

Internet Safety for Elementary School (from the Holmes PTO Meeting - March 13, 2012)

Christina Hefele began her presentation by explaining how Internet dangers have evolved in the last 5 years. While the focus used to be almost exclusively on predators and inappropriate information on the Internet, other serious dangers have emerged, including bloggings that promote violence or dangerous behavior (pro anorexia, cutting, revenge), cyberbullying, identity theft, piracy, sexting, online gambling, viruses and piracy.

Christina emphasized that kids need to understand that the real world and the digital world are not separate – they do not have an online identity and real world identity, as the *consequences are the same*.

Research shows:

18% of 8-10 year-olds spend time on a social networking site *daily*

Kids' online behavior is tracked much more heavily than adults'

About 30% of children ages 10-17 have reported being bullied online

38% of Facebook users in the last year were under the age of 13, and over 25% under age 10 (although the Facebook policy states that users must be age 13)

Only 10% of parents have had frank talks with children age 10 and under regarding online behavior and threats

97% of kids report playing games online, many playing "M" games

Christina notes that there are good games to play online, involving problem solving and other skills, such as Mind Craft.

While the online filters are helpful, none are 100% effective, which is why parents must have a frank conversation about the Internet and appropriate online social interaction with their children (before age 10).

Some helpful examples given by Christina of what children really need to know are:

1. Nothing on the Internet is ever private – even if deleted
2. Not everything on the Internet is true (even on Wikipedia) – discuss the author, credentials, whether he/she is reputable with your children
3. Don't share too much personal information – obviously name and address, but also school name, jersey number, places and times (i.e. I'll be at Cherry Lawn for soccer practice at 5:30 today).
4. Avoid and do not participate in online gossip – don't feed the cyberbullies, and don't be a bystander to cyberbullying or any type of unkind behavior online
5. Understand copyright laws (downloading, sharing music)
6. Don't ever impersonate anyone else online, and don't share your password
7. Rely on trusted adults if bothered or confused by something that seems inappropriate

Other things parents can do to keep children safe in the digital age:

1. Establish family rules for all technology in the house (even phones) at age 9-10 to set the pattern for future years.
2. Go online with your child and ask what they do (games, etc)
3. Know your child's passwords – set them up for them
4. Encourage your child to make profiles private - friends only (i.e. on Facebook), and limit who can call and email
5. Know "net lingo" to understand texts – see netlingo.org
6. Preview you child's devices periodically
7. Provide guidance (don't freak out) when your children find something inappropriate, so they'll come to you for guidance again next time – it is a teachable moment
8. Support other parents in the community and rely on each other
9. Use parental controls on devices; gaming devices also have parental controls
10. Teach kids to be nice to each other – don't write it if you wouldn't say it to someone's face
11. Continually educate yourself - helpful websites:
<http://commonsensemedia.org>
<http://netsmartz.org>
<http://Safeteens.com>
<http://wiredsafety.org>
<http://onlineonguard.gov>

Some Parental Control Options:

- Hardware devices (phones, ipods, tablets) – usually in "Settings"
- Phones – service providers also have programs
- Gaming systems – usually under "Options," "Settings," or "Security"

Paula Bleakley added that the digital world problems with Holmes students have mainly involved Xbox Live. Parents need to be aware of this and set parental controls.

Paula also explained that mean-spirited behavior (real world and through technology) is addressed at Holmes whether or not it fits the "bullying" definition.

Christina Hefele is happy to answer any questions from parents. Her email address is chefeled@darrienps.org

