Protecting Your Children on the Internet

The Internet has dramatically changed how most children interact with the world. Along with the benefits of the Internet come significant potential risks to children including easy access to pornography, online predators, cyberbullying and exposure to material encouraging dangerous activities. Despite these risks, many parents neglect to set up parental controls and monitor their children's online activity. Many American teens report that their parents have no idea what they are doing online and a majority of teens admit to hiding their online behavior from their parents.

Being vigilant to put in place safeguards to help protect your children from Internet dangers is an important responsibility. Although time-consuming, neglecting to do so may have very costly consequences for your children. If you are not willing to monitor Internet use on a device (computer, tablet, or smart phone), then do not make that device available to your child or disable its Internet access. Start with Internet safety when your children are young, and as they grow, strive to stay involved so you can help to train them to avoid dangers and use the Internet responsibly.

INTERNET SAFEGUARD RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Install Internet filtering software** on internet-enabled devices (computer, tablet, video console, or smart phone) to decrease the likelihood of inappropriate access. This type of software is designed to block a device's access to inappropriate material and typically has settings to allow different levels of access for different family members. Consider a program that will also help you monitor your children's Internet activity. Also, check out the parental control settings on your child's Internet-enabled devices, where you can set parameters for features such as app installation and time limits. No filter will block out all offensive material, so continue to monitor even after installing an Internet filter!

- **Set ground rules** for your children about Internet safety including instructions and consequences. Create an Internet usage contract for tweens and teens with rules such as parents know all passwords, child must get permission before downloading an app, no chat rooms, and only instant messaging/texting with people parents have approved.

- **Place your computers and game consoles in public areas** (like the family living room) so you can better monitor your children's online activity. No devices in the bedroom!

- **Social Media sites have privacy features** that you should review and set before your children use the sites. Configure the privacy settings on your children's social networking accounts so that their photos and information are only accessible to people they know. Also, keep in mind that according to the Children Online Privacy Protection Act, children under 13 years old are not allowed to have profiles or accounts on social media such as Facebook or Instagram.

- **Communicate with your children** often about being safe and wise on the Internet. Take time to surf the Internet with your children and dialogue with them. Discuss not sharing personal information and what to do if

someone asks to meet them face-to-face.   Make your children aware that dangerous people may pose as youth online or otherwise misrepresent themselves online. Ask them to share with you if they encounter something that makes them uncomfortable. Report any suspicious activity to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at their Cyber Tip line at 1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST).

- **Know your children's usernames and passwords** for their email and social networking sites. Be your children's "friend" or follower on social media. On at least a weekly basis, review their social networking posts, status updates, downloads, music, blogs, etc and discuss the content with your children.   Keep in mind that some children will create secret social media accounts to avoid parental oversight. If your children are making poor choices, use the situation for a learning opportunity or impose consequences to help train your children.

- **Communicate with parents of your children's friends** about their Internet safety standards before allowing your children to spend time at their homes. Also, familiarize yourself with Internet safety standards at your children's schools.

- **Password-protect** your home WiFi through your Internet modem or router.

- **Be a good example!** Avoid being addicted to your screens. Turn off or put down your devices often. As you use social media, avoid posting or "liking" things that you would not approve of for your children.

- **Ask for help from someone tech-savvy** if you are having difficulty figuring out how to implement Internet safeguards for your children. Teens can find ways to circumvent Internet boundaries, so try to educate yourself on how to prevent this. For example, you may have blocked Internet browser searches for pornography, but your teen may still have access to inappropriate material directly on websites such as YouTube or eBay.

INTERNET LIMITS
- Excessive time spent on the Internet is not healthy for the overall well-being of our children, may impair interpersonal skills, and may lead to unrealistic relationship realities. Some youth today are truly addicted to social media, online gaming, or other apps.

- Parents can help prevent Internet addiction by enforcing Internet limits from early ages and actively encouraging other real-life activities that help develop crucial interpersonal skills for success in life. Watch for signs of addiction such as your children becoming agitated when they are denied access to the Internet.

- Do not allow cell phones, computers, tablets, or other internet-enabled devices in bedrooms, especially at night.

- Consider "unplugging" the whole family from screens periodically.

- Limit your own use of digital media to set a good example, including turning off smartphones and computers during family meals. Avoid texting while driving.

PORNOGRAPHY & THE INTERNET (statistics from covenanteyes.com)
- Internet pornography viewing by children and teens is extremely common. First exposure to pornography comes at an average age of 12 years for boys. By age 18 years, 90% of boys and 60% of girls have been exposed to porn.

- Percentages of American youth who have viewed specific types of pornography online:
  - Group Sex: 83% of boys, 57% of girls
  - Sexual Bondage: 39% of boys, 23% of girls
  - Bestiality: 32% of boys, 18% of girls
  - Same-Sex Intercourse: 69% of boys, 55% of girls
  - Porn use by youth is a risk factor for oral sex and intercourse at a young age.

- Pornography can be highly addictive and exposure at any early age is a risk factor for addiction and hard core porn use. Pornography is extremely addictive because the brain releases powerful hormones and neurochemicals that give a quick buzz when pornography is viewed. As with other addictive "drugs," the brain develops a tolerance over time and then harder core porn is needed to get the same "fix."

- Start talking with your children in the preteen years about the dangers of pornography and keep the conversation going through the teen years and beyond. Warn your children about the addictiveness of porn and how it can ruin their lives.

- Major Harms of Pornography:
  - Creates a preference for the quick fix from pornography over fostering meaningful relationships with real people
  - Interferes with a fulfilling marriage relationship
  - Society-wide: promotes adultery, prostitution, sexual abuse, and sex trafficking

INTERNET BULLYING
- Internet bullying ("cyber bullying") is common and can have serious consequences. Examples of online bullying include making false accusations online, posting hurtful or threatening comments and public sharing of personal information or images.

- Over half of today's adolescents state they have been bullied online and over 25 percent of adolescents state they have been bullied repeatedly through the Internet. However, only 1 in 10 teens will tell a parent about the bullying (from bullyingstatistics.org).

- Sadly, some victims of cyber bullying resort to suicide to escape the embarrassment. Scientific studies find a definite relationship between cyber bullying and suicidal ideation and behavior.

SEXTING
- Many teens and tweens text nude or otherwise sexually provocative pictures or videos of themselves from their mobile phones, which is known as "sexting."

- These images are often shared with more people than just the intended recipient.

- Police consider this activity the "creation and distribution of child pornography," which is a felony.

- Begin early teaching your children a healthy view of sexuality and continue the dialogue as your children grow about healthy relationship practices (both online and offline).

LIVE STREAMING

- Be aware of applications (apps) that allow for instant live streaming (video broadcasting) of daily activities. These apps include Meerkat, Periscope, YouNow, and Twitch, and over 100 million people around the world currently access YouNow. Many teens are broadcasting from their bedrooms, including leaving their cell phones on to broadcast while they are sleeping. Talk with your child regarding safety and privacy concerns, especially related to live streaming.

Recommended Reading on Internet Safety

- *Growing Up Social: Raising Relational Kids in a Screen-Driven World* by Gary Chapman and Arlene Pellicane
- *Protecting Your Family Online: A Parent's How-To Guide*, free downloadable book from CovenantEyes.com
- *Selfie: A Parent's Guide to Social Media* by Tommy McGregor
- *The Digital Invasion: How Technology is Shaping You and Your Relationships* by Drs. Archibald Hart and Sylvia Frejd
- www.netsmartz.org/InternetSafety
- www.safekids.com/kids-rules-for-online-safety/
- www.internetsafety101.org
- http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm (parent's guide to Internet Safety from the FBI)
- https://sos.fbi.gov/ (interactive web site, "Safe online surfing," to teach children from 3rd – 8th grade Internet safety)

Internet Filters and Monitoring Programs

- www.NetNanny.com
- www.CovenantEyes.com
- www.InternetSafety.com (SafeEyes)
- www.ScreenRetriever.com (members of ACPeds can get a discount for this one!)
- www.MyMobileWatchdog.com (for mobile phone monitoring)

Resources on Pornography

- *When Your Child is Looking at Porn*, free download from CovenantEyes.com
- *When Your Teen is Looking at Porn*, free download from CovenantEyes.com
- *Somebody's Daughter: A Journey to Freedom from Pornography*, directed by John Evans, DVD
- *Every Young Man's Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation* by Stephen Arterburn
- "Matt Fradd: 10 Myths About Pornography" on www.youtube.com
- *FBI – A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety: https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide/parentsguide.pdf. Accessed 9/16/15*

For more information visit https://www.acpeds.org/