Time to Think about: Internet Safety

The Internet can be an amazing tool. You can explore a new place, read a book, find information, share photos, connect with a friend on the other side of the world, and so much more. But, the Internet can also be overwhelming and potentially dangerous, especially for our children and students. Just as it is important to talk to children about fire safety and other dangers, it is also important to speak to children of any age about safety and security when it comes to using the Internet.

Social media is a major part of Internet Safety. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and others get checked on a daily basis on smart phones, tablets, and computers. As adults, we are able to make choices as to what kind of information we post on these sites. Children do not always have the same expertise in deciding what is appropriate and safe to post and what isn’t. All children should be reminded not to post identifying information such as their full name, birthday, address, phone number, and more. Older children should also be taught to think about how writing a post or posting a photograph might affect themselves or others in the future.

Before downloading a new app or signing up for a new website, children should be encouraged to read the terms and conditions before they accept them. It is important to pay specific attention to the privacy measures and how their information could be shared. If they decide to accept the terms and conditions and they download the app or sign up for the website, it is always a good idea to check the privacy settings and preferences. Those settings should be changed to reflect what is most appropriate for the age of the child as well as the purpose of the website. Children should also be encouraged to consider what kind of information is being collected about them by the app or website and how that information might be used.

One website that offers a lot of important information to parents and teachers is Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org). Common Sense Media includes Internet Safety, Best Apps & Games, Reviews of movies, games, TV shows, and much more. According to the experts at Common Sense Media, here are basic guidelines to share with your child:

- Follow your family's rules about when and where to use the Internet.
- Be polite, kind, and respectful.
- Understand a website's rules, and know how to flag other users for misbehavior.
- Recognize "red flags," including someone asking you personal questions such as your name and address.
- Never share your name, your school's name, your age, your phone number, or your email or home address with strangers.
- Never send pictures to strangers.
- Keep passwords private (except from parents).
- Never open a message from a stranger; it may contain a virus that can harm a computer.
- Immediately tell an adult if something mean or creepy happens.

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