

WHAT PARENTS DON'T KNOW ABOUT INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND HOW THEY RELATE TO CHILDREN

Our children are our nation's most valuable asset. They represent the future of our country and many of them will be the leaders of the next generation. The advances in computer technology have provided many opportunities in making improvements to learning and knowledge. However, there are also negative effects (actual and potential) that influence our children's behavior. These include vulnerability to exploitation, harassment and harm by computer sex offenders.

BENEFITS

Some of the benefits that our children experience from the virtual world are:

1. Increased knowledge and information. Access to many sites provides them with information in broad based areas.
2. Research opportunities. Children can research information related to their school work.
3. Establishing contacts. Through social networking e.g. facebook, twitter, etc; children can keep in touch with their peers throughout the world.
4. File sharing programs. Children can download positive material
5. Children's hand / eye co-ordination is improved
6. The skills and knowledge acquired helps young people prepare for the world of Work

However, there are harmful negative effects, actual and potential that parents and children need to know.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Some of these negative effects are:

1. Some sites are inappropriate and they contain data that is inaccurate. If children need to research information they should be encouraged to seek reputable sites.
2. Loss of privacy. Giving out personal information that makes it easy for predators. This can lead to sexual exploitation, virtual abuse, harassment, cyber bullying and the seduction children by giving them gifts etc.
3. File sharing can encourage children to download music illegally, download software that contains viruses, and possibly open their pc to other malicious programs.
4. Poor e-mail etiquette can contribute to the use of poor writing techniques and repetitive use of negative language, "leetspeak".
5. Playing on line games for long periods can be linked to addictive, extreme self-destructive behavior, which can turn into a serious social problem if left unchecked.

6. Cyber-stalking can occur where one party can engage in posting lewd photographs or constant harassment of the other individual
7. The feeling of anonymity and the invisibility effect while interacting on-line with others can draw out the darker side of human nature. This means that certain behaviors are released that normally would not be released because of “shyness” in real world interactions.

WHAT PARENTS DO NOT KNOW

1. Parents can use Parental Control Software e.g. blocking websites, content filtering etc.
2. Parents can control Internet restrictions using the Internet Browser
3. Parents can select an Internet Provider that offers built-in parental controls e.g. AOL, MSN Premium etc
4. Parents can review the history list in Internet Explorer to see sites visited on the Web
5. Software can be configured to allow only approved contacts
6. Parents can keep the lines of communication open with children. Enhance the family relationships.
7. Parents must educate themselves with the popular websites that children use e.g. MySpace, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc.
8. Parents can create a Family Account e.g. Yahoo, where they can monitor children
9. Parents must educate themselves and be computer literate.

INTERNET TIPS

1. Children should not be online without permission and supervision
2. Communicating with an unknown person online should not be allowed
3. Giving personal information online should not be allowed
4. Parents should encourage discussion with their children on internet activity
5. Parent should ask to see pictures that your children are posting on the internet
6. Children using social networking sites should be mature enough and be responsible with their own interactions.
7. Parents should not allow computers in their children’s bedrooms
8. Recognize negative behavior such as e.g. lack of sleep, long hours on line, secretive behavior like closing the laptop screen etc., withdrawal from interacting face to face with others.

In conclusion, parents have a responsibility to protect their children from the negative effects of the virtual world by monitoring what they do. Parents also need to educate themselves so that they have the knowledge and skills of the computer and of Cyberspace.

Parents should ensure that the computer has an up-to-date anti-virus, spyware and firewall installed. Parents should work at developing effective communication and relationships with their children. Parents should become one of their children's online friends and finally parents must know the warning signs that children show that may become a target to online predators. Everyone has a responsibility to protect the next generation from the negative effects of cyberspace.