Cybersafety for kids and teens

The internet offers exciting opportunities and experiences for kids and teens. But for some parents it can seem like a dark forest fraught with danger.

While there are great aspects of technology, it should be remembered that the internet could potentially expose children to harmful content, cyberbullying or contact with strangers.

To coincide with Stay Smart Online Week, we’re sharing our top tips for online safety for kids and teens.

How to approach cybersafety

It’s more than likely that your kids are using computers or tablets regularly at home and at school. In fact a 2013 study from the ACMA found that 95 per cent of eight to 11 year olds had accessed the internet ‘in the last four weeks.’

It’s important to try to understand the technology and to be aware of the online dangers that exist. There are many online resources and guides that you can access to get up to speed.

We recommend talking to your kids about cybersafety rather than spying on their online activities. Openness is the key and the earlier you start talking to your children about online safety, the better.

It’s reasonable to monitor your child’s online activities to ensure they are using safe practices, but if you’re too restrictive, you may risk them going behind your back and engaging in dangerous online activities.

Educate your kids about appropriate online behaviour. For example, you might want to discuss what kinds of websites are acceptable to visit and those which are not. It would also be helpful to outline the kinds of personal information they should never share on social media.

A good approach would be to set up rules around your child’s online activities and use of technology. For example, you may want to put a limit on how much time they spend online per day, what apps they can use and which websites they’re allowed to visit.

Parental controls

These are helpful tools for monitoring what your child can and can’t access on smartphones, tablets and computers. They will also help you avoid accidental in-app purchases in games and other apps.

With so many devices on the market running different software, it’s impossible to cover all of the parental controls in this article.

The majority of devices will probably have in-built controls that will allow you to restrict access to certain applications, software and content. We recommend reading the device manual or consulting the manufacturer’s website to get more information and instructions on how to set these up. There are also a range of third party apps available for phones and tablets that allow you to set up parental controls.
The Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner’s website has helpful information on parental controls.

Cyberbullying

Bullying used to just be confined to the school playground. But with social media and other online platforms, there are more opportunities than ever before for kids to be bullied. Research from the ACMA in 2013 found that 17 per cent of 12 to 13 year olds reported that they had been cyberbullied.

The number one reason kids don’t report cyberbullying (or inappropriate content) is that they fear their internet privileges will be taken away if they do. It’s important to let kids know that they should report these things to you.

Due to the nature of the internet cyberbullying can take place at any time. It could come from anywhere, not just your child’s school, but from random followers on Twitter, or ‘friends’ on Facebook who they’ve never actually met.

There are many ways cyberbullies can target victims - through harassing messages, images, videos and so on. This harassment can quickly spread across social media making it worse for the victim and often hard to pin point the source. Deleting inappropriate or harassing material can also be difficult. In the first instance, you should contact the social media company to ask them to have the material removed. If the material isn’t taken down by the company you can contact the Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner to request that it’s taken down.

Regardless of how your child is bullied, the effects are the same. Here are some tips from Stay Smart Online on how to deal with cyberbullying:

- Talk to your kids and encourage them to let you know if they are being bullied
- Block the bully and change privacy settings
- Don’t respond to aggressive comments or behaviour as it can make the situation worse
- If someone is posting personal information about your child, report it to the social media platform or your ISP as they may be able to remove it
- If it’s not removed by the company or ISP, you can report it to the Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner to have it removed
- Be supportive and let your child know they can get help to deal with the situation
- Collect any evidence of cyberbullying and report it to your child’s school. Contact your local police if you have any safety concerns

For more cybersafety tips and information, download the ACCAN Magazine - The Digital Wild.