



LAKE COUNTY NARCOTICS AGENCY

DAVID FRISONE, Executive Director

P.O. Box 490, Painesville, Ohio 44077
(440) 350-3333 . (440) 918-3333 . Fax (440) 350-3313



P.L.U.S.² Parent's Guide Lesson 9 Internet Safety

This week's lesson focuses on the fact that the Internet has no built-in safety features. Safe use and navigation comes completely from the person who is going online. We know that the use of common sense can be a huge protective factor. But what if some of our youth are limited in this skill as a result of where his/her age and emotional development lies? Yikes! Our students are accessing the Internet from many different devices; laptops, computers, game systems, cell phones, music devices, and portable reading devices to name a few. Their access might be virtually unlimited! So how do we make sure that they are being safe online?

In class, the officer uses the *Internet Terms* homework to begin the conversation about Internet safety and what the students do when they are online. Chatting, shopping, watching videos, gaming, music, research, and social networking are among some of the most popular activities. Our teens today belong to one of the most connected generations ever. According to a 2009 Pew Internet & American Life Study entitled, "Teens and Technology:" 93% use the Internet, send or receive email at least occasionally, 73% use social networking sites like Facebook or MySpace, 54% send text messages to each other every day, and 37% of teens send messages through social networking sites daily.

The officer further explains how each computer or online device has a "fingerprint" (IP addresses, SIM cards). This allows tracking of online activity from that source. There is no such thing as "anonymous" when it comes to being online. Anything we post online should be assumed to be public information. The officer presents a situation in which a *predator* uses basic pieces of information, gathered from what the victim posted online, to find the person. The things that were posted were totally appropriate but shared way too much information. We have to teach our kids to be smart online!

The class shifts and becomes a discussion of things that the students have seen posted online. This discussion always leads to negative, inappropriate, bullying type examples. The students see kids picking on other kids, posting pictures, making up and spreading rumors, creating *hate* surveys, and soliciting negative comments from other kids about a particular person. Things are more easily said "in the privacy of your room" than in a face-to-face conversation. It's a powerful feeling to be able to say what you want....thinking it will never get back to you....when no one is there to call you on it. You may or may not be amazed with the amount of drama, negative and cutting remarks, and bullying seen by the children while they are online.

The Internet is a powerful part of our lives that impacts us now and has the power to influence our lives in the future as well. A vital part of teaching our youth to stay safe online has to involve encouraging them to create a **Positive Virtual Identity**. This is defined as *an identity that you knowingly create about yourself online that is positive and caring*. That image is seen by millions of people who have never met us and might never meet us to really get to know who we are. They will only know "what we show them online". As your children begin to look at colleges or finding jobs, they WILL be looked at online. What is the image we want that

potential college admissions person to see or that prospective employer? The bottom line is that depending how we have presented ourselves online we may never get the chance to even talk with them before we are removed from their “potentials” list.

When potential colleges or employers look at us online, we want them to see character, a positive attitude, a helpful and caring individual, someone who stands for what they would want as a representative of their organization. We are not going to keep our children off line. In fact, for our children to be employable they will need to know how to use the internet, use it wisely and responsibly, and show themselves as positive individuals. So we need to teach our kids a way to do this online!

There are 6 important aspects to consider when posting online and building a

Positive Virtual Identity:

1. **Stay in control of your site** – Only allow people you know and trust to be “friends” online. These should be people that you know personally, not just from an online friendship.
2. **Show yourself in a positive way** – be proud of how you present yourself to be online. It's a very bad idea to post photos that are suggestive or sexual in nature. What you post on the Internet can be downloaded by others and can hang around forever.
3. **Be truthful and honest** – lying will only lead to problems. Do not lie about yourself any time online. Claiming you are someone that you're not puts *targets* on you. Targets put you at risk. InterNet Predators look for targets.
4. **Make positive comments** – Put things on your site that are funny, supportive, interesting, and thought provoking. You don't have to create all of your own stuff; embed quotes, songs, videos. If you allow non-friends or strangers to post comments to your site, check the comments regularly to make sure they're appropriate. If not, remove them.
5. **Stand for what you believe** – don't allow others to post in your space in a way that you disagree with or find upsetting. Never allow messages that are mean, threatening or embarrassing to you or others. Make appropriate responses about why you won't allow such postings. Then delete them. After one warning block that person from visiting your blog or web posting site. Let others know why you have blocked them.
6. **Ask your grandparents what they think of your postings** – a great way to avoid embarrassing yourself or posting inappropriate material online. Before uploading a photo, ask how you would feel if that picture were seen by your grandparents, your parents, a college admissions counselor, a potential employer, a future boyfriend/girlfriend or a future spouse. If you hesitate, don't put it online.

Check out the handout from class “Posting on the Net” for more details!

What can parents do? Put limits on the number of hours and time of day that TV and the Internet/computer are available. Make sure homework and other responsibilities are done first. Do not allow TV or Internet connection in the bedroom. Teach your child to monitor his or her own media use. Take advantage of one of the many screening devices available for TV and computers (www.getnetwise.org) for Internet screening. Advise your child to never give out identifying information to someone online, not even the name of your family dog. *Stay involved* and *be aware* of who your children are interacting with online as well as what they are doing.

Some Great Resources...

A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide>

NetSmartz Workshop for Parents & Guardians <http://www.netsmartz.org/Parents>

Online Safety by Parent Further <http://www.parentfurther.com/e-parenting>

National Crime Prevention Council <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/Internet-safety>

Common Sense Media Info for Parents <http://www.common sense media.org/advice-for-parents/teens>

This week's homework: My Anti-Drug

If this paper has not been completed prior to this point, it will be due in the next (and final) P.L.U.S.² class. This paper is a requirement to successfully complete the P.L.U.S.² program.