

Parenting Digital Tweens & Teens: Being a Cyber-Aware Parent in the Digital Age

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Digital citizenship is defined as appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use. This definition includes a range of skills such as general etiquette, digital literacy, and social responsibility to name a few. Students, schools and parents all play a part in helping our youth to learn responsible digital citizenship skills and values. Likewise, dealing with these concepts proactively is considerably more effective than trying to pick up the pieces after a problem reaches a crisis point.



**Carefully consider what you would do in the given situations.
What are the proactive and reactive strategies for each scenario?**

PROACTIVE STRATEGIES:

What could have been done beforehand to help prevent the issue from occurring?

REACTIVE STRATEGIES:

What could be done after the issue has already happened?

Scenario #1: OMG...she is soooo ugly!

A group of sixth grade girls from the same class had a slumber party. They listened to music, downloaded songs, played games, called friends on their cell phones and sent text messages back and forth to other friends from their school. One of the girls suggested that they make an online poll to rate the ugliness of a classmate ("Do you think Loraine is ugly, yes or no?"). A couple of the girls seemed a bit hesitant, but the stronger personalities prevailed and the next hour was spent with this group sharing their "ugly" poll with the other students on Facebook. Within 2 hours, over 80 students responded to the online poll. Loraine finds out and she is devastated.



What would you do if...

- a) you find out that your daughter is one of the girls who initiated the "ugly" poll?
- b) you are Loraine's parent?

Scenario #2: The snowball effect

Sylvia and Rosie were best friends. They shared everything and were inseparable, although this was definitely a love-hate relationship. The 13 year olds often argued over minor things and the girls would sometimes go days without talking. The latest problem occurred when Sylvia embarrassed Rosie by telling others about a secret crush Rosie had on a boy in their class. This gossip occurred over the lunch hour and it did not get resolved before the end of the school day. Both girls exchanged nasty text messages after school and Sylvia even sent mean messages to other classmates. The problem quickly extended beyond the two girls and soon many students were sending mean and hateful text messages to both Sylvia and Rosie. Rosie received an anonymous text from an unknown number saying “ur such a loser. I h8t u. watch ur back.” Rosie is very concerned and she decides to report this message.



What would you do if...

- a) you are Rosie’s parent and she reports the text message to you?
- b) you are Sylvia’s parent and you receive an angry phone call from Rosie’s parents?

Scenario #3: “Where’s your mummy?”

Sal is a typical 8 year old boy who loves to play games on the computer. The internet-based motor cycle game is his favourite. Sal was playing the game on the laptop in the kitchen when a cute bear popped up on the screen via Skype. Sal’s parents often use Skype to video chat with friends and family and the program was running in the background. The bear asked Sal to be his friend by text and Sal replied “yes”. Then the cute bear texted "where's your mummy?" and Sal sent back a picture of someone running because his mom had just left for a jog. The cute bear then video phoned on Skype. Sal answered the video call and a male voice said "Hello".



Sal’s dad, who was nearby, quickly ran to the kitchen when heard the strange male’s voice. The unknown “teddy bear” caller hung up but for the next 24 hours the family received a stream of these kinds of calls. Some of the pictures they sent were very "cute", others were disturbing and frightening.

What would you do if you were Sal’s mom or dad?

Scenario #4:

Just Google it

Jack is a devoted grade 5 student who typically does very well in school. He is also very involved in many school clubs and he plays hockey on a community team. Needless to say, Jack's schedule is very busy and he has little time left over at the end of each day for homework. As the end of term approaches, Jack is starting to feel overwhelmed with the amount of work he still needs to complete. One assignment in particular has him very worried. He needs to prepare a report and presentation for his class and the assignment is due tomorrow but he has not even started. As a last-minute effort to complete his task, Jack goes to a website and copies and pastes information for his report and submits it to the teacher the next morning. He has not properly cited his sources and given credit to the author. Mr. Smarts, Jack's teacher, quickly recognizes that the report does not reflect Jack's assessed writing ability and he calls home to discuss the issue.



What would you do if...

- a) you are Jack's parents and this is his first time doing something like this?
- b) you are Jack's parents and he done this before?

Scenario #5:

Broadcast yourself...and lots of other stuff

A video showing two students fighting outside of the school has appeared on the Internet. A student recorded the fight on their cellphone and then posted it on YouTube. The link to the video has the potential to go viral as it was sent throughout the student population via text messages, email, and social websites. The 45-second clip of the incident shows the students fighting and screaming at one another. Many students are seen gathering around the fight and cheering on the event. At one point, one of the bystander students appears to get involved in the fight as he attempts to kick someone on the ground. The video site quickly records over 220 views with a comment bank full of inappropriate remarks that have been added by viewers online.



What would you do if...

- a) you are the parent of one of students involved in the fight?
- b) you are a parent of the student who videotaped the fight?
- c) you are a parent of a student who has contributed negatively to the comment list?

Scenario #6: This isn't Super Mario Bros.

Tyson loves playing video games on his computer. He has an X-Box Live gaming system set up in his bedroom which allows him to connect online and compete with other players across the world. Tyson's one-time online buddy, Mario, is upset that Tyson has beaten his record score. Late one night, Tyson received some rude messages from his online competitor and now nemesis, Mario. The message sent was "i know where u live...i can find u...u and ur family r dead." Tyson was very upset as he does not have many close friends in the real world and the Internet was typically a safe haven for him. Not only was he fearful about the threatening nature of the comments, but he was also feeling excluded and like he was losing his friends. Apart from that, Tyson's teacher has also called home to inform you that Tyson appears to be lethargic, tired and has not been doing his homework lately.



What would you do if you are Tyson's mom or dad?

Scenario #7: My new BFF

Marg loves chatting with her friends on Facebook and other social media websites. She has many "friends" on her buddy list but her parents have always been diligent about helping her keep the list realistic. Marg's parents have also set-up strict usage times to limit her online time. She is only allowed online between 3:30pm and 4:30pm on week days. One afternoon Marg's older brother notices that Marg forgot to logout of her Facebook page. He reads an ongoing conversation between Marg and a friend named Bill. Bill is a student at another school in the community and the two teens have been conversing for some time. The conversation also includes an exchange of photos and a planned "date night". Marg has never mentioned anything about a friend named Bill. Marg is very upset when her brother reports this to her parents.



What would you do if you are Marg's parent(s)?

Scenario #8: I'm so lucky!

Ralph's is an energetic 9 year old who enjoys playing games on the computer. He would spend hours playing silly online games if he was allowed to. One afternoon, while playing his favourite Harry Potter game, he is prompted with a pop-up.

"Congratulations young Gryffindor! You have just won the grand prize! Click here to collect your reward!" Ralph is pleased by his good luck and excitedly clicks the ad. When Ralph clicks the pop-up, the computer is inundated with a stream of pornographic pictures. Ralph is shocked and he tries to close the windows, but the pops are relentless. He runs to his parents in tears.



What would you do if you are Ralph's parents?

Scenario #9: Forever and Ever

Michelle was partying with some friends on a Friday night. They consumed some alcohol and smoked a few cigarettes. At around 2:00 am, Michelle decided to change her status on FACEBOOK to "Drunk as fucl". The girls thought that Michelle was hilarious. The next morning, Michelle remembered what she had done and decided to change her status back to normal. Unfortunately, she started getting messages on FACEBOOK as well some text messages in relation to her changed status. Students at school started making fun of her and calling her a "flail" as in someone who cannot handle their alcohol. Two years later, that nickname is still around.



What would you do if you are Michelle's parent(s)?

Scenario #10: Hate Blogs

Julie loves using Facebook. She shares her page with her parents and really has nothing to hide. She connects with friends and family members by sharing stories and photos on a regular basis. One day, Julie opened up her Facebook and found a link to a new hate blog. She clicked on it and it opened up a Tumblr site. The site made fun of Julie as well as some of her friends. Julie was quite upset and contacted her friends immediately. Julie also took the time to talk to her parents about the site. However, within an hour, the site had disappeared and was removed completely from the Tumblr site. The hate blog was anonymous with no connections to the original creator. The creators of the site were unknown and numerous anonymous comments were accumulating.



What would you do if you are Julie's parent(s)?

Scenario #11: Text Ed

Coach Johnson was on a road trip with his volleyball team. They decided to stop at a restaurant to get a bite to eat. He noticed a group of his volleyball boys huddled together and giggling. When he approached them, he saw that Steve, the team captain, was showing them naked pictures of a girl. The coach immediately took Steve aside to talk to him. The boy said that they were pictures of his girlfriend that she was currently sending to him while on the road trip. The coach asked if he had shared the pictures with anyone else apart from his team-mates. Steve assured his coach that he had not done anything with the pictures. The coach asked him to immediately remove the images from his phone.



What would you do if you are Steve's parent(s)?

Scenario #12: I'll get you back!

Sarah was a talkative grade 7 girl who regularly got in trouble at school for disrupting the class. This was particularly troublesome in her English class with Mrs. Tennyson. Mrs. Tennyson was a very strict, traditional teacher who had little patience for disruptive students. One Monday morning, Sarah went to English class and quickly began chatting to her friends about her weekend during the morning lesson. Needless to say, Mrs. Tennyson was furious and she sent Sarah directly to the principal's office to be disciplined for repeated defiance. Sarah was very upset with her teacher, so when she got home, she decided to create a fake Facebook page to ridicule her teacher. The page was created using Mrs. Tennyson's identity and an embarrassing edited photo of the teacher was used for the profile picture. Sarah added many insulting comments and then invited students from her school to join the page. Many students participated by adding their own insults and some even secretly recorded embarrassing video clips of the teacher and published them to the site. Word of the site quickly spread around the school and eventually Mrs. Tennyson finds out about the page and she reports it to the school administration.



What would you do if...

- a) you are Sarah's parent?
- b) you are a parent of another student who posted hurtful material on the site?