Be There

Be There is a national movement that inspires parents to become more involved in their children's education. Teachable moments are everywhere. Be your child's favorite teacher. Connect in meaningful ways and your simple actions will reap immense rewards at home, play, and school!

15 Tips for safe 'surfing'

The World Wide Web is an integral part of daily life. From educational games and research resources to news sites and social media sites, the Internet has a host of information your child may want to access. As a parent, what can you do to strike the balance between helping your child stay connected while keeping your student safe online? Check out these tips for parents on using media wisely.

Create 'house rules' for Internet use.

Create simple, easy-to-read house rules about using the Internet and post them on or near the monitor. You and your kids can work together to outline your family's rules of acceptable Internet usage. Consider varying levels of access for your children on an age-appropriate basis. A family Internet contract is a way to reinforce responsible computer use. Just as with any rule, make sure to consistently enforce the family's house rules for the Internet.

Create passwords.
Internet accounts should be in the parent's name, with parents creating the primary screen name, controlling passwords, and using blocking and/or filtering devices. Children should not complete a profile for a service provider. Remind your child to never use a real name— Johnny Jones— as a display name. Instead, use a nondescript screen name—ATLFalconsFan not DaculaFalconsRock, for instance— that doesn't identify your child as a minor or a student.

Go online yourself.
Check out the web sites your child routinely visits. If any cause you concern, use security features to block access. Be familiar with YouTube, social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, and popular blogs. If your child is older and has a social networking account, consider creating an account for yourself and having your child add you as a "Friend." Have your child show you what his or her profile looks like. Even if you don't set up your own account, know your child's passwords and make sure it's understood that you have 24/7 access. If your student changes a password without letting you know, Internet use is restricted.

Consider using security software for your home computer.
Many cable and Internet service providers (ISPs) offer customers a security suite at no additional charge that includes parental controls, pop-up blocker software, anti-spyware, anti-spam software, and firewalls. Typically this feature offers five, age-based levels of blocking. Levels include:

- complete web blocking;
- access to selected, age-appropriate web sites, suggested for children 8 and under;
- a medium-filter selection, recommended for ages 9 to 12, that blocks web mail and chat functions;
- a low-filter option for teens; and
- an adult "no filter" option.

Check if your ISP can make available a daily web history report detailing when your child has been online. Also, you can check your browser's history (Ctrl-H on a PC) to see what web sites have been visited.

Keep the computer in the family room.
Keep the Web-enabled computer in the family room or in another open area. Be aware of any other com-

puters your children might be using and know whether parental controls are in place. (Do your children access the Internet at a friend's? What are *their* "house rules"?)

Don't be afraid to ask. Know where your student goes online. Know with whom your child is exchanging e-mails and IMs and chatting. Get to know your child's online friends.

Be aware of cyberbullying. Electronic or cyberbullying occurs on social networking sites, in chat rooms, and through instant messages and e-mail. Students often engage in cyberbullying because they can do so anonymously. Talk to your child about cyberbullying from both the bully's and the victim's perspective. Bullying—whether in person or online— is punishable under the school system's Code of Conduct.

Talk about chat rooms. Limit chat room access to child-friendly sites. Talk with your children about never meeting a new online "friend" face-to-face. Be sure to spell out the specifics of acceptable chat room behavior in your family contract. Discourage IMing or chatting with strangers.

Learn the lingo. *LOL (laughing out loud), POS (parent over shoulder)…* Internet communication has a language, sometimes a shorthand, all its own. Know what your kids are saying online. Try the chat translator at *http://www.teenchatdecoder.com.*

Talk about spam. Explain to your children what spam is and caution your kids to never respond to commercial e-mail, or to open e-mail attachments from unknown senders. Protect your e-mail accounts from spam by *not* responding to spam. Following a link and asking to opt out from future e-mails confirms to spammers that your e-mail address is active.

Internet viruses are often spread via e-mail attachments.

Use situations in the headlines to spark conversations. Cyberbullying and Internet safety frequently are in the news. Use these opportunities to talk about your family rules, good decisions, and safety.

Remember, "online" doesn't mean just on the computer. Many devices— including cell phones, smartphones, and some online video games— allow Internet access without a computer. Know how your child is accessing the Internet and discuss safety issues related to these devices as well.

Watch out for dangerous e-mails. Talk to your children about not responding to offensive or dangerous e-mails, chat, or other communications. Report any such communication to your local law enforcement agency or to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (*http://www.cybertipline.com).*

Talk about file downloading. If your children are music fans and enjoy accessing music or videos online, be sure they are getting their media from legitimate sources and not sharing copyrighted materials illegally.

Learn more about Internet safety and media literacy… online. You can find a wealth of reports, lists, and guides that speak to smart media use for parents and children at these sites:

- *http://www.commonsensemedia.org/internet-safety*
- *http://www.getnetwise.org/*
- *http://www.wiredsafety.org*
- *http://www.ciconline.org/mediasmartparents*
- *http://www.safekids.com/safety-advice-tools/*
- *http://www.wiredwithwisdom.org*
- *http://www.teenchatdecoder.com*

Together, we will be there for our students— Gwinnett County Public Schools and YOU!

Make the ordinary *extraordinary!*

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