

Caring for Kids in the Digital World

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February 1,
2017

In 1994, as a police officer in Victoria, Australia, Susan McLean took her first report of cyberbullying involving a group of school girls in the eighth grade. Today, the 27-year veteran of the Victoria police force is widely known in Australia as the “cyber cop.” Facebook, Twitter and Instagram turn to McLean as a top resource on internet safety and cyberbullying.

“Gen Y and Gen Z have been raised online and it’s their primary form of communicating. They have no fear of cyberspace,” says McLean. “Parents need to take control where they can.”

The author of “Sexts, Texts & Selfies: How to keep your children safe in the digital space,” recently spoke to members of YPO’s Parenting Network about educating their children on some of the risks they will encounter online.

“Parents should not be afraid to be the adult in the relationship with their children. Kids are tech savvy, but their cognitive development is not aligned with their technical skill. They don’t understand the risks and the consequences of one wrong click or post,” says McLean. “However, parents’ life experience, coupled with kids’ technical experience, makes a powerful force to be reckoned with.”

Parent first, friend second

Empowered parents should not worry about telling their children ‘no’ says McLean. “Far too many under-age children are on one or more age-restricted accounts,” says McLean. Approximately 40 percent of 9 and 10 year olds and 80 percent of 11 and 12 year olds are on one or more age-restricted accounts. “It doesn’t send a good message to your children when you allow them to be on a site they are not old enough to be on. You’re telling them that rules don’t matter, that lying about your age to get something you want is OK and that rules can be broken if mum or dad say so.”

It’s important as well not to hand over devices to your children until you have familiarized yourself with the settings. Although Apple devices offer the best built-in parental controls in McLean’s experience, you can buy filtering software. McLean suggests some settings that should be modified on your child’s devices include turning on the “explicit” filter to limit the music and podcasts they can download; use family sharing accounts on iTunes so you know

which apps are being downloaded; and turn off GPS location services so specific locations are not imbedded in the photos your child takes or posts alerting predators to their location.

McLean's top safety tips you can use now to protect your children include:

- Get your children's devices out of their bedrooms, especially late out night. Kids should be online at home in common areas of the house where you can keep an eye on their activity.
- Create a family online contract such as "The Family Internet Safety Contract" at fosi.org.
- Know your child's passwords.
- Make sure your child's social network's privacy settings are set and turned on and that they know all of the people they are "friends" with on their network. Only add people from your contact list.
- Have a conversation with your child about sending nude photographs of themselves over text messages. Sexting has reached epidemic proportions. It has been reported that 68 percent of teenagers have shared nude photos with a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Change your home's WiFi password frequently in the morning and don't give your children access to it until you get home in the evening to keep them offline until you are available to supervise their activity.
- "Shoulder surf" while your kids are online keeping an eye out for what sites they are spending time on. Some web sites cannot only see images and read information, but many of them have chat rooms which can also be damaging as predators troll these site and misinformation can also begin on discussion boards.

Parents need to get to know and understand the technology their kids are using. The best protection for your child is to know where and when they are online. "This is just the reality of parenting in the 21st century."

[Learn more about Susan McLean and cyber safety solutions.](#)

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