

Internet Safety

Tips for Students, Parents and Staff

The Internet has changed the way that teachers teach and students learn. In most ways, this tool has opened the windows of possibilities in the education of children. It has also opened our young people up to some very adult issues.

It is vitally important that schools and parents have clear rules and guidelines for use of the Internet by our youth. Schools and parents need to provide students of all ages with information about how to stay safe on the Internet. Many schools spend a day at the beginning of school explaining appropriate use or acceptable use policies. If your district/school does not have such a policy in place, I would recommend that one be adopted as soon as possible.

How big is the issue of Internet safety? Here are just some of the issues our students face online, according to data collected by George Washington University and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

- 54 percent were unsure or believed it was safe to meet someone in person after they had been chatting with them for a long time.
- 25 percent were unsure or believed it was safe to post their picture on the Internet.
- 20 percent have told people their real name on the Internet.
- 25 percent were unsure or believed that it was safe to put their address on the Internet.

What Schools Can Do

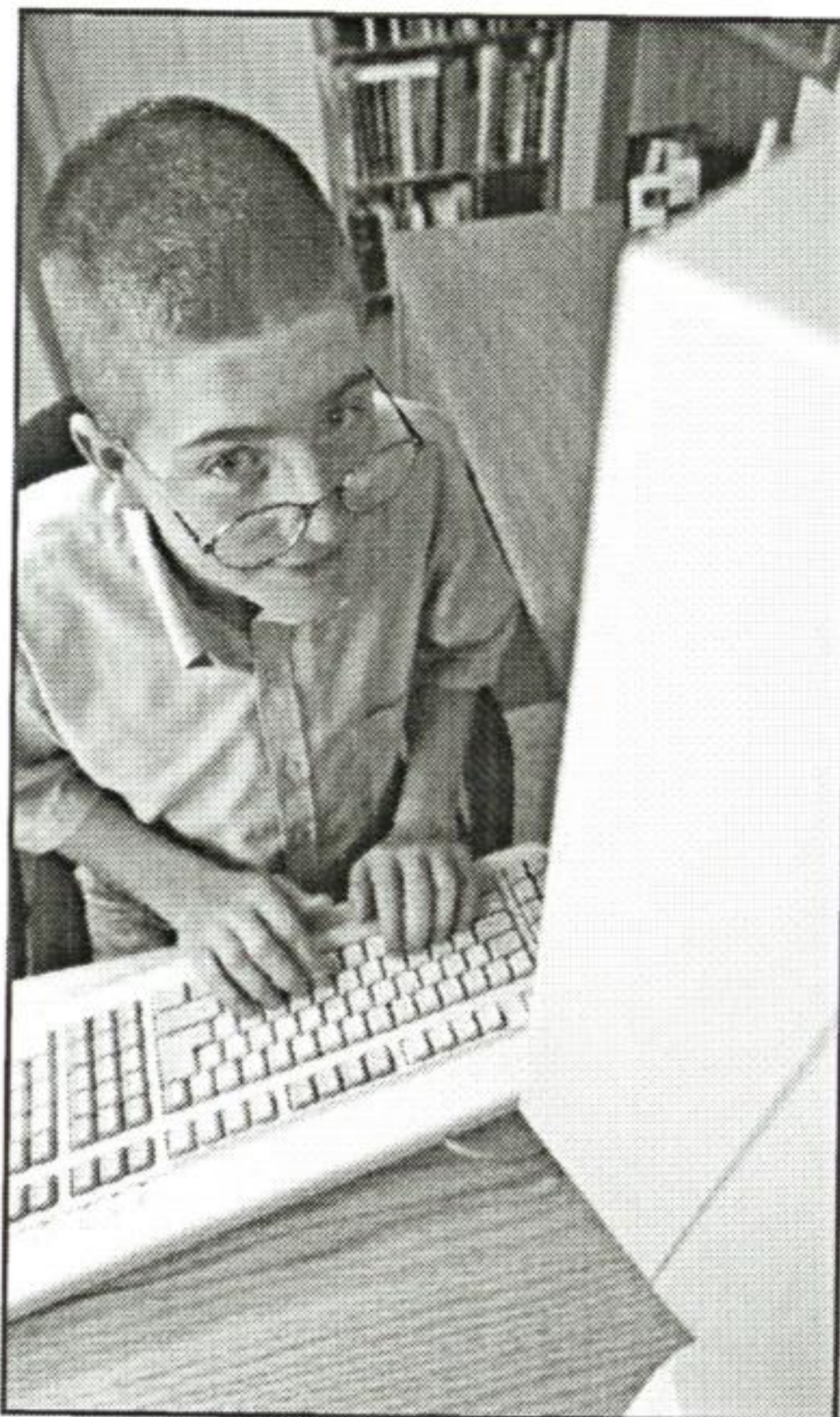
Staff should check computers that students have access to periodically to determine what Web sites they are using. Go to www.webwisekids.org to learn to check your computer's use history.

There are several age appropriate programs on Internet safety available online. The Faux Paws Internet Safety Program targets grades K-4 and can be accessed at <http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>. Some school districts require their elementary school students to complete the course and sign an Internet safety pledge prior to any use of school computers.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has an extensive Web site that includes interactive games and presentation materials

for elementary and middle school students accessible at www.netsmartz.org.

The following are Internet safety detective style games for teens ages 11-16 designed for classroom use, requires teacher or law enforcement supervision, and takes one class period. <http://www.webwisekids.org/index.html>.



Tips for Parents

Keep the family computer in an open area of the home where use can be easily supervised.

Find out what Web sites your children are using (e.g., MySpace, Friendster, Xanga). Explain to them clearly about the importance of not sharing personal information online. Seemingly innocent actions like posting pictures of themselves wearing school t-shirts, talking about their hometown, offering the names of their friends, their ages or the names and ages of their siblings can give an online stalker all the information they need to do harm. Parents should also monitor their home computer periodically to check which Web sites have been accessed. (www.webwisekids.org).

Talk with your children about your expectations about their computer use. About Family Internet provides helpful tips and tools for parents as well as an acronyms guide that shares common abbreviations youth use in their conversations. Available at <http://familyinternet.about.com/>.

Wired With Wisdom is designed specifically for parents to provide them with information on current issues and how to manage their family's Internet use. Visit www.webwisekids.org. For a brochure that offer tips for parents and teens on Internet use visit <http://www.k12.wa.us/Safetycenter/Resources/FreePublications.aspx>.

Parents may also want to install an Internet filter on their home computer. Visit <http://inter-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/> for a review of the top 10 filters.

It is important that families and schools work collaboratively regarding Internet Safety Issues to ensure that all students have a safe and healthy learning-focused environment. Our youth are our most important asset.