

Internet Safety and Security

We have seen an explosion in the popularity of web blogging sites such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com. These sites provide a portal for students to post pictures, share personal information, and participate in instant messaging or on-line chatting. At SHS, these sites are blocked from use through the District filter (WebSense). However, similar new sites are created daily. Recent news articles clearly illustrate the dangers associated with careless or inappropriate Internet use. It is the shared responsibility of parents and educators to teach children safe Internet practices, monitor computer usage, and promote the educational value of information literacy.

How can I teach safe Internet practices at home?

Learning more about the Internet will help parents promote safe and secure home internet use. The U.S. Department of Education publishes a “Parents’ Guide to the Internet”. This handbook can be accessed at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/internet/index.html>. Links to popular educational sites, definitions of Internet terminology, and resources for additional support can be found in this guide.

PC Magazine recommends the following sources to help keep your kids safe in cyberspace.

- Be Safe Online (<http://www.besafeonline.org/>) – This site discusses common problems associated with e-mail, instant messaging, and file sharing.
- Be Web Aware (<http://www.bewebaware.ca/english/default.aspx>) – Safety tips are organized by age group on this site. It also includes a database of kid-friendly web sites.
- Get Net Wise (<http://www.getnetwise.org/>) – A site created and maintained by the Internet Education Foundation, it is a resource for understanding the Internet and how to protect your family from potential Internet-related problems. Site provides a resource for obtaining and evaluating tools for parents.
- i-Safe (<http://www.isafe.org/>) – A well-organized site that provides information for parents, children, and educators. Many suggestions for filtering and monitoring Internet use can be found at this site.
- Wired Safety (<http://www.wiredsafety.org/>) – This site contains many resources to promote responsible and safe computer use.
- NetSmartz (<http://www.netsmartz.org/>) – Netsmartz is a division on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Childgen. This site is build around teens, parents, educators, and law enforcement to educate on the topic of Internet Safety.

What is the school doing to assure my child’s Internet safety?

District 211 and Schaumburg High School reduce the risk of inappropriate Internet surfing in several ways:

- (1) Students are encouraged to use school computers for educational purposes and not for recreational activity.
- (2) Students who use computers in classrooms are under teacher supervision. With parent permission, students receive a “W” on their ID cards. These students may also log onto the Internet in the Media Center where student computer areas are monitored by adults.
- (3) Internet content is filtered at the District level by a program called “WebSense”.
- (4) The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) is reviewed with students and can be found on the desktop of each computer throughout the year.
- (5) In addition, for those students who stray from appropriate use, an Internet history report can be generated. Students who violate the Acceptable Use Policy risk having their network access restricted or revoked. Suspension or expulsion from school is possible in situations where network security and personal safety is threatened.

What can I do if I'm concerned about my child's Internet use?

Be involved . . . find out what your child is up to! Block sites that concern you. Talk to your child! Discuss safe Internet use. Know your child's friends, their screen names and with whom he/she is instant messaging. Ask for user names and passwords to sites that concern you. Review your child's posting on sites such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com, or LiveJournal.com. If they are inappropriate or give too much information, ask your child to remove the information and then check that he/she has done so.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, some signs that your child might be at risk on-line include:

- Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, particularly at night.
- You find inappropriate material on the home computer.
- Illicit pop-up advertisements and e-mail spam appears when you use the computer.
- Your child quickly changes screens or turns off the monitor when you enter the room, becomes withdrawn from the family, is sharing an on-line account with an unknown user, or resists sharing passwords or information related to their computer use.

Several publications recommend the installation of monitoring or filtering software, particularly if the child is using the computer in an isolated location. Many of these programs can generate reports of Internet usage and provide various levels of filtering and parental controls. Your own Internet Service Provider may even provide monitoring features as part of their package. Some popular, commercial programs associated with Internet filtering include:

<http://www.netnanny.com/>
<http://www.cyberpatrol.com/>
<http://www.surfcontrol.com/>
<http://www.cybersitter.com/>

SHS houses nearly 1200 computers with Internet access. Faculty and staff are expected to monitor student use and model best practices associated with information literacy and research. We reduce the risks of inappropriate Internet surfing by learning about Internet sites, monitoring student usage, and setting expectations for appropriate use. Knowledge and awareness are powerful tools when it comes to promoting safe and secure Internet usage at school. Knowledge and awareness are also powerful tools to promote safe and secure Internet usage at home!