

Cyber Savvy Teens

A Guide for Parents



Introduction

Today's teens are totally connected through the Internet. As long as their time spent using online is balanced with other important activities the Internet can be fun and beneficial.

Parenting online is just like parenting in the Real World. When children are younger we keep them in fenced play yards. But as they grow, we have to make sure that they know how to independently make good choices. But they still need parents!

Active & Positive Parenting

Research has shown that teens whose parents are actively and positively involved in their online activities engage in less risk-taking behavior. Delete the fear! These are steps you can take:

- ✓ Appreciate your child's online activities. Show interest in your child's online friends. Work in partnership to address any concerns.
- ✓ Make sure you have implemented appropriate security against malware, use a spam blocker, block pop-up ads, and use safe search features. Never allow peer-to-peer software.
- ✓ Encourage your teen to always use the protective features on social networking sites and instant messaging to control who can view information and communicate in these personal environments.
- ✓ Keep the computer in a public area until your child is older and demonstrates good choices. Pay attention to what your child is doing online. But balance your supervision with your child's legitimate interests in personal privacy. Positive interactions will encourage your child to share.
- ✓ Never overreact if your child reports an online concern. Fear of overreaction and loss of access is leading many teens not to report.
- ✓ If your child engages in inappropriate or harmful actions online or using a cell phone, impose a consequence that will focus attention on why those actions caused or could cause harmful consequences. Require a remedy for any harm.
- ✓ Pay attention to "red flags" ~ appearing emotionally upset during or after use, disturbed relationships, too much time online, excessively secretive behavior, and subtle comments about online concerns. Carefully try to engage your child in discussion.
- ✓ Encourage your child to help others directly or report to an adult if he or she witnesses someone being harmed or at risk online.
- ✓ Help your child learn to make good choices. "What you do online reflects on you."

Cyber Savvy Teens

- ✦ Keep themselves safe.
 - They understand the risks. They know how to prevent themselves from getting into risky situations, detect if they are at risk, and effectively respond, including asking for help.
- ✦ Do the right things.
 - They do not harm others. They respect the rights, privacy, and property of others.
- ✦ Take responsibility for others.
 - They help others online. They report concerns to a responsible adult or site.

Not a Good Choice

Addressing Harmful Influences on Online Behavior

Watch out for these harmful online influences:

- ✦ You Can't See Me. The perception of invisibility makes detection and punishment less of a concern.
 - ✓ Encourage your child to make choices based on internalized values and understand their online actions can be traced.
- ✦ I Can't See You. The lack of tangible feedback interferes with the ability to recognize the harmful consequences to self or others.
 - ✓ Focus your child's attention on harm to themselves or others.
- ✦ Didn't Think. Teen's brains are not yet full developed, which results in an inability to effectively problem-solve, especially if they are emotionally upset.
 - ✓ Demonstrate and discuss strategies for effective problem-solving.
- ✦ Who Am I? Exploring personal identity online can lead to inappropriate or unsafe personal disclosure.
 - ✓ Encourage your child to pay attention his or her online "image" and reputation. "What you post tells people who you are."
- ✦ Am I Hot? When teens explore sexuality and relationships online this can lead to sexy images, sexual discussions, and the fantasy of finding love.
 - ✓ Honestly discuss issues of maturing sexuality and how to safely and respectfully form, engage in, and end personal relationships.
- ✦ If I Can Do It, It Must Be Okay. The easy ability to do something appears to create the permission to do so.
 - ✓ Tell your child: "Just because you can, doesn't make it right."
- ✦ Everybody Does It. Teens follow others who make bad choices.
 - ✓ Tell your child: "Just because they do it, doesn't make it right."
- ✦ How Far Can I Go? Teens test boundaries to find out about limits.
 - ✓ Focus on the reasons for limits ~ to avoid harm to self or others.
- ✦ Doing What They Say. Teens may be manipulation by others.
 - ✓ Teach your child to recognize signs of attempted manipulation ~ including overly friendly messages.
- ✦ Looking for Love. Teens who face Real World personal challenges are at higher risk online.
 - ✓ If your child is at higher risk, pay close attention to their online activities and "friends."

Cyber Savvy Teens

What You Do Reflects on You

Make Good Choices Online

The decisions you make about online actions will affect how others view you. Read with your eyes open, Think about what might happen to you or others. Make decisions that will prevent harm and reflect well on you. Pay attention to the well-being of others.

Keep Your Life in Balance

Avoid Addictive Access

Addictive access is letting the time you spend online take the place of all of the other activities that make your life happy and healthy. Make a commitment to spend Real Time with Real Friends in the Real World ~ as well as homework, chores, time with family, physical activities, and sleep. Turn your cell phone off at night.

Think Before You Post

Protect Your Personal Information & Reputation

Anything you post or send is ~ or easily could become ~ public and possibly permanent. Remember the more embarrassing or damaging the material you post, the more likely it will become very public and be seen by people who will judge you badly. Be very careful posting personal contact or sensitive information. Be respectful of others.

Connect Safely

Interact Safely with Others Online

You will connect with different kinds of people online ~ any could be safe or unsafe. If you don't know someone very well in Real Life, this could be a false profile or the person could not tell you the truth. Watch out for anyone who is overly friendly and wants to establish a special relationship. If you want to meet in person, do so only with parent approval, in a public place, with friends present, and an "escape plan." Be careful if you are looking for friends online ~ you could connect with unsafe people.

Keep Yourself Secure

Pay Attention to Security & Avoid Scams

All computer users must pay attention to security and avoid scams. Make sure your computer has good security software. Use a spam blocker. Block pop-ups. Don't install peer-to-peer networking. Filter search returns. Exercise care with downloads. Avoid scams that request personal information by offering free rewards or warning that something bad will happen if you don't provide personal information.

Abide by the Terms

Follow the Terms of Use

Acceptable Use Agreements govern activities on school or workplace Internet services. Terms of Use govern activities on services and sites. These agreements restrict activities that could cause harm or are not appropriate because of the purpose of the service. Violation can result in restrictions. Read and follow the terms of use.

Stay Out of the Garbage

Avoid "Gross Stuff" Online

You can avoid accidentally accessing "gross stuff" ~ inappropriate material that often comes with malware ~ through effective computer security and safe searching. Read, think, then click ~ don't click if you don't know what you will access. Don't fall for traps ~ don't type URLs, use a search engine. Delete the spam ~ never click on links in suspicious messages. If gross stuff appears ~ turn it off and tell. Then check your computer security.

Don't Sell Yourself

Watch Out For Aggressive Profilers & Advertisers

Wherever you go online you will be tracked, tricked, and targeted by market profilers and advertisers. They want to know all about you so they can display ads that are more likely to attract your interest ~ and convince you to purchase. Read the privacy policies. Avoid profiling tricks that ask for interest and contact information. Make wise decisions about how much information you will share, to whom, and what kinds of companies deserve your business.

Protect Your Face & Friends

Protect Your Reputation & Friends When Networking

Social networking sites are great places to share who you are and connect with friends. Use the protective features ~ but always remember "protected" does not mean "private." Think of your profile as your public image ~ not your private journal. Don't let creeps into your circle of friends. A friend might trust someone because you have linked and be hurt.

Effectively Handle Mean Kids Online

~ Don't Be One

Prevent Cyberbullying

Cyberbullies use the Internet or cell phones to send hurtful messages or post information to damage people's reputation and friendships. Don't post material or engage in interactions that could place you at risk. If targeted ~ never retaliate. If you are on a public site ~ leave or ignore. Otherwise ~ say "stop," block communications, remove friendship links, or file a complaint. If this does not stop the harm, get help from an adult. Don't be a cyberbully. It's not cool ~ it is cruel. People do not deserve to be treated badly. Be a helpful friend ~ help the target, tell an adult, file a complaint, or tell the cyberbully to stop, if you can do so safely. Be a "fire extinguisher" and stop any "flame wars."

Avoid Fantasy Love ~ Creeps ~ Abusers

Avoid Risky Relationships & Activities

Watch out for fantasy love. Electronic interactions can lead both of you to think you are in love ~ when it's really not real! Don't post sexy images online or talk about sex with people ~ this can attract online creeps. Meeting in person with an online creep can lead to very bad outcomes. Abusive partners use the Internet and cell phones to control their partner. Respect yourself ~ don't allow someone to control you like this. Never create and send nude sexy images. This could ruin your reputation. Don't demand or harass someone with such images. This can lead to major trouble.