**How to Discuss Internet Safety with Your Teen**

**The Importance of Discussing Internet Safety with Your Teen**   Are you a parent?  If you are, have you already had the internet safety talk with your child?  If you have yet to do so, this is a discussion that you will want to have.  Since many teenagers like using social networking websites, online message boards, internet chat rooms, and instant messaging programs, internet safety is a subject that must be discussed.

As nice as it is to hear that you should talk about internet safety and internet use in general with your child, you may be curious as to why it is important that you do so.  For your convenience, just a few of the many reasons why you should have the internet safety talk with your child are outlined below.

1. **They May Not Know**How old is your child?  If they are just starting to use the internet, they may be unaware of the dangers that lurk on many popular websites, including online chat rooms and social networking websites.  If your child has just started using the internet to research school projects, be sure you discuss internet safety with them, as it won’t be long before they realize that they can communicate with and make new friends online.

2. **It Is Your Job, As the Parent**Perhaps, the greatest reason why you should talk to your child about internet use and internet safety is because it is your job to do so.  As a parent, it is your reasonability to guide and protect your child.  Parents need to set some rules and guidelines with their children and the internet shouldn’t be any different.  You donít have to completely outlaw chat rooms, online message boards, or social networking websites, but be sure that you set clear cut rules that your child will understand concerning their use.

3. **It Will Help to Keep Them Safe**As much as we would all like to believe that the world is filled with nice, happy people, it isn’t. Unfortunately, many of those people, who may be child predators, are finding it easy to target children online.  Why?  Because the internet enables anyone to create their own identity.  While most internet users that you meet online are truthful, all it takes is one online predator to cause serious harm or damage to a family.  When you talk to your child about the dangers of the internet, you are keeping them well aware, which can help to keep them safe.

4. **You Can Teach Them What to Do**As for teaching your child what to do online, there are a number of different aspects that should be examined.  For starters, teach your child how to properly use the internet, especially chat rooms and social networking websites.  Let them know that they cannot discuss personal information or share pictures or videos with strangers.  You should also let your child know what to do if they are targeted or harassed by someone online.  This should involve coming to you immediately or saving all information, as opposed to erasing it from the computer, until you or the police can examine it.

5. **They Can Feel More Comfortable Talking to You**If your child is in high school or junior high school, they may automatically get defensive when you try to talk to them about internet safety.  This is because most kids believe that they already know all that is needed to know and others just assume that you are being an overbearing parent.  Despite this, discussing internet safety with your child in a calm and cool manner is likely to make your teenager feel comfortable about the issue.  This increases the chances of them approaching you when they run into trouble online.   As you can see, there are a number of reasons why you should talk to your child about internet safety.  Although this piece focused on discussing internet safety with teenagers, remember that internet safety is a lesson that can and should be started as soon as your child turns a computer on.

Are you the parent of a teenager who uses the internet? If you are, have you already had the internet safety talk with your teenager?  If you haven’t, it is time for that talk to occur. As nice as it is to be able to use the internet for school research projects or to communicate with friends online, it is important to remember that the internet can also be a danger to children and teenagers.

As nice as it is to hear that you should talk to your teenager about internet safety, you may be curious as to how you can go about doing so. Brining up the subject can be hard, as your teen may automatically become defensive. The good news is that you do have a number of different options. One of those options is to just go for it.

When you outright discuss internet safety with your teenager, make sure that you pick a good time to have the talk. Don’t start ranting right away about your teen’s internet use and the dangers after a disagreement or when tensions are already high. With teenagers, this can lead to other problems. It may cause your teenager to not listen to you just for the point of not listening or they may purposely defy you.

Another option that you have, when looking to discuss internet safety with your child, is to wait until your child gets off the computer. When they walk away, ask them if they know about being safe online and the dangers that the internet has. This is a great opener, when your child is already using the computer. It may make you sound less like an overprotective, overbearing parent, at least in the eyes of your teenager.

When discussing internet safety with your teenager, it is important to not assume that your child already knows. Even if your child stops you and tells you they already know how to be safe online, don’t stop. Be sure to restate your point and establish any internet rules you would like your child to follow. It is important to remember that many teenagers think they know everything, but many don’t. For example, your child may know that there are internet predators out there, but do they also know that pictures of them smoking or drinking underage could get them suspended from school or even arrested, no matter how “cool”, they look on a MySpace page?

peaking of MySpace, it is important to know what you should talk to your child about. Since many teenagers use MySpace and other similar social networking websites, they should be discussed. Make sure your child knows that anyone can hide behind a computer, even a sexual predator. Also, let them know the dangers of posting personal information and pictures on their social networking profiles.

In addition to social networking websites, like MySpace, internet chat rooms should also be discussed. Internet chat rooms are different, but similar in nature to instant messaging programs, like AOL or MSN. Generally speaking, instant messaging programs are safer for teens to use, as they aren’t automatically paired up and thrown into a chat room with other internet users, who are essentially strangers. As with social networking websites, make sure that your child knows that they could, essentially, be talking to anyone. Tell them to get out of a chat room right away if the tone turns sexual in nature or if they receive a private message from someone who makes them feel uncomfortable.

You may also want to discuss personal blogs. Many websites, like Blogger.com and WordPress.com allow internet users to start free blogs. Many teens find this a nice and easy way to vent or allow their friends to stay up-to-date on their thoughts. Your teenager needs to know that anyone can view these blogs, so their information really isn’t private and personal, say as a handwritten journal.

As you can see, there are a number of different ways that you can go about discussing internet safety with your teenager. Remember to do so, however, before it is too late. Any child who uses the internet should be well aware of the dangers that lurk.

**4 Signs That Your Teenager May Be In Trouble Online**

Are you a parent who has a teenager who uses the internet? If you are, do you know that your teenager may run into trouble online? Their chances increase when they are using the internet to socialize with friends or make new friends. Your child may unintentionally fall victim to a child predator online or they may be harassed by those that they know online. But, would you know if your child is in trouble?

For your convenience, there are four signs that your teenager may be in trouble online. If any of these signs apply to your child, you will want to take action right away.

1. **They Get on the Computer at the Same Time Everyday** -What many parents do not realize is that children and teenagers can easily become targets of online child predators. Many also do not realize that this process doesn’t always happen overnight. Some child predators pretend to be the ages of their targets. They then work to gain the trust of those targets. This can take a few days or a few weeks. You may be able to tell if this is happening though if your child gets on the internet at the same time, every single day. This is a good sign that they are communicating directly with someone, who may not have pure intentions.
2. **They Are Secretive When They Use the Computer** -How does your child act when they are using the computer? Does your child try to hide what they are doing online from you? If they automatically shut off the computer or put a game on the screen, they may be trying to prevent you from seeing what they are doing online. This is a good sign that your child may be doing something they shouldn’t be doing online, like having direct, personal conversations with a stranger, who may be a child predator.
3. **They Are Very Happy When Getting Off the Computer** -If your child is overly happy when they sign off the internet, they may be on the path to trouble. This sign can be a little bit tricky though. Your child may be happy because they just finished a long school project, but you honestly never know. If your teenager is communicating with someone online, they may be in the process of starting a relationship, which they are happy about. Unfortunately, many teenagers do not realize that anyone can hide behind a computer. That is why it is important that you talk to your child about the dangers of starting an online romance.
4. **They Are Very Depressed** -As previously stated, your child may be very happy when using the internet, but another warning sign is that they are depressed, especially when they sign off the computer. What many parents do not realize is that other teenagers use the internet for harassment. If your teenager has a falling out with one of their friends, they may find themselves being harassed online. If that is the case, your child may seem very down, depressed, and withdrawn.

The four above mentioned signs are just a few of the many that you will want to look for to see if your child is in trouble online. With that said, there are additional signs that you will want to be on the lookout for, the biggest being a change in behavior. If you do suspect that your child has or is about to run into trouble online, be sure to talk to them and as soon as possible.