



Jericho High School's Psychology Corner

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Keeping Our Youth Safe in the New Age of Technology: Internet Safety & Cell Phone Contracts

In the three part series about *Keeping Our Youth Safe in the New Age of Technology*, we've learned that although the Internet and cell phones can be considered useful informational devices, when utilized in an irresponsible manner these electronic means of communication can potentially have a negative impact on our youth. As stated in the second part of this series, 93% of our children ages 12-17 are Internet surfing, blogging, tweeting, instant messaging, texting, and video chatting (Feinberg & Robey, 2008); therefore, it is important to establish specific boundaries for responsible Internet/Cell phone use and to discuss with your child ways they can protect themselves when utilizing these devices.

In *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard* (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009a), the authors discuss the following five strategies that parents can focus on to assist in the prevention of cyberbullying and potential dangers when their children use the Internet/Cell phone:

Communicate- Develop an open dialogue with your children so they feel comfortable sharing information with you. If you convey to them that you will listen to their situation and respond in a non-judgmental manner, then there is a greater probability that they will come to talk to you about serious issues.

Venture online- Go on the Internet with your child. For those of who do not know how to navigate the Web or cell phone applications, ask your child to teach you. Use this time as a bonding opportunity with them. Ask them why they go online and why they like certain sites.

Develop safe Internet/Cell phone practices- The earlier parents teach their children to use these devices in an appropriate/responsible manner, the easier they will internalize those positive habits.

Monitor their activities- Keep Internet-enabled computer in an open area and install monitoring software programs.

Use discretion when spying- Tell your child if you choose to use filters and tracking software. Parents should explain to their children that it is intended to protect them.

The following are two examples of Family Cell Phone Contracts and Internet Safety Contract that parents can utilize to proactively address potential concerns:

Family Cell Phone Contract

Hinduja and Patchin (2009b)

Child Expectations

1. I acknowledge that using a cell phone is a privilege and, therefore, will not take it for granted.
2. I will not give out my cell phone number to anyone unless I first clear it with my parents.
3. I will always answer calls from my parents. If I miss a call from them, I will call them back immediately.
4. I will not bring my cell phone to school if it is prohibited. If allowed to bring it to school, I will keep it in my backpack or locker and turned off between the first and last bell.
5. I will not use my cell phone for any purpose after _____am/pm on a school night or after _____am/pm on a nonschool night, unless approved by my parents.
6. I will not send hurtful, harassing, or threatening text messages.
7. I will not say anything to anyone using the cell phone that I wouldn't say to them in person with my parents listening.
8. I will pay for any charges above and beyond the usual monthly fee.
9. I will not download anything from the Internet or call toll numbers without first asking my parents.
10. I will not enable or disable any setting on my phone without my parent's permission.
11. I will not take a picture or video of anyone without that person's permission.
12. I will not send or post pictures or videos of anyone online without that person's permission.
13. I will not send or post any pictures or videos to anyone without first showing them to my parents.
14. I will not be disruptive in my cell phone use. If my parents ask me to end a call or stop text messaging, I will.

Parent Expectations

1. I will respect the privacy of my child when my child is talking on a cell phone.
2. I will not unnecessarily invade my child's privacy by reading text messages or looking through call logs without telling my child first. If I have a concern, I will express it to my child, and we will look through this material together.
3. I will pay the standard monthly fee for the cell phone contract.
4. I will be reasonable with consequences for violations of this contract. Consequences will start at loss of cell phone privileges for 24 hours and progress according to the seriousness of the violation.

Child's signature:

Parent's signature:

Parent–Child Contract for Internet Safety

Dombrowki, LeMasney, Ahia, and Dickson (2004)

I, _____, have read this contract with my mother/father _____ and I understand the rules of Internet use in my home. I also understand that these same rules apply whenever I access the Internet outside of my home, such as at school, the library, or a friend’s house. I will keep this contract clearly posted by my computer. If I should run into any problems while surfing the Internet or while in a chat room, I will contact my parents and abide by the rules listed in this contract.

Child’s Responsibilities:

- I will never give out my home telephone number or address over the Internet.
- I will not give out any information about my family, such as where my parents work and the names of my brothers or sisters.
- I will not use my real name in chat rooms and will always use a “nickname.”
- I will not tell a stranger on the Internet where I go to school.
- I will never meet someone I have talked to on the Internet unless my parents approve and come with me to the meeting.
- I will never send pictures of my family or me over the Internet without my parents’ permission.
- I will not open email or download files from strangers.
- I will not talk to anyone over the Internet who makes me feel uncomfortable; I will tell my parents right away when this happens.
- I will tell my parents if anyone is threatening me or using bad language.
- I will always keep in mind while talking to people on the Internet that they are strangers and some strangers can be bad.
- I will obey my parents’ rules about being on the Internet, including obtaining their permission to sign on and download material.

I will abide by these rules whenever I use the Internet, even if I am not at home.

Parents’ Responsibilities:

- I _____ will supervise my child while he or she is on the Internet to ensure they are using this tool responsibly and not endangering themselves by communicating inappropriately with strangers they may meet over the Internet.
- I will not use this contract as a way to control every action taken by my child on the Internet.
- I will respect my child’s need for a degree of privacy while speaking to friends on the Internet.
- I will spend time with my child and learn about what interests him or her on the Internet.
- I will be aware of the procedure for contacting my online provider for advice should someone appear to be bothering my child. I will also contact the Cyber Tip Line at (800)-843-5678 or www.cybertipline.com if I suspect someone has been soliciting my child for sex or sending pornographic material to my child.
- I will teach my child to use judgment while online and I will ensure that my child is educated about the hazards of Internet use and how to safely use the Internet.

Parent’s Signature _____ Date _____

Child’s Signature _____ Date _____

References

Dombrowski, S. C., LeMasney, J. W., Ahia, C. E., & Dickson, S. A. (2004). Protecting children from online sexual predators: Technological, psychoeducational, and legal considerations. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 35, 65-73.

Feinberg, T. & Robey, N. (2008). *Cyberbullying*. Principal Leadership. Retrieved December 22, 2009, from the National Association for School Psychologist database. www.nasponline.net

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2009a). *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press.

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2009b). *Family Cell Phone Contract*. Retrieved December 21, 2009, from the Cyberbullying Research Center database: www.Cyberbullying.us

Additional Resources

www.cyberbullying.org

www.Cyberbullying.us

www.nasponline.net