

Safe & Savvy: Communication on the 'Net

Petaluma City Schools

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**PETALUMA SECONDARY
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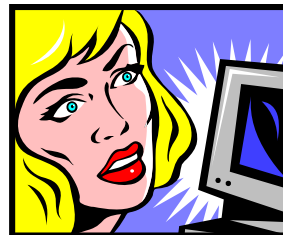
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Communication on the 'Net

A recent report from the Pew Internet & American Life Project (<http://www.pewinternet.org>) states that 87% of young people between 12 and 17 use the Internet. More than half of them have created a "Blog", a Web page, or have posted on-line original art including photos, stories, or videos. Add to the mix a

pervasive use of e-mail, instant messages, and chat and it becomes clear that teens are using the Internet for communication purposes in a number of creative and evolving ways. However, because the Internet is a highly public means of communication teens as well as adults must know that what may have

traditionally been shared privately in paper diaries and letters, in face-to-face conversations, and in telephone calls may no longer be so private.



Computers are essential pieces of electronic equipment in our teens' lives !

The Good News...

Teens are very good at using computers as tools to help them do well in school. They have had instruction in searching and for-

matting school papers from library professionals and other caring adults. However, teens are a bit naïve about their privacy

and internet safety, so this publication may help parents to help students protect themselves while online.

Special points of interest:

- Ask your student to teach you to do a systematic search using keywords. Discuss the results with your teen.
- Have your teen take you to a "chat room" or have an IM session with them just to see how it is done.
- Chat with your teen online, and stay involved in their cyber-life.

Some Useful Internet Definitions

The Internet provides a forum for powerful communication among friends, experts, and complete strangers. Here are a few of those forums defined and described.

Web Page: A document on the World Wide Web that may include text, graphics, sound, and video. These documents are accessed with browser software such as Internet Explorer, Netscape, and others. Individuals can easily create their own personal Web pages with any number of simple template software programs, some of them free and accessible on the Web.

Blog: The short form of 'Web Log', a publicly accessible Web page/journal that reflects a *blogger's* particular interests and musings. Popular Web sites that allow for easy blog creation include MySpace, LiveJournal, Xanga, Blogger.Com, and Facebook. Blogs are usually updated daily and readers/viewers may add comments to them. On some blogs, comments can only be made by other blog

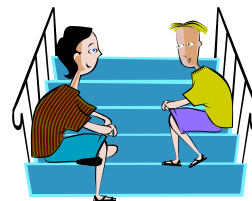
members, some can be 'locked' and available only to those given a password by the author; but most are public and can be read by anyone.

E-mail: Electronic mail systems that use specific software programs to send text files over communications networks to other e-mail users at specific e-mail addresses. E-mail groups and 'listservs' have been created around special interests and topics. Only members who join these groups may read and participate in the e-mail discussions.

Instant Message: The ability to communicate directly with others in real time using text-messaging software. Computers with *IM* services installed sound an alert so that users know when someone wishes to communicate/*chat* with them. Instant message communicators can create 'buddy lists' where only the individuals on

the lists may communicate with each other.

Chat/Chat Rooms: *Chat* is what individuals do when they are 'talking' to another person online in real-time. One of the more common forms of chat is "IM"... and chat is what you do when instant messaging. *Chat rooms* are where several individuals may chat simultaneously.



Many teens chat or IM their friends while doing homework.

Bulletin

Boards are

form of chat that involves posting messages and the corresponding replies. Chat rooms and Bulletin Boards can be established among friends who know one another, or they can be established groups that provide a forum for people who share common interests such as music, games, and sports. There are thousands to choose from.

"Computers need to be installed in a place where parents are able to monitor teens' activity... there should be no cyber-secrets."

Risky Business

Unfortunately, not everyone who enjoys the benefits of this new world of Internet driven communication is honest and innocent. Child predators, molesters, and 'hate

mongers' are using these same good communication vehicles. Consequently all teens, children and adults should be conscious of the content that they post to their Web sites,

blogs, e-mails, and chats. Teens should ask themselves, what kinds of unwanted solicitations are they inviting—consciously or not?



Teens spend more time using computers than watching TV.

Some websites, like "MySpace", are restricted to teens over age 16... this is for a good reason; the topics discussed can be a bit adult in nature, and the Blogs are often unacceptable for school. MySpace is blocked at the Petaluma City Schools level, it is not a site decision.

What Can Teens Do To Stay Safe?

What can teens do to ensure that they don't put themselves—and their friends—at risk? Here are guidelines to consider...

- Never give out passwords to anyone—even 'best friends'. You never know how they might accidentally be passed to others.
- Never reveal in a chat room or other on-line forum personal information about yourself including your real name, names of family or friends, address, school, community, phone numbers, etc. You never know who might be 'lurking' and you never know if the strangers are in fact who they say they are.
- Immediately end conversations in a chat room or other on-line forum if you feel uncomfortable. Trust your gut instincts—if it doesn't feel right it probably isn't. Tell an adult about the incident.
- If you are being harassed or bullied on-line, *don't* reply. Report it to an adult.
- Never create content that you would not want others to see—there is no privacy on the Internet.
- Never agree to meet an on-line stranger unless accompanied by an adult. Remember: someone you have met on-line is still a stranger.
- Be careful when uploading pictures and videos of yourself and friends. They should not reveal personal information or cause embarrassment or harm.

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What Can Parents Do?

The Internet, Web, Blogs, IM, Chat rooms, and other modes of electronic communication are here to stay and continually evolving. This new frontier of knowledge, entertainment, and communication need not be frightening as long as we use it wisely and safely.

- Talk with your children about appropriate uses of computers and the Internet and ask them to show you the kinds of Web sites they enjoy visiting and the kinds of interactive activities they engage in.
- Encourage your children to learn how to effectively use a search engine.
- Stay informed on the latest trends in computers and technology—the media as well as your children provide a wealth of information.
- If your child reports being harassed on-line contact your Internet service provider or the Webmaster at the offending site.

If your child uses a Web site such as MySpace, check its age limit. If your child is underage, contact the Web site to have the account revoked.

For More Information

Ask your School Library Media Teacher for more information and more ideas to help keep your students safe in Cyberspace.

Visit the following Web sites for additional information about Internet safety.

For Older Teens:

I-Safe America
<http://www.i-safe.org/>

The Incredible Internet
<http://www.incredibleinternet.com/qwest/>

GetNetWise
<http://getnetwise.org/>

Childnet International
<http://www.childnet-int.org/>

For Younger Children:
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