INTERNET SAFETY – Tips for Parents

Although advances in computer and telecommunication technology have allowed our children to expand their knowledge base, experience different cultures and reach out further, it is also left them open to exploitation and harm.

Even though the internet provides a valuable communication system for obtaining information, keeping in touch with friends and chatting with others who share similar interests, the world wide web is an adult world.

Providing a safe environment for kids when they are using the internet is important to us. At St Joseph's Primary School, a number of measures are in place to protect our students from potential harm. However, because most Internet use occurs at home, children need parents and carers to help them make smart choices when they are on the Net.

Some risks when using the Internet

- **Exposure to inappropriate material** Your child may be exposed to material of a violent or sexual nature.
- **Molestation** While online, your child may provide information or arrange an encounter that could risk his/her safety, or the safety of other family members.
- **Harassment** Your child may encounter email or bulletin board messages that are harassing, demanding or aggressive.
- **Incorrect information** Although there is a wealth of information on the Internet, caution must be taken in assessing the accuracy and honesty of the information.

Here are some tips to help you make surfing safe for your children:
- Put the computer in a public area of the home, such as the living room, rather than a child's bedroom. This allows you to monitor their internet use and may encourage your child to talk about what they are doing online and seek help with anything they find troubling.

- Spend time online with your children. Check out good sites together. The internet can be a fun family activity! By showing interest in what they do and letting them "teach" you about how they navigate the Web, you will be better placed to learn about what they access.
  Get online yourself and familiarise yourself with the resources available.

- Help your children use the internet as an effective research tool - learn about handy homework tips for children and also good searching ideas.

- Learn about the world out there. Children are communicating in a diverse range of ways, from chat to IM, and from message boards to blogs. Learn how these work and what tools they offer to protect your child's privacy.

- Talk to your children about their internet experiences, the good and the bad. Let them know it's OK to tell you if they come across something that worries them. (It doesn't mean that they're going to get into trouble)

- Teach your children that there are ways they can deal with disturbing material - they should not respond if someone says something inappropriate, they should immediately exit any site if they feel uncomfortable or worried by it, and teach them to tell you about it.

- Teach children that information on the internet is not always reliable.

- Encourage children to treat others in the same way they should in real life by giving them an understanding of Netiquette.

- Consider using filters, labels and safe zones.

Family rules…

It might help to set some family rules with your child prior to accessing the Internet:

- Never give out identifying information over the Internet
  – use a made up name that will not give away personal details. Some examples are "Dancing Queen", "GI Joe", "GreenBean" etc.

- Advise your child not to give out any personal information such as surname, telephone number, sport activities or team names, name or location of their school etc.

- Never give out Internet or email passwords. Advise your child not to give out this sort of information, even to friends.

- Never arrange a face-to-face meeting with another computer user without parental permission, or without a chaperone. If parents agree to a meeting, make sure that it is in a public place and that a responsible adult or family member goes with the child (mother, father, older brother or sister).

- Never respond to messages or bulletin board items what are suggestive, obscene, threatening or make you feel uncomfortable.

- Remember the people you "meet" online may not be who they seem to be – someone identifying themselves as a "12 year old girl" may, in fact, be a 40 year old man.

- Remember that anything you read online may not be true – any offer that sounds "too good to be true" probably is.

- Instruct your child not to enter any contests without your permission, as these often require personal data.

- Encourage your children to tell an adult right away if they come across any information that makes them feel uncomfortable.

- Set some guidelines for your child to follow for their online safety and pin them up by the computer.

It is important to note that the Internet is a gateway to the world and can be a very useful tool.

Your child is able to learn about diverse topics, explore countries they have only heard about and gain knowledge about subjects they are studying in school.

Just remember to keep communicating with your child and remain vigilant – your child's safety on the Internet depends on it.