

Internet/Technology Safety Tips Speech

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Presented to the PA on April 24, 2009

Blogs. Chat Rooms. Texting. My Space. FaceBook. Twitter. All common terms now. But hearing them over and over again doesn't make them more understandable, especially if you were raised without the dependence on technology that our children feel today.

We buy it for them, but there's still a lot we don't know about it. Technology is constantly changing and just when you think you have a grasp of it, the next wave hits. Something new that you don't yet understand. The purpose of this talk is to increase your awareness of technology safety issues.

Your children were raised with technology, and in most cases they like being connected at all times to friends. And connecting with technology can often mean disconnecting from you. As technologist and counselor Doug Fodeman says, "For many of our kids there is little or no 'down time.' Some have difficulty disengaging from their social life." They feel this need for social engagement, or social networking, which they get through instant messaging, Facebook postings, cell phones and text messaging. They like the sense of immediacy. This social networking cycle begins with the younger set in such sites as Club Penguin and Webkinz.

Technologies each have their purpose. For example, we use e-mail here at DDS in grades 6 through 8 very effectively. Students can communicate with teachers easily to get answers to questions, and they can often receive assignments when they have missed a class, making the folder at the desk a thing of the past. It has increased our ability to connect with one another, even over great distances, so a parent who is away on a business trip can communicate easily with a teacher. The Internet has been a wonderful resource educational purposes.

Facebook is great as a tool for reaching DDS Alums who are plugged into technology. With over 100 "fans" Hillary Henderson, Director of Development, is able to post events, past photos, and receive news for the *Courtyard*. Eighty percent of her followers are alums. The rest are current and past parents. We believe this number will continue to grow and benefit the school.

Cell phones help you and your children communicate wherever you are (unless you're on campus where there is limited service). Knowing you can reach them brings a certain peace of mind.

The downsides are just as obvious. Via computer or cell phone, kids can, and will, say things to each other they would never say to each other's face. Avoiding face to face contact is too easy

with technology. We need to teach children to be polite and only say what they would to a person's face.

Cell phones:

Cell phones bring a whole new group of issues. They can be used for cyber bullying. Stopbullyingnow.chrsa.gov is a great website for children and parents that explains how to deal with cyber bullying issues via any of the newer technologies. Recent cyber bullying statistics show that:

- Girls are twice as likely as boys to be victims or perpetrators of cyber bullying
- Children are almost always bullied by someone who knows them. Sixty two percent are bullied by another student at school, and 46% are bullied by a friend.
- Eighteen percent of students in grades 6-8 said they had been cyber bullied at least once in the last few months
- Eleven percent of students said they had cyber bullied someone else.

A more recent negative use of cell phones, covered in a story on CBSnews.com, talked about the newest phenomenon called "sexting." This is the term for sharing nude or partially nude photos via cell phone text messaging (text with photo). The scary thing is that 20% of teens participate in this behavior and that three teenage girls in PA and three male classmates who received the photos were all charged with child pornography.

Facebook or MySpace (social networking sites):

Facebook and social networking sites have been equated to a line from the Eagles song "Hotel California:" "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave." Many children are naïve when it comes to believing that information they post is private. They have a false sense of privacy. The fact is, once something is posted to the Web it becomes public property. With over 60 million active members on Facebook and over 3 billion photos posted, Facebook actually owns every photo.

And some of these photos and pages have been used to screen candidates for jobs. Compromising photos at a prep school were even used to expel students. Photos that showed students drinking on campus were enough for immediate grounds for dismissal. In 2007, a study was done by the Center of Marketing Research at UMASS Dartmouth and it showed that 20% of colleges and universities used social networks to screen their admissions candidates. I'm sure this number has grown dramatically in the last two years.

Phishing scams are frequent on Facebook and My Space. Children are often tricked when accepting "friend" requests. It is strongly recommended that they only "friend" someone they have met in person first. Some research suggests that teens allow in 44-87% of strangers that make "friend" requests. In one scam Facebook users got a message that said, "OMG! There are some photos of you on this website," along with a link. They were encouraged to register to see the photos, which were a bit blurry and maybe a bit explicit. As they divulged personal information they didn't get photos, they got taken (most likely on their parent's credit card). On My Space people were tricked into visiting a music website promising a cost of \$2-3 per album. No music came but \$300-\$600 credit card bills followed. Children need to be taught to be more suspicious. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

The University of Texas publishes a webpage for its students on The Dangers of Facebook. They suggest users protect themselves on a social networking site by:

- Turning on privacy settings that disable major search engines from making their page searchable.
- Consider restricting access to their profiles.
- Keep information private. Never post their full name, SS#, address, phone number, etc.
- Choose a screen name that is different from their real name.
- Think twice before posting their photo. These can be altered or shared without their knowledge.
- Use common sense. Don't friend people they don't know.
- Trust their instincts. If they feel uncomfortable with an online conversation, report it.
- Be suspicious. Don't take any information from a new online contact at face value.

This is all good advice that you should know because Facebook allows accounts beginning at age 13 and children know how to lie about their birthdate to get an account earlier.

ZDnet.com a technology publisher's web site suggests that if you forbid Facebook, your children will find a friend's house or somewhere else to do it. So you join too. Use the local area in which you live as your network (as opposed to a college). Add your children as a friend and make sure they accept your request. Check your children's profile pages over very well. Work with your children to create a safe profile. Check the friends they have listed. Check their pages on a daily basis but do not bug them about every little thing or they will hide activity from you. There is a way to get an e-mail update when they add new friends. Also know that they could open

another account under another name without your knowledge (even though Facebook forbids it).

Internet Research:

A note about surfing the web. Almost all children at DDS choose to use Google, Wikipedia, or Yahoo for their research. For many of the younger children this is not the best place since most of the websites those browsers take you to are written for adults and are too complex. Wikipedia is still not considered a primary source of information, so students are encouraged to verify the information at another site if they use Wikipedia. Some great sites for kids include askkids.com, kids.yahoo.com, or kidsclick.org.

Older students who are asked to research papers online can sometimes fall into the trap of copying blocks of text, putting them at risk for violating school rules and accepting punishments for plagiarism.

General Rules:

Parental advice from Kidshealth.org

1. Become computer literate and learn how set restrictions.
2. Keep the computer in a common area.
3. Share an e-mail account with your kids.
4. Bookmark kids' favorite sites.
5. Spend time together online to teach appropriate behavior.
6. Forbid chat rooms.
7. Monitor your credit card frequently.
8. Find out what other parents' rules are so you know where children will be unsupervised.
9. Report any obscene or threatening messages to your Internet service provider.

Other ideas:

Sign a contract with your children that you create together defining the rules for computer and cell phone usage. Since you sign a contract for cell and Internet service, agreeing to terms and conditions, it is reasonable to hold them accountable as well. Enforce those rules when there are infractions.

Continue to keep your computer safe from viruses and downloads. By now with all the many virus scares you are well equipped with virus and spyware software and you are vigilant about yearly updates. If you are on a Windows based computer, you should also have your software updates set to automatic. You can also contact your Internet service provider to learn about the parental controls they offer. If you're on a Mac, Apple has a great website called thexlab.com which includes a list of third party Mac based solutions to increase the safety of children using the Internet.

You educate at home and we educate here:

DDS works in several ways to educate your children regarding internet safety. Beginning in fourth grade internet research class we discuss e-mail, and some basic rules of the internet and safe searching. We talk about what to do if you come across something objectionable, and students know to exit out of the program quickly and call an adult to their side. In fifth grade I use a curriculum from Becybersmart.org. It has a wonderful set of lessons that discuss bullying, safe passwords, research skills and other safety tips. The class discussions this year have been wonderful and show that your children have received good advice from the teachers and adults in their lives. In the upper grades curriculum has been expanded on in health but will transition to the computer classes next year. All fourth through eighth grade students (and their parents) sign Acceptable Use Agreements at the beginning of each school year to clarify the school's policy for computer use at school. Fifth and sixth graders learn about on-line safety as they create their "digital portfolio blogs" in Mr. Blakley's class. Sixth, seventh and eighth graders all learn about the dos and don'ts of Facebook as well. Although we do not choose to put filters on the computers at school, students must agree to use computers only in the presence of a teacher so they can be monitored. We have a NO Facebook policy at school, as well as a policy that students may only access e-mail at school to receive or send something school related (like a paper).

I hope this information has helped to increase your awareness of new technologies and actions you might take to keep your children safe. Sources of information used in this speech will be available as an attachment to next week's *Fencepost*. If you have concerns or questions we are always happy to help. Please feel free to e-mail or call me to discuss this further.

Internet Sources:

"Sexting"

http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/15/national/main_4723161.shtml

Internet Safety

http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net_safety.html

<http://www.thexlab.com/faqs/internetsafetychild.html>

Facebook

http://www.utexas.edu/its/secure/articles/social_networking.php

<http://wiredal.wordpress.com/2008/01/06/the-dangers-of-facebook/>

<http://education.zdnet.com/?p=1446>

<http://www.nais.org/articlePrint.cfm?print=Y&ItemNumber=151505>

Cyber Bullying

<http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/cyber-bullying.aspx>

http://www.symantec.com/norton/library/familyresource/article.jsp?aid=pr_cyberbully