discover more about using the Internet wisely or learn about new technology?
We invite you to read the following Spotlight on Safety articles available now on our website at:
Volume 3 and 4 : Facebook | **Volume 9 :** Living in a wireless world |
Volume 11 : Online Safety in the real world

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