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10 tips for parental guidance online

Steve Johnson

1. Know the enemy. When she advises parents on keeping their kids safe, Sarah Migas, Internet safety specialist with the Illinois attorney general's office, tells them to "look at the people their kids are talking to. Talk to them about how they're treating other people and the fact that this is a public, permanent place."
2. Don't be intimidated. It's happening in a new realm, sure, but the old rules about fairness, good judgment and decency still apply. If your daughter is getting a barrage of text messages at 2 in the morning, that's not "how kids are today"; that means it's time for a talk.
3. "Friend" your children when they join Facebook. This allows you to get a feel for how they and their friends interact on the service (which is officially for people 13 and older but has many younger members).
4. Use monitoring software, but not as a crutch. Such tools can filter out inappropriate material and keep tabs on who is contacting your children and in what context. But a child determined to do wrong can find ways to around it.
5. Think hard before using spyware. Yes, software that secretly monitors keystrokes and records which Web sites are visited can tell you things your teen doesn't want you to know. But what do you do with that information once you have it?
6. Keep family computers in public places. This is an old rule, but a great one. In any realm, opportunity is a big contributor to misbehavior.
7. Drill your children on the idea of the "digital footprint." The long-range consequences of online behavior rarely occur to kids. They need to have it drilled into them that their profane opinion about, say, Miley Cyrus could cost them a job someday.
8. Maintain access to accounts. A good rule: For children to keep phone and computer privileges, parents have the right to check in on what they're up to whenever requested. What's put up online is, to a sometimes shocking degree, public information and should not be kept private from the people who care most.
9. Consider time limits. Learning to manage the Web's distractions is a skill that will help them not just to get homework done, but to function effectively in college and, believe it or not, in the workplace. Monitoring software can help in this.
10. Communicate. Do it early, and do it often. Keep on doing it. Safety in the digital world needs to be an ongoing conversation, not a one-time event.