Keeping Our Children Safe Online

Disney Families,

In preparation for Spring Break we would like to take the opportunity you have with your child(ren) home for the week to focus on cyber safety and best practices that we can share from school to home.

The stats say it all. 90% of children are online by 3rd grade. We live in a digital age. The Internet is neutral, neither good nor bad. However, just like real life, there can be some negative consequences if we don't use it wisely. Never is this truer than with our kids. As a parent, we have to ask the basic question... How do we keep our children safe online?

In addition to the Digital Citizenship teaching your child receives here at Disney including a Cyber Safety session with our State's Attorney General, there are a few things to consider as a parent.

Parenting has always been hard, but parenting in the digital age where we are all connected brings a whole different level of challenge. We're not just talking about the computer anymore. Online safety reaches all the way from the laptop kids can take to their rooms, to the Nintendo DS, PlayStation, Xbox, and tablet they have to occupy their time when you travel. You can't hide from the online threats that are out there facing your family even if they come through the online access your kids' friends have.

There is a tendency for us as parents to see a threat and then try to shield our children from harm or shut it out of their lives. The problem with protecting your kids online and shutting that threat out is that our lives are intertwined with it. Our Internet bill at home is just as critical as our water bill...we use it all the time. Our children need it in almost every aspect of their education, even if you homeschool.

Protecting your child online means that you choose to guide them toward healthy use of the Internet and we must guide them.

Right now let's start with why protecting your child online matters. What we see, hear, and experience shapes how we think and the choices we make, and the Internet is a primary path of learning for us now. Even as adults when we have a problem we run to YouTube for help videos. What kids see online shapes their hearts and their thinking.

Please ask yourself this simple question. What steps are you taking to protect your child online? Some of you might ask what am I protecting them from. Well, WebMD has already helped us some here. Recently they shared 4 big potential online threats to all our kids. These threats were:

1) Cyber bullying – so many times our kids are being bullied behind a screen and sometimes our kids are the bullies!
2) Sexual Predators – people who would like nothing more than to harm our kids have access to our kids when we don't help protect them online.
3) Pornography – We always think this will impact some other kid, but it's a threat to every child! The typical child with no online guidance is experiencing pornography by the age of 8.
4) Damaged reputations – We have to help them THINK BEFORE they post. Once it's on the web it's freely accessible. Kids with no guidance share things they should not share.

Our shared role as educators and parents is to teach and model positive use with technology and social media as well as to set boundaries.

Here are some tangible ways to begin setting boundaries that will lead children to online safety.

- All laptops and desktops should be used in public places and not placed in bedrooms.
- Set clear expectations on which sites are safe and which ones are not. Inform your child you will do random checks on their web history and that if they delete the history on a device, it gets taken away.
- Set Restrictions on your child's device.
- Use a content filter.

Please access the following resources for keeping our children safe online.

Tips to help stop Cyber Bullying:

RETHINK - STOP CYBERBULLYING is a tool created by a teen girl that sets out to stop cyberbullying before it starts. Users download and enable it as a keyboard option. Then, when users type in any app on the device, a pop-up will appear if they type profanity or words that have been pre-identified as abusive, hateful, or otherwise hurtful. The pop-up message changes with each appearance; one example is, "Would you like to re-word this? Remember, you are what you type!" Users can then tap "clear" to delete the hateful word or phrase or tap "OK" to let the words stand.

TALK TO YOUR KIDS:

• Families can talk about [cyberbullying.](#) What is it? How can it get out of control? How do you think it makes people feel when they read unkind words online?

• Talk about ways to talk with people when you've had a disagreement or when you're upset with someone. Talk about how to verbalize feelings without being hurtful and how to show empathy when another person is hurting.

[Download Rethink App](#)

Another helpful tool as a parent myself, are apps that help children manage usage and provide self monitoring strategies:

[**10 apps for parents to monitor kids' mobile use**](#)