Tanya's Tips for Safety Success

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The world is quickly changing – by the minute, hour, day, week, month and year. Progress is being made at every turn, and sometimes it is difficult to understand this progress.

The technological and social changes that occur from childhood to adulthood in any given generation are increasing, more so than any other time in history. With the evolution of the Internet, how people communicate in everyday life has changed dramatically. Most adults want to know how the Internet works, but don't have the time to learn all that they need to know. On the other hand, children are on the cutting edge of this technological revolution. Many children will have had some access to the Web by age six, either by way of school, peers or self-exploration.

New Web sites are cropping up at an astounding pace and it is quickly becoming the most important new communication medium since television. Sometimes the most valuable areas on the Internet are not the most popular and the most popular areas are often not valuable. Parents need to know how to distinguish between the two.

The Internet is capable of posing many dangers. They include people roaming chat rooms in search of innocent participants and marketers collecting personal data. If a cute cartoon character pops up and asks children for personal information (name, telephone number, address), they may not understand that it is not appropriate to provide that type of information and inadvertently give it out. In addition, there are many online competitions that promise chances to win valuable prizes that unfortunately also require personal information. Buying and selling children's information has become big business with direct marketers and information brokers.



Pornography is also in abundance on the Web. Research shows that 80 percent of all Web traffic is pornographically related. For example: Your child gets on the Internet and goes to a search engine looking for sites that sell toys. By using the word "toy" as a keyword search, not only will it lead to numerous children's toy sites, but sites for adult toys as well.

Chatrooms are also unsafe places for children to visit on the Internet. Some of the people that kids make "friends" with could be very dangerous. These people have a way of making children trust them and confide secrets. In fact, they often pose as children. They provide false personal information, encourage friendship and sometimes send fake photographs.

So what can a parent do to ensure their child's safety on the "Information Superhighway?" There are some software tools that are available to filter Web content. These will help in the effort to keep kids safe, but are not able to protect them from inappropriate and unhealthy content 100 percent of the time. Supervision and encouraging moderation are also vital.

Whether a child uses the Internet for school research or e-mail, he or she must be taught that there are limits on time and energy spent. Parents and children should discuss expectations and agree upon certain guidelines to guarantee safe and responsible use of the Internet's vast resources.

Some families have used a contract to promote safe and responsible Internet use. Its purpose is to make children understand what is expected of them while they are online. To view or print one of these contracts, visit the Responsible Kids Network at http://www.responsiblekids.net/ebcontract.com.

Here are some other online safety tips to practice:

- Place the computer in a central area of the home and make using the Internet a family activity.
- Retain the password for the master account if your account has multiple users. This prevents children from turning off imposed restrictions.
- As with being careful about strangers on the street, be careful about strangers on the Internet.
- If anyone uses inappropriate language or mentions things that are uncomfortable, log off and don't respond. Notify the service provider of these privacy violations.
- Do not give out personal information, such as last name, telephone number, address, parent's work address or telephone number, or school location. If someone asks for this information, log off.
- Never agree to get together with or send personal pictures to someone you've "met" online.
- Do not give out Internet passwords to anyone, even a best friend.

By following these tips you are taking responsibility for your own safety in this age of high-tech communications.