Computer Privileges and the Dangers of the Internet

In addition to the useful and educational information available on the Internet, a great deal of content exists that is not appropriate for teenagers. This content can include nudity or other sexually explicit material; hate or racist web sites; promotional material about tobacco, alcohol, or drugs; and graphic violence. Other Internet dangers to teenagers include sexual exploitation or enticement.

Unfortunately, child pornography is frequently exchanged via the Internet and sexual predators can use the Internet to try to reach out to teenagers for sexual purposes. Your teenager can be the target of cyber stalking or harassment. This includes repeated and unwanted contact through the Internet that is rude or threatening. In addition, your computer is vulnerable to viruses which can damage or permanently destroy the hard drive. These viruses are often downloaded inadvertently, but the effect is just as harmful.

In most cases an open conversation about expectations and ground rules regarding computer use will help to prevent problems. Keep in mind that your student might have come from a family who has a different set of rules than those you established in your own family. The student's cultural background might also have an impact on what he/she perceives as appropriate.

The following are suggestions on how you can prevent the dangers mentioned above:

- ❖ Become informed about computers and the internet.
- ❖ Talk to your student about his/her use of the computer in your home, and discuss the dangers. This applies even if they bring their own laptop.
- ❖ Consider using filtering or monitoring software for your computer.
- ❖ Limit allotted time on the computer to 30 minutes daily.
- ❖ Keep the computer in the family room or another communal area in your home to make monitoring easier.
- ❖ Make sure your student understands not to download anything from strangers or open spam or junk e-mails that may contain viruses.
- ❖ Ask your student to tell you immediately if they receive offensive e-mails, chats or other communications and, if appropriate, report to your local law enforcement agency.

❖ Teach your student to never give out personal information about themselves or others online. Provide an example of how giving personal information can have terrible consequences. This will give your student a context so that they truly understand why it can be dangerous.
❖ Establish a firm agreement that the student must never meet an online acquaintance face-to-face.

The following behaviors indicate that your student might be in danger:

❖ Spending an inordinate amount of daily time on the computer
❖ Withdrawing from host family and friends
❖ Hiding CDs/DVDs
❖ Quickly changing the computer screen when you enter the room
❖ Uncharacteristic behavior, e.g. secretiveness, inappropriate sexual knowledge/language

Please contact your LC or Field Manager if you suspect your host son/daughter is displaying concerning behavior with regard to Internet usage. If your student is in immediate danger please call the main ETC office Toll Free (877) 222-9803 or (503) 222-9803.

5 Tips to Protect Your Children in the Digital Age

The Internet provides an opportunity for children to learn, explore their world and socialize with friends. As parents, we also know the safety risks the Internet poses to our children. By understanding the potential threats children face, you can educate, empower and protect yourself – and them – to have safer, more meaningful online experiences.

1. Get Educated – And Educate Your Children
Learn how kids use the Internet by spending time with them in the digital world. Remember, unlike conventional media, the Internet is interactive, giving us all the opportunity to interact with anyone. Remind kids that "virtual" safety is just as important as "real world" safety.
2. Safety First
If possible, keep the computer in a common area of the house and set reasonable limits on computer usage. Show kids the value of privacy. Encourage them to protect their passwords and personal information, as they would with something like a diary or journal. Help them use privacy settings to restrict who has access to or can post on their social networking profiles, blogs and other accounts. Use monitoring and filtering software that restricts what websites they can visit and tracks where they've been.
3. Know and Enforce Age Appropriate Online Experiences
Children under 8 should have direct supervision while online. Tweens, kids from 8 – 12,

should have more freedom, but an adult/parent/guardian should still be close by, with privacy settings at their highest level. Teens, due to smart phones, school computers, etc. will have more Internet access, which is why it's important to set rules early and encourage ongoing conversations.

4. Discuss Expectations for Appropriate Conduct

Ongoing, frequent communication is vital to keeping your kids safe. Discuss what appropriate online conduct looks like – how much of it mirrors safe, responsible real-world behavior. Encourage a "think before you post" attitude – and discuss consequences. Write down the rules and keep them near the computer. Encourage their questions. Invite conversation.

5. Get – and Stay Involved

Share your Internet safety plan with other parents as a means to set expectations and offer and gain support. Stay alert to changes in your children's behavior – are they becoming secretive about computer time? Understand how, when, and where to report suspicious behavior online: **Facebook**, **Twitter,** **My Space**