

Pointers For Parents

Key Information For Protecting Children Online

by Regina Lewis

(NAPSA)—With more children becoming Internet savvy at a younger age and being exposed to online peer pressure, parents should take an active role in helping their children stay safe while they surf. To protect their kids, parents should:

1. Educate themselves.

There's so much to learn, but fortunately there are terrific online resources to help, including a new educational Web site geared to parents. The new Web site, called SafetyClicks.com, provides Web content from online mom experts and nonprofit partners such as the site ConnectSafely.org. It provides parents with blog articles and tips on topics such as social networking and cyberbullying.

2. Know who their child is online. Personal Web sites, blogs and social networking sites are where kids hang out these days. It's free to search (by child's name, screen name or e-mail address). You may be surprised at how much you can learn. What's most shocking to parents are the personae their kids have online that are often quite different from how they act around the house.

3. Know their online friends.

Just as you would get to know your children's circle of friends in the real world, find out who they're chatting with online. Ask them who's on their "friends list" and if they can be sure these people are who they say they are. Just because someone's online profile says he or she is 14 years old does not mean he or she is really 14 years old.

4. Protect their privacy. Kids and teens often treat personal Web pages and online profiles as they would a diary, sometimes revealing a little too much. Scan for personal



information that could make it easy to track them offline, such as an address, phone number, where they work, what sports teams they play on. Advise kids not to share anything they wouldn't put on a highway billboard and carefully consider which pictures they post.

5. Use parental controls. Popular parental controls software from AOL is available for free and now works with any e-mail address. That means you don't need to have an AOL screen name to take advantage of it. Easy-to-use features include standard age-based access controls, as well as specific controls on IM and e-mail, online timers and e-mail/Web reports on children's online activities. A little parental guidance can go a long way toward protecting children online. (The free download is available at <http://parentalcontrols.aol.com>.)

AOL Online Advisor Regina Lewis (www.reginalewis.com) is a national TV & radio contributor and Internet trend expert. She knows the tips, tricks, secrets and shortcuts for making technology work for you.