<u>Tips for Monitoring Your Teen's Use of Digital Technologies</u>

Cell phone technology allows teens to stay connected by text messaging and sharing photos, however, unwanted photos or video can easily get posted on sites like YouTube or MySpace, and have lasting consequences. A recent survey indicates that 6% of teens who use social networking sites say someone has posted an embarrassing picture of them online without their permission. Parents must be vigilant about their children's use of all technology and encourage responsible decision making skills.

For teens, personal technology devices like computers, tablets, and "smart phones" can provide a wealth of positive information and connection to a greater community. In many families, these also provide a convenient way to keep in touch throughout the day, and consult with one another as plans and schedules change. However, unsupervised technology use can also open a world of temptation and misinformation on topics such as drugs, sex, and other risky behaviors. Kids want and need the kind of trust between themselves, their parents and other care- giving adults that only a continuous pattern or regular, healthy give-and-take communication can establish. But, parents also need to know that their trust isn't being violated. Kids can not always be counted on to use digital technologies appropriately. Sometimes they stumble into danger unknowingly. They need guidance and rules. Follow these tips and guidelines to monitor your teen's use and keep them on the right track:

Limit Time Spent Online and put computers in a common area of the house so you can more easily monitor use.

Be Clear And Consistent About What Is Off Limits, including Web sites, chat rooms, games, blogs or certain music downloads and how to handle information promoting drugs or sex. Discuss consequences for breaking the rules.

Enforce Consequences. The more meaningful the consequence to the teen, the less likely they will break the rules. For example, if you catch your teen Instant Messaging (IM'ing) someone they don't personally know, take computer, tablet, or cell phone privileges away for an extended period of time. You can also restrict or prohibit use of these devices as a consequence for breaking curfew, coming home smelling of smoke or alcohol or exhibiting other signs of substance abuse.

Learn About The Digital Devices Your Teen Uses. Teens' cell phones are living diaries of their friends, activities and whereabouts. Know the people who are listed in your teen's electronic phone book and learn how to review recent calls and text messages. (Check the cell phone manual for instructions.) If a strange number appears, ask about it.

Visit Your Teen's Web Site Or Personal Blog. Review your teen's profile, pictures, video and music uploads. Also check out the links your teen includes on his/her page. These will give you a candid view of his/her thoughts on issues like drugs and dating, as well as, an inside glimpse of your teen's friends and activities. Check out his/her "network" and what type of information is on his/her friends' sites.

Monitor Your Teen's E-Mails And Instant Messaging. Know who your teen is communicating with online. Ask who is on his/her cell phone and Instant Message contact lists. Ask to review their email address book on a regular basis and who unfamiliar addresses represent. Use every available opportunity to meet and get to know those friends AND their parents.

Remind Your Teens The Internet Is Public Space and anyone, including college admissions offices, potential employers, and even predators can see what they are posting online. Talk to your teen about not posting personally identifiable information or regrettable pictures, videos and information.

Make Sure Your Teen Knows That Everything "On The Web" Is Not Necessarily Legal. Alcohol, tobacco, illicit and prescription drugs are all marketed on the Internet, along with weapons, pornography, and opportunities for real-world sexual liaisons. Young people need help understanding that many things offered to them via the Internet may be illegal, as well as, dangerous. Talk to them about letting you know if they receive personal messages encouraging them to engage in illegal behaviors so that you can notify the appropriate authorities.

Use Technology To Help Monitor Your Teen. See for yourself what is posted on social networking sites (i.e. Facebook) your teen visits by setting up your own account. Use text messaging to check in with your teen after school. **If your teen has a camera phone, have him/her send a picture of where they are and who they are with.** If he/she is supposed to be at a school football game, tell your teen to take a picture of themself with friends in the stands.

If You Suspect, Go The Extra Mile. Some technologies enable you to track the exact web pages, blogs, and message boards that your teen visits. Many of these same products have filtering devices that prevent teens from viewing inappropriate content.

Talk To Other Parents About How They Monitor Their Teens, especially in this age of gadgets and digital devices. Ask what has worked for them and what has not. Stay connected and share your stories to aid your monitoring activities and keep your kids safe.

Above all, do not feel uncomfortable with these tactics. Think of the online world in terms of a real neighborhood - would you let your teen hang out with a stranger down the street, or have an unknown adult check in on your child while you are away? Probably not. The same types of precautions you would take in your own neighborhood are the same types of precautions you should take in the virtual world. You can do it. You are supposed to do it. You owe it to them.