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The Monthly Security Awareness Newsletter for You

Online Security for Kids

Background

Kids' lives are online more than ever, from socializing with friends and interacting with family to online learning and education. As parents we want to make sure they do so in a safe and secure manner. However, this is hard as many of us never grew up in such an online environment like this. Below we cover key steps on how you can help kids make the most of online technology safely and securely.

Education / Communication

First and foremost, make sure that you foster good open communication with your children. Far too often parents get caught up in the technology required to block content or what mobile apps are good or bad. No parental control technology is perfect, and some have privacy concerns due to the data they collect. Ultimately this is not a technology problem but a behavior and values problem. Teach your kids to behave online as you would in the real world. A good place to start is to create a list of expectations with your kids. Here are some to consider (these rules should evolve as kids get older):

- Times when they can or cannot go online and for how long.
- Types of websites and/or games they can access and why they are or are not appropriate.
- What information they can share and with whom. Children often do not realize what they post is permanent and public, or that their friends may share their secret with the world.
- Who they should report problems to, such as strange pop-ups, scary websites, or if someone online is being creepy or a bully.
- Treat others online as they would want to be treated themselves.
- People online may not be who they claim to be, and not all information is accurate or truthful.
- What can be purchased online and by whom, to include in-game purchases.

Consider tying these rules to their academic grades, completion of chores, or how they treat others. Once you decide on the rules, post them in the house. Even better, have them review and sign the document; that way, everyone is in full agreement. The earlier you start talking to your kids about your expectations, the better.

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Not sure how to start the conversation? Ask them what apps they are using and how they work. Put your child in the role of teacher and have them show you what they are doing online. Keeping communication open and active is the best way to help kids stay safe in today's digital world.

For mobile devices, consider a central charging station somewhere in your house. Before your children go to bed at night, have all mobile devices placed at the charging station, so your children are not tempted to use them when they should be sleeping.

Security Technologies and Parental Controls

There are security technologies and parental controls you can use to monitor and help protect your kids. They typically provide capabilities to enforce usage limits or hours as well as content protections. These solutions tend to work best for younger children. Older kids not only need more access to the Internet but often use devices that you do not control or cannot monitor, such as those issued by school, gaming consoles, or devices at a friend's or relative's house. This is why communicating with your kids about your expectations and the dangers that exist on the internet is so important.

Leading by Example

Set a good example as parents or guardians. When your kids talk to you, put your own digital device down and look them in the eye. Consider not using digital devices at the dinner table and never text while driving. Finally, when kids make mistakes, treat each one as an experience to learn from instead of engaging in an immediate disciplinary action. Make sure they feel comfortable approaching you when they experience anything uncomfortable online or realize they themselves have done something wrong.

Guest Editor

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Resources

FOSI: https://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting
SANS Securing Your Kids Videos: https://www.sans.org/security-awareness-training/secure-your-kids
National Cybersecurity Alliance: https://staysafeonline.org/get-involved/at-home/raising-digital-citizens/
NetSmarts: https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/home
OpenDNS: https://www.opendns.com/

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