

Florida Times-Union
Parents Beware of your Child's Internet Activities
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July 1, 2009

Summer vacation allows our teens and young adults time and opportunity to get involved in activities that they would not normally do or have the courage. Our children have more time on their hands and we do not know what they are doing every minute of every day. These are just some incites from my experiences as a technology teacher and from research to help parents, grandparents and those taking care of children this summer. It is never a good idea to allow the Internet to be a "baby sitter", just as television is not a substitute for parental involvement. Take the time to talk to your children or the children in your life to guide them, not threaten them or scare them not to do something, because they ultimately will.

JUST BECAUSE IT IS THERE AND YOU SAID NOT TO.

My Quest To Teach: As an educator and parent of two teens (Sean 17 and Shae 13) my quest is to provide information to make parents aware of what is a "possibility" online, to empower parents with knowledge and not to be in denial nor ignorant to what their children can or maybe are doing online. We must remember children of this generation are known as "Generation Y" and as such are born into a digital world where it seems from birth they are connected. Stated in Wikipedia," Generation Y, also known as The Millennial Generation, is a term used to describe the demographic cohort following Generation X..... These Gen Y have new access to information that we did not comprehend nor existed in our years as young adults. Now the world is literally at their finger tips, how do we as parents cope and guide this new generation?

What is in a Name: The names may change, but it is still the same: the Internet, World Wide Web, the Net, Web 2.0, Information Superhighway, or National Information Infrastructure (NII) and Cyberspace all these provide access to information on a scale that transcends local networks, but broadens to global applications of information content. Parental discourse comes into play when the Internet has revolved around the possibility of online access and exposure to indecent and violent material, predation, and similar harms and dangers.

21st Century Technology: Technology in the 21st century has allowed our children to be involved in a new digital connectivity that allows them to connect with friends, peers and others from around the world. We are far beyond just going to hang out at the mall or window shopping at plaza's, outlet malls or flea markets, our young people are making connections and "hookups" nationally and internationally. Our planet has become smaller because of the progression and invasiveness of the Web 2.0 environment that has permitted unprecedented contact on a platform that is both interactive and engaging. There are many entities ranging from nonprofit organizations, museums, educational institutions, social networking and government agencies that are making available online

content for children and teens, offering opportunities to explore worlds from communities that are also created with their own works of art and imagination.

Movies and Real Life: Web 2.0 allows young people to build, manage and manipulate online worlds that they control. Movies recently such as “The Matrix” shows that online environments are not outside of the realm of imagination nor reality when using virtual reality applications (apps), but older movies such as “War Games” (1983) have long since projected the possibilities of future “games” and their interactivity within a digital environment. New movies coming out with Bruce Willis “Surrogates” (2009) are showing the use of online worlds where people “plug in” and become what they want to be. Here lies the responsibility of parents and guardians of young people to monitor online access to content. The technology for this type of interactivity is not as far off as some would believe. (Surrogates - Set in a futuristic world where humans live in isolation and interact vicariously through surrogate robots).

No Limitations with Technology: Children and teens are not limited by demographics, color, social economic status, cultural boundaries; they only need to access the web through a high speed Internet connection. If there is no access at home they are welcomed at libraries, local colleges, cyber cafes and flea markets are providing Internet access at a nominal cost. Parents should be aware that the exploration of contact on the web may lead to inappropriate access to contact that is either graphical or interactive with individuals or groups who do not have your child’s best interest in mind. Many parents do not know that, “federal legislation now requires parental permission before commercial Web sites can collect personal information from children under age 13” (Children and Computer Technology, **The Future of Children**, Vol. 10, No 2, Fall/Winter 2000). Parents should protect their personal information from their children because more often than not a child will do what they can to get what they want and that would include obtaining parental information such as date of birth, social security numbers, bank account numbers, etc. Never underestimate your child and their desires to get what they want. My daughter ran my cell phone bill to over \$200.00 with ring tones and subscriptions for music and my sisters son took her credit card and purchased a Gucci belt for \$300.00 and had it sent UPS Air to the house..

Empowering Parents with Knowledge: Parents are more empowered than they think by educating themselves on how their children are accessing content on the web. What web sites are their children going through (gateways and portals to content) to get to sites. When accessing sites are there passwords needed, what kind of content is accessible from the site: music, videos, games, interactive environments, etc. The digital environment contains a rich resource of materials that are free, educational and wholesome, but children must be directed to these sites. Youth are a key part of the digital future especially in marketing content by online companies. The Internet by design would connect everyone in an electronic digital village, bringing vast resources of art, music, literature, science, humanities, archeology, psychology and sociology to all, and making the contact available regardless of geography, distance, resources, or disability.

The Law, You and Your Child: “Your Children, the Internet, and the Law”

Parents are held responsible even in online situations where products and services are purchased by their children. Many sites require a registration fee, service fee or donation to gain access to resources, to make purchases that interest teens and young adults. Given the volatility of the economy many young people cannot find employment so teens rationalize that it will not hurt to “borrow” mom or dad’s and even in some situation grandparents information. The article “Your Children, the Internet, and the Law” shows that there are legal consequences to purchases, services and activities by teens. There are documented cases of *Libel and defamation cases on MySpace, Facebook, Ning and child porn cases from posting nude or seminude pictures of friends, siblings or family members online. These sites provide opportunities for expressions, but there is a legal and moral line that needs to be discussed with your children and their online activities.* The use of *credit cards and their abuse can result in charges of identity theft and fraud.* Parents are liable for their children’s actions, in some states it is until the age of 18, but other states it is until the individual turns 21 years of age there is still parental liability. The participation in criminal behavior by the teen or young adult could lead to prison, probation and or fines that the parent will be responsible for..... Examples can be seen in cases such as “two teenage students made false and damaging statements about their assistant principal on a My Space account. The principal sued the students—and their parents—for defamation, libel, negligence, and negligent supervision”. It goes to “parents have been sued in civil court for their children online behavior, and statutes in some states appear to hold parent criminally liable for their children online actions—whether the parents know about the actions or not”. So parents beware and forewarned, take appropriate action and measures to protect yourself and your children. Be proactive instead of reactive to possible situations, establish rules and guidelines to help your children understand the potential consequences of illegal online activities. Open communication, staying involved in online activity and setting good examples proves to be the correct course of action.