

Thoughts about 'Online' and families



Here are some tips for those starting to work out how they are going to manage the cyber world with their children...

Norton online family (<https://onlinefamily.norton.com/familysafety/loginstart.fs>) is a helpful site with plenty of information on features for home computers. A great place to start looking into filters and blocking software. (There are a number of other suggestions at the end of this article – however GFA doesn't endorse any particular software solution...)

Consider using timers and curfews on the family computers. This helps to establish boundaries, and reminds the children that those boundaries are there. Some people can have them installed on their computer system, but an oven timer or other kind of buzzer can work too. Stick to the rules! They will always want longer time!

Keep internet connected computers in a public area of the house - lounge room/kitchen etc. and with the screen facing out from the wall so all can see. It should never be in the bedroom. This means that you can wander past at any time and keep an eye on what they are doing. Have a docking station in a living area for recharging phones etc at night, so they are not tempted to text all night.

Make some family rules for computer use – e.g. once other responsibilities are complete, certain days of the week, particular times of the day, age at which a child can have an email account/ Facebook/ access to websurfing. Review these rules regularly to account for different ages, stages and levels of maturity in your children.

Have a cut off time for any personal electronic entertainment devices, i.e. Computer – internet, internet games, social media sites, Skype etc. iPod games or music, any personal game machine, PSP, Playstation, Xbox or Wii. A suggested time is 7:30pm for a bedtime of 9pm. Due to the high mental stimulation from these entertainment devices, children can be going to bed with their heads going at a million miles an hour and then they are struggling to go to sleep. The hour and a half cut off before bed time allows the child to slow down and relax. Each child is different and the parent needs to assess what is best for their children.

Be a presence regarding their internet use - let them know you may check their history, and you require their passwords. This gives a sense of accountability. Don't feel the need to be secretive and sneaky – they need to know that you have the authority to do that.

Consider the consequences of purchasing devices which open up the world to your children - iPod touches, and mobile phones are often seen as necessities, but they do create other problems of access to unwanted material or people. While many 8 year olds have an amazing amount of freedom in this area, it is worth considering the funnel – do they need this freedom at this age? When is it appropriate to give them this freedom of access to the world?

Just because a child's device has wireless / WIFI functionality doesn't mean that you have to connect them up to your WIFI at home.

Teach your children about demonstrating the preciousness of others in regards to the language and tone they use in online communication. They should speak kindly and respectfully in person, and the same applies online.

Teach children not to respond to rude or harassing online communication, and keep records in order to follow up on a potential cyber-bullying problem. They should know they have the freedom to come and speak with you if they are feeling uncomfortable with some communication online.

Teach children about personal privacy online – not giving out email address/ phone number/ house address online, or even using full name in certain circumstances. Children often do not understand the consequences of being open online – we need to teach them. Do not put the year you were born on any of the public viewable sites, especially Facebook. This is for everyone, not just our children. Facebook and other social media sites ask for lots of detail – you don't have to provide it – be careful with personal information.

Learn about and understand the internet world you are allowing your children to join. If they have a Facebook page - YOU get a Facebook page!



Comic strip from "One Big Happy Day" by Rick Detorie - 6th of May 2012

Remember that the age for Facebook begins at 13. Don't support your child lying in order to have a Facebook page too early. In our house, we think 13 is too young to manage the language and content of Facebook, and have set a minimum age of 15. Spend time with them exploring interesting places online - watch youtube clips together, research project topics. Help them to safely navigate. Supervise younger children very closely - they should never Google or websurf without close direction.

Remind them that information on the internet is not necessarily all true or reliable! Just because Wikipedia says it doesn't make it true!

Encourage them to communicate online only with friends that they know in real life. Teach them that if they have on-line friends that use inappropriate language or other things, it is OK to un-friend them. Work through what is appropriate and what is not.

Be aware that web pages like Google images, Flickr and tumblr may be suitable sites for images to put into school projects; they also have inappropriate images as well.

There are conversations to have with our children that we will need to have over and over again. Technology is changing, and our children are growing older. There is so much to learn and adjust to - we need to make it part of our parenting to include this cyber-world in our parenting world!

(Thanks to the Boswell family for their significant contribution to this topic)

Below are some other comments or thoughts from several other families:

- Lori reminds us that... “the General Sessions from the 2011 GFI National Family Conference is available at Christian Family Heritage (www.christianfamilyheritage.org). The second session taught by Paul Daily titled Raising Daniels in a Technological Babylon is a great reminder for all parents in teaching parents and their children about technology and the various issues. You can order the set through the website (international orders are accepted) or it is also available for download as .mp3’s.”
- Tom & Evangaline... use a free filter called "K9" www.k9webprotection.com. “It has worked beautifully for us on many different computers. You can adjust to whatever settings you are comfortable with. They have a mobile version as well.”
- Michael (for K9 adds)... “as background for this product, it was designed for a company called BlueCoat who does web filtering on the corporate/education side. They have an extensive network of systems called “honeypots” that attract the “buggy” address and various types of malicious software. For being a free product, it is quite good. It allows the parent/administrator to have a password requirement for turning it on/off as well as controlling a number of levels/categories of web content to filter. The one thing it lacks from some of the pay-for software is the ability to do extensive logging as well as emailing for certain events, like certain categories being used or accessed.”
- Steve uses... “in the free category is Microsoft's Windows Live Family Safety (<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-live/essentials-other-programs> or <http://familysafety.live.com>). We've used for several years now. It's quite capable, though I haven't really compared it side-by-side with the other software options.”

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