KEEP KIDS SAFE ONLINE!

From laptops to smart phones to gaming devices...how can we help our children have safe, more positive experiences online?

Trusting, curious, and anxious to explore the Internet, children need parental supervision and common sense advice on how to be sure that their experiences online are safe, healthy and productive.

What are some risks kids face online?

- **Exposure to inappropriate materials**
A child may be exposed to material that is sexual, violent or hateful in nature. Children could seek out such material but also could come across it via social media, e-mails or text messaging even if they are not looking for it.

- **Cyber-Bullying & Harassment**
Children can encounter posts on Facebook, tweets, text messages or emails that are belligerent, demeaning or harassing. Bullies sometimes use the internet to bother their victims and engage others in the bullying.

- **Physical Harm**
A child might provide information or arrange an encounter that could risk his or her safety or the safety of other family members. In some cases, child molesters have used social media, text messaging and e-mail to gain trust and then arrange a face-to-face meeting.

- **Viruses and Hackers**
Children can unknowingly download files that damage computers or allow access to the family's private or financial information.

- **Social Networking Sites**
Children often volunteer far too much information, especially on blogs and networking sites. These personal sites may contain inappropriate pictures or content. Since these sites are password protected, teens are lured into a false sense of security, when in fact, the site is not completely protected and private.

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

1. Designate "safe" locations for technology. Keep the computer in a common room of the house - NOT the child's bedroom - with the monitor in plain view of anyone walking through the room. Have children (and parents) drop their phones in a basket or charging station every evening before bed.

2. Teach your child boundaries. Tell them why they should NOT give out personal information about themselves such as their telephone number, their full name or their address. Discuss the consequences of their own posts on social media (such as an inappropriate photo, mean-spirited text, etc.)

3. Set family guidelines. Decide how long they can go online, which sites they can visit and the time of day they can use the internet. Don't forget that many phones and gaming devices provide Internet access for your children as well!

4. Use parental controls. Check with your service providers to set up age-appropriate controls on your TV, computers, wireless plans, etc. Use privacy features -- especially for personal social networking sites -- to limit access to your child's profile, photos, etc.

5. Explain the UNreality of "friends" online. Not everyone is who they say they are. Make sure your child knows this, and have them agree to NEVER send photos, share personal information, or meet with someone they've met online without your consent.

6. TALK! Set aside time when technology is turned off by *everyone* in the family. Use these times to let your child know that you are available and will listen if anything is bothering them (such as cyber bullying) and you have time to talk face-to-face.

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