UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL PARENTING

The Essential Guide to Raising Connected Kids

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Introduction

The world has changed since the days before cell phones and computers, and along with it so has parenting. Parents are now surrounded by constantly evolving technology that impacts every aspect of their children's lives, from entertainment to school to social networking. In recent years, availability of the Internet has gone from a spattering of households to over 77 percent of homes having consistent Internet access. Estimates show that over half of children have their own cellular devices by the time they reach 11 years old on top of an already existing social media account. Almost half of parents believe that by the time a child is *6 years old* he should be able to access and use the Internet independently, according to a survey conducted by a government technology project.

The Internet opens a new world of information, commerce, networking and education, and job opportunities that were not available to past generations, but with all of these benefits come risk. Cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, identity theft and fraud are all very real threats in the Internet age. As parents it is our critical role to educate our children about the Internet and support legitimate, safe use of its offerings.

We can't deny that the Internet is an integral part of our lives now. With mobile technology we are offered the benefit of feeling more connected to our children, even so far as being able to track their movements with the use of GPS technology within cellular devices. Knowledge is quite literally at the tips of their fingers, with the answers to any question available with just a simple search engine inquiry. When used properly the Internet can dramatically enhance a person's life and encourage curiosity, adventure and exploration. This eBook will help you to understand how to effectively educate your children about the Internet and keep them safe online while also allowing them to enjoy the benefits of the incredible mobile and Internet technologies of today.

The Importance of Educating Children About How to Use the Internet

As a parent you want to protect your child from everything negative in the world and guard him from anything that may cause him harm on the Internet, but sometimes that is not always possible. This is why it is vital to take the time to educate your child about the Internet and teach him how to utilize it responsibly. Providing your child with a thorough education and ample support will encourage him to utilize good judgment and make wise decisions while online.

Using the Internet for Social Networking

The phenomenon of the use of social networking online has exploded in recent years. Over 40 percent of children between the ages of six and 11 have their own accounts on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Foursquare. Facebook was originally limited to college students, but is now available to anyone 13 years of age or older. Even though, many parents report allowing their younger children to have a private account, and some admit to never monitoring the activity of that account.

> *Over 40 percent of children between the ages of six and 11 have their own accounts on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Foursquare.*

Internet social networking provides children with an opportunity to stay connected to friends and family around the world. Being able to share messages, pictures and even video chats helps to bring people closer together. Unfortunately, this also can give child predators access to young, trusting children.

Here are some guidelines for monitoring your child's social behavior online:

- Restrict "friends" only to people that your child knows

- Require that you review each potential friend prior to acceptance

- Regularly review your child's friend list to make sure no other friends have been added

- Discuss appropriate and inappropriate topics for posts, language and pictures

- Make sure your child understands that he is not responsible for what his friends post on his site, but that he is responsible for deleting inappropriate messages and asking that it not happen again.

Handling Predators

The Internet offers a tremendous array of benefits to your children, but unfortunately, it is also a place where predators have learned to find and take advantage of victims. Many sexual predators that seek to prey on children present themselves as the age of the children in which they are interested and seek to build

friendships with these children based on supposedly shared interests. Upon gaining the trust and compliance of the child the predator will then suggest that they meet up. This is an exceptionally dangerous situation. Preparing your child for the potential of encountering a predator is an important step in keeping him safe while using the Internet.

Check for these indications that your child may be communicating with a predator:

- He is secretive about his online friends

- He is suddenly talking a lot about a "new friend" that he does not know from school

- This new friend seems too similar to your child, or your child cannot give express details about the friend such as his last name, his teacher at school or his siblings

- He does not want you to be in the room when he is talking with this new friend, closes the computer or changes the window whenever you come in the room

- He seems quiet, withdrawn or uncomfortable after starting this "friendship"

- He starts sending pictures of himself over the computer

- He asks to be brought to meet up with this new friend, but does not want you to wait with him or meet the friend

If you are concerned that your child has come into contact with a predator, it is critical that you not allow your perception of your child's "privacy" to prevent you from doing everything that you can to protect him. Remember, it is your job to defend your child and guide him into making the best decisions in life, and that sometimes requires that you interfere in order to resolve a potentially

dangerous situation. A child's privacy should not include complete lack of involvement, and it is nowhere near as important as his ongoing safety. Help your child to understand these important guidelines when it comes to interacting with new friends online:

- Make sure your child understands the difference between "real life" and "virtual life"

- He should never share his full name, address or phone number with someone that he doesn't know in real life and who you don't give him express permission to share this information with

- He should never offer identifying information such as a sports team that he plays for, the names of his pets or the names of his siblings, that could be used to fabricate a connection with the family. Help him to understand that predators will often lie about knowing the family or sharing some sort of identifying characteristic in order to gain trust

- He should never discuss specific places that he will be or things that he will be participating in at certain times on public forums

- He should never post pictures of himself that you do not approve

- He should never send pictures of himself to anyone

- He should always ask you about any plans that he makes to meet up with anyone, and should understand that he has to have age-appropriate supervision during all activities

- He should never leave the place where you left him with anyone, for any reason. You should identify specific people that he can trust such as family members, and a code word that can be used to identify that this person is telling the truth when stating that you want your child to leave with that person.

Cyberbullying

Another serious risk that has grown as a result of the popularity of social networking is a phenomenon known as cyberbullying. As long as there has been social interaction, there has been bullying, but when this bullying moves to an online platform, the results can be even more devastating. The Internet acts as a mask for bullies, giving them greater confidence in themselves and allowing them to be crueler and more aggressive than they may be when face to face with a victim. A cyber-bully utilizes social networking platforms, email and even custom websites in order to frighten, threaten, torment and otherwise lash out at a victim. This can involve spreading vicious rumors, posting modified pictures or sending violent personal attacks directly to the victim. Unlike bullying that occurs in person where there are usually teachers or administrators available to offer protection, cyberbullying often leaves a child feeling isolated and hopeless which can have tragic consequences. In the last year, there has been multiple national stories about teens that have taken their own lives due to relentless cyberbullying.

It is important, even if your child has never been the victim of any type of bully-ing, for you to acknowledge the potential risk of cyberbullying and encourage him to protect himself and others from the damaging effects of such treat-ment. Help him to understand that everyone is at risk of becoming a target and that it is critical that he remain vigilant about how he and his friends are being treated online so that actions can be taken to stop any inappropriate or dangerous behavior as quickly and effectively as possible. Let your child know that being bullied is not his fault, nor is it something that he should be embarrassed about. Rather, it is hurtful and criminal behavior that needs to be addressed by an adult. By maintaining an open dialogue about his interactions online you will place yourself in a better position to be the person your child comes to in the event that he becomes the victim of cyberbullying.

If your child does come to you because he is a victim of cyberbullying, do not allow your own emotions and assumptions to make him feel even worse about the situation. Even if you find that there is some truth to the things that are being said about your child, help him to understand that no actions make cyberbullying acceptable and he in no way deserves the treatment. Acknowledging that his actions have not made him open game for maltreatment can help your child to feel more comfortable discussing the entirety of the situation with you so that you are able to approach the bullying effectively.

Look for the following signs to determine if your child may be the victim of cyberbullying:

- Sudden changes in personality, such as being more withdrawn, angry or sensitive

- Reluctance to go to school or participate in activities that he enjoys

- No longer mentioning friends that he once spent a considerable amount of time with, or acting strangely when these people are mentioned

- Agitation after spending time online

- Secretive behavior online

- Suddenly closing down social networking accounts or email addresses

- Changes in the way that he looks or presents himself

If you suspect that your child has become the victim of cyberbullying it is important that you take action as quickly as possible. Cyberbullying can escalate extremely quickly and the negative impact can be truly catastrophic. Start by openly and honestly asking your child if anything is happening. Express your concerns about anything that you have noticed, and reassure your child that you want to help him, not make the situation worse.

Expect resistance when you begin discussing cyberbullying with your child. Most children do not want their parents involved in their social issues, and feel that any interference from you will only exacerbate the problems that they are already having. This can result in your child withdrawing from you, lying about the situation and pushing away your offers for help. Do not let this discourage you. If you are truly concerned that your child has been coping with cyberbullying, it is critical that you do everything that you can to protect him, which might mean doing some investigating.

The prospect of reading your child's email or social networking account may be uncomfortable for you, but it could be an absolutely vital step for keeping your child safe. If you notice anything suspicious that indicates cyberbullying, approach your child cautiously. Do not accuse or show anger, but demonstrate love and compassion so that your child will feel comfortable discussing the situation with you and working with you to bring the issue to a positive resolution. Contact your child's school to discuss the situation, carefully expressing your desire that the situation be monitored by that it not be mentioned to the aggressors that you have made contact, as this could only worsen the attacks. Depending on the severity of the cyberbullying, it may be necessary to involve the police.

What is absolutely critical for you to remember is that you should never underestimate the seriousness of cyberbullying. It may seem to you just like kids being kids, but psychological violence, particularly when it is in a public forum, can be even more devastating than physical violence in terms of destroying a child's self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Psychological violence can also quickly escalate into physical violence. Do not take this situation lightly. Encourage your child to stand up for himself by getting the help that he needs whenever he feels threatened or as though he has gotten into an overwhelming situation. Help him to understand that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, and that it is your goal to help him to overcome the issue of cyberbullying. Developing a strong and trusting relationship with

your child will give him the confidence and self-esteem to come to you for help when he needs it.

> **Erin Gallagher, a 13-year-old girl,**
>
> *committed suicide after enduring weeks of cyberbullying. Just 24 hours before taking her life, Gallagher sent messages to her tormentors telling them that she intended on killing herself, but they did not stop their threats and harassment.*

Recognizing Privacy and Security Risks

The Internet does not just pose risks in terms of potential sexual predators. Identity theft and fraud have been intensified by the accessibility of the Internet, and young children are not immune. Children tend to be extremely trusting, as well as compulsive, which makes it easy for a criminal to draw personal information from them that can then be used to steal your identity and your money. Even if your child does not reveal information, certain types of malware and viruses can be installed onto your computer through seemingly harmless behaviors that can steal your personal information and even destroy your computer.
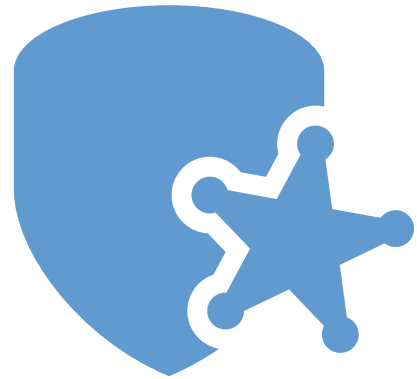
It is critical that you discuss Internet safety with your child so that he under-stands his responsibilities when online. Make sure that your child understands how important it is that he protect himself from potential scams, and protect the computer from harm that can be caused by irresponsible actions. Use the following discussion points to structure a conversation about Internet privacy and security:

- Make sure that your child understands the difference between "real" life and "virtual" life.

- Never share credit card information with anyone, or use a credit card online without your direct permission and supervision.

- Never open an email or click on a link that is sent by someone that you don't know.

- Never share passwords or account information with anybody, even if a request looks legitimate. Most companies will never ask for a personal information in an email.

What to Do in an Emergency

No matter how well prepared your child is, he may encounter negative situations online. A child that is prepared for an emergency is much more likely to handle it responsibly, therefore protecting himself from serious negative consequences. Give your child these guidelines for handling emergency situations that may arise on the Internet:

- If something feels weird, stop

- Always be honest about your activities online, even if you think that you may have done something against the rules, if you feel that you may be in danger, it is important that you are upfront about the situation

- Never meet anyone in person that you met online without having your parents with you the entire time

- Never allow anyone into your home if your parents are not home

- If you are fearful of a person that you encountered online, or a situation that has arisen, immediately tell your parents

- If you are uncomfortable talking with your parents about the situation, talk to a teacher, guidance counselor or other trusted adult that can help you through the situation

- If you feel physically threatened at any time, do not hesitate to call the police.

PART 2:

Stages of the Digital Child and How to Parent Effectively at Each Stage

Just like children of every other generation, digital children move through a series of stages as they get older. It is important that you understand each of these stages so that you can be an attentive and effective digital parent at each stage of your child's development. Remember, that there are no strict guidelines as to the ages at which children will move through these stages. Each child is different and you must be aware of your own child's development so that you recognize these stages and can help your child through them in a positive and successful way.

Infancy and Babyhood

Children as young as 18-24 months can gain benefit from exposure to the Internet and mobile technologies. During early childhood your child is getting his first lessons in these technologies, so it is important that you introduce them in a controlled and positive manner so that he can feel confident in his future use. Consider purchasing a toy laptop for your child so that he can feel comfortable with the device itself and encourage him to play with it while you use your laptop so that he

can begin to learn the methods of using the device in a safe and controlled way. At this point you can also take advantage of games that are available on a real laptop that stimulate your child's brain through sound and color. These games allow your child to touch the keyboard and experience different reactions, which will help him to understand patterns and cause-and-effect.

Toddlerhood

When your child reaches 2 years old he will be ready to engage in more structured learning activities online. At this point he will also be ready to learn the mechanics of the computer such as the mouse, touchscreen and simple commands. Take advantage of the various learning opportunities that are available online such as online preschools that will guide your child through basic learning skills in order to prepare him for his later schooling. At this age your child is also ready to be exposed to mobile technology with supervision. Allow your child to participate in phone calls to loved ones so that he can begin to understand connecting to others through the device. Utilizing tools such as Skype enables your child to see family members that he may not be able to visit often, and will encourage him to develop stronger communication and self-expression skills.
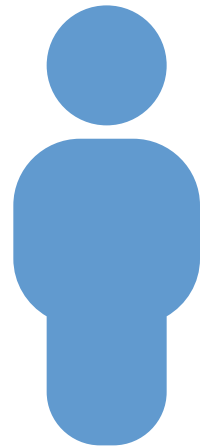
> **Susan D., mother of 2 year-old Ryder who "goes to school" online,**
> *"Parents have found online learning academies for their young children to be incredibly beneficial in helping their children learn basic skills such as colors, letters and numbers as well as computer usage. "My two-year-old knows the alphabet, can count to 20 and can recognize all of his colors."*

Preschool

At 3 years of age children are capable of using a computer independently. Of course, your child should be supervised at all times, but you should also encourage independence to foster online skills. Strengthen his fine motor skills through use of the mouse, and teach him simple commands that tell the computer to perform certain functions, ex. clicking on a play button makes a game launch. There are more learning activities and games available for this age group, and these are an ideal complement to a regular preschool curriculum. You should begin careful discussions of Internet safety and proper behavior, starting simple with rules about permission from mom and dad for various activities. It is important to lay the foundation of proper Internet security and etiquette early.

Elementary Age

When your child is in elementary school he will be exposed to the computer on a daily basis. Most schools have a strong emphasis of computer skills in their curriculum and will require use of the Internet to complete projects. Do not rely on your child's teachers to provide him a thorough education on appropriate computer usage. Though there will likely be some discussion of safety and predators, it is still your responsibility to maintain close contact with your child and monitor his computer usage carefully to ensure that he is handling the greater computer responsibility properly. At this age your child will be able to handle more independence when using the computer, though you should still pay close attention to his usage. Consider keeping the computer in a central place in the home so that you are able to pay constant attention to your child's online activities. Simply knowing that you may come by at any time can discourage your child from participating in inappropriate activities. Consider

the following rules for keeping your child safe during this stage of digital parenting:

- Use of the Internet is restricted to a certain length of time each day, or only during certain times a day

- You have the right to check in on what your child is doing at any time, without notice

- The search history and temporary files on the computer are not to be deleted or modified in any way

- You must discuss with your child anything that he wants to look up on the computer, and verify any projects that he claims to be working on

- Social networking activities will be limited to a specific portion of his Internet use time per day. Considering using a parental intelligence system, such as uKnowKids that will allow for location, mobile and social monitoring as well as an alert system to inform you if your child is potentially involved in dangerous activity.

Middle School Age

Middle school is often the most difficult time for a child. This is when social involvement becomes much more important and self-esteem problems can arise. Your child often may also begin to research inappropriate topics or engage in potentially dangerous relationships. This is the time when his privacy will become extremely important to him and your child will likely become very guarded about his activities and resistant to your involvement. It is vital that you continue your monitoring of your child's activities so that you can guide him along the right path and help keep him from making poor decisions. If your child has proven himself responsible, you can offer greater freedom regarding use of the Internet

and mobile technologies. It is important, however, that your child understand that this increased freedom is a privilege that he must continue to earn with appropriate behavior. Periodic checks of his activities will ensure that he is making the right decisions and not abusing the freedom that you have offered him.

Middle school is also the time to start paying close attention to his interactions with others to protect him from cyberbullying. You must also realize that it is possible that your child may engage in cyberbullying. This is not something that any parent would want to admit about a child, so preventing it requires that you be aware of your child's behavior and that he is very clear about your expectations. Discuss the topic of bullying in clear and non-hesitant terms so that there is no question as to how you feel about your child's respect and tolerance of others. If a situation does arise in which he becomes the victim or aggressor in cyberbullying, do not "let him figure it out on his own". This is not a life lesson, nor is it something that every child goes through. Resolve the situation promptly, and take the opportunity to reinforce lessons of safety, security and responsibility.

Many parents purchase cell phones for their children at this age. If you are considering giving your child access to mobile technology, utilize parental intelligence systems, such as uKnowKids, that will monitor his usage and protect him from using the device for inappropriate activities.

High School Age

Being a digital parent is never more difficult than when your child reaches high school. Teenagers are very close to adulthood, yet are still young enough that they have not developed impulse control or understanding of consequences. Children at this age tend to think of themselves as invincible, and as their parents as intruders. At this age you will offer your child greater freedom and privacy, but keep him aware that you are still the parent and that you have the right to review and control his activities at any time you choose. Your child may own his own computer and access the Internet and social networking platforms completely independently. He will need the Internet more for school and will also connect to friends and family on a more regular basis using social networking and mobile technologies. Consider the following guidelines for Internet and mobile technology use during high school:

- Cellular devices should be turned off during school, meals and family time

- The amount of time your child is permitted to use the phone per month and the number of text messages that can be sent and received should be controlled

- Cellular devices should never be used when driving, including talking on the phone and texting

- The amount of time your child is permitted to use the Internet per day should be controlled

- You should continue to monitor your child's online etiquette and social interactions. Considering using a parental intelligence system, such as

uKnowKids that will allow for location, mobile and social monitoring as well as an alert system to inform you if your child is potentially involved in dangerous activity.

- Make it a requirement that you are a friend on your child's social networking platforms and that you make it a habit to check in on posts, pictures and other information that is being shared. Agree not to interfere or embarrass your child, but make it known that you will be monitoring his behavior

- Make regular checks of your child's search history and temporary files. Have a rule that these should not be deleted at any time

Building Trust with Your Child

Trust is a fundamental part of any relationship. This is especially true for parents and their children. Though as a parent you have the right to monitor and control the activities and behaviors of your child until he is of age, it is critical to your relationship and to his development that you foster appropriate decision-making and give more responsibility based on trust. Trust is a critical aspect of your child's development. As he gets older, it is inevitable that your child will separate from you and need to be able to function in the world on his own. This means that he will need to be able to make responsible decisions and handle a variety of situations independently. Creating a relationship based on trust will enable your child to test out his independence and responsibility in a safe manner, knowing that you will be there for him should a negative situation arise. Trust is not about blindly allowing your child to do whatever he pleases. Trust is about developing a mutual sense of respect and allowing your child to explore his identity and undergo the process of becoming an adult with the freedom to express himself. As your child grows older it is more and more important for him to understand that he is a separate individual, and to discover who that individual is. Trusting your child gives him the opportunity to discover who he is, and embark on the life that he desires.

This being said, trust is also about your child knowing that you are there to protect him, and that you will help him to make the best decisions and resolve any negative situations that may arise. There is no single formula that is right for every child--you must evaluate your child and your relationship to determine how much freedom you're going to offer and when. Ask yourself the following questions when you are preparing to allow your child more freedom:

Is your child truly ready for a social media account?

If your child has been asking for a Facebook page or other type of social media platform, it is important that you don't simply bow to the justification of "everyone else has one", and make sure that you come to a decision that is appropriate for your child. Evaluate your child's maturity level, responsibility and tendency to make wise decisions regarding social interaction and privacy. If you have any questions as to whether your child would be prone to improper social etiquette, posting inappropriate pictures or engaging in interactions with inappropriate contacts, he may not be ready for the responsibility of such an account. Consider sharing an account with your child so that you can guide him in appropriate usage of social media.

## What kind of privacy controls should be used?

When your child opens a social media account, make sure that you are involved in establishing his username, setting up the page and putting privacy controls into place. Your child's account should not be public, but rather should only be visible to those who are accepted as friends. This will protect him/her from being scouted by potential predators, and help to control the list of people who have access to his information. Make sure that you carefully control who is able to see any pictures that are posted, and use the strictest form of privacy, which keeps

posts that your child makes on other people's pages invisible to anyone who is not a friend.

Should you maintain access to your child's account?

Whether you have started with a shared Facebook page and are transitioning your child into having an independent page, or allowing your child to open his own page initially, it is important that your child understand that his activities will be monitored. You can make clear that you will not access the page in order to post pictures, status updates, comments, or checkup on friends or family members, but you will be protecting him by monitoring his use. This should be a non-negotiable topic. If your child resists allowing you to see the page, or constantly changes the password in order to disallow your access to the page, he is demonstrating that he is not responsible enough to handle social media, and you should consider not allowing him to maintain the page.
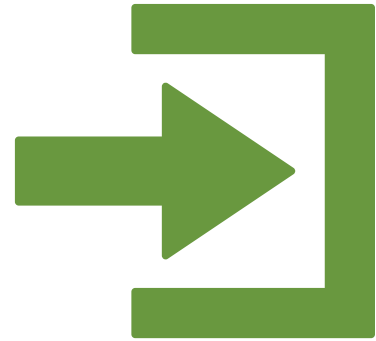
How long should you have access to your child's account?

If your child proves himself responsible and trustworthy, you do not have to maintain constant monitoring of his social media. This does not mean, however, you should completely disengage yourself from monitoring your child's activities online. Consider insisting that you remain a friend on his page or running routine monitoring checks every few weeks, with the understanding that these checks will become less frequent as long as he continues to prove himself honest, trustworthy and responsible.
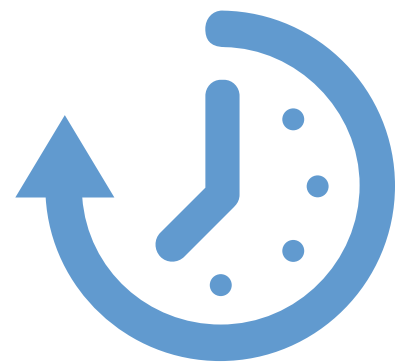
What kind of rules should you have in regard to who your child may have as a friend?

It may not seem your place to decide who your child should establish a friendship with, but it is critical that you ensure that your child is maintaining relationships with only positive influences. This is especially true when these friendships are online. It is easy for people to falsify their identities, or engage in various inappropriate and illegal activities over the Internet, so it is important that you make sure you are paying close attention to who your child is befriending online. Your child should only add people as friends on social media if he knows them offline.
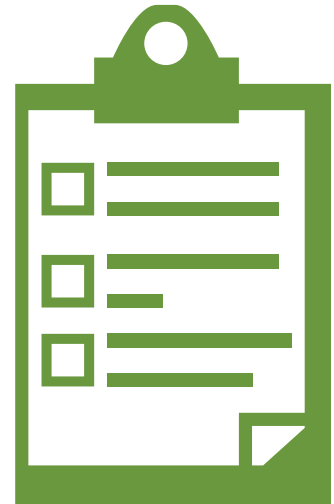
Should you be friends on social media sites with the parents of your child's friends?

Being friends with the parents of your child's friends often makes it easier to monitor your child's behaviors and decisions. Having a network of support among the parents ensures that at all times at least one set of parents is aware of the movements of the children, or that it quickly becomes obvious that something is wrong.

PART 4:

Technology Solutions for Digital Parenting

It is extremely important that your child earn your trust before becoming completely independent online. Luckily, there are technological solutions to help parents guide their child online. Some services allow parents to block certain inappropriate topics, such as pornographic sites or those involving online gambling or other risky topics. Others allow you to monitor your child's use of the Internet or mobile technologies. Still, others, referred to as Parental Intelligence Systems, combine mobile, social and location monitoring coupled with real-time data, education and community. Utilizing these tools helps you to support your children as they navigate the digital world, and make you a responsible and confident digital parent. Monitoring your child is not about restricting his freedom or individuality, but rather helping him to become a safe and responsible user of the Internet and mobile technology. These tools make technology safer for children who want desperately to be able to use it, and less frightening for parents who worry about their children's safety and security and ensure that if your child becomes involved in a dangerous or difficult situation, you will be aware of it and can help to resolve it quickly and effectively. Here are some of the options that the Parental Intelligence System uKnowKids provides for digital parents.

Facebook Messenger Monitoring

This type of monitoring allows you to stay in control of instant messages, group messages, photos and locations on your child's Facebook page. Regardless of the device that your child is using to connect to Facebook, you can be notified when modifications have been made to the page, and closely monitor the information that is being shared.
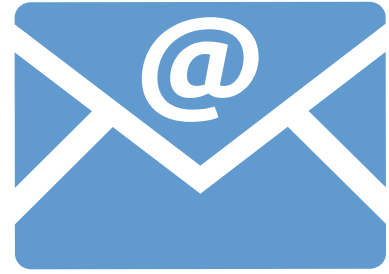
New Friend Monitoring

uKnowKids allows you to keep track of all of the friends that your child adds to his Facebook page. You will be able to receive notifications when friends are added that may be inappropriate for your child; for example if a friend is much older than your child is accepted.

Trends and Habits

It is easy for even someone that uses social media themselves to get confused when attempting to review the social media and Internet activities of a child. uKnowKids offers, as part of their system, the ability to see all of your child's activities and trends on social networks and his mobile phone, including who he interacts with the most, and what time of the day he is most active, so you can get a clear and easy-to-understand view of what your child is doing in the time that he spends on the Internet. This will help you understand his activities, and can guide you in creating stricter rules or involving yourself more actively in your child's activities.

It can be frightening trying to navigate the world of the digital parent. Fortunately, there is support. With the help of Parental Intelligence technology you can feel confident in your ability to provide your child with a thorough education into the appropriate and responsible use of the Internet so you can begin his exposure to this technology with close management. From there, you can gradually allow greater freedom and independence as he proves capable and trustworthy in his online and mobile activities.

BOK

Contributors:

Tim Woda – Tim is co-founder and resident Child Safety Advocate at uKnow.com. Tim originally conceived of uKnow.com following his own child's encounter with an internet child predator. While his son was thankfully unharmed, the incident inspired him to become a passionate advocate for empowering families and helping them to protect their children from today's scariest digital dangers.

Taryn Duncan – Taryn is truly a digital parent in a digital world. As she maintains a career completely online, she is navigating teaching her young child about the internet and mobile technologies that surround her daily by encouraging her to participate in an online learning academy and communicate with her extended family using the internet and mobile devices.

Edited by: Callie Harris

Layout design by: Julie Csizmadia

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