Internet Use By 'Tweens And Teens: Tips For Parents

- *Tip #1*: **Consult with each other**. Other parents are a terrific resource for finding out what kids are doing and how they are using the Internet. Talk with each other and find out how other parents have handled situations you are puzzling over or concerned about. Armed with this information, you can make your decision as to what is best for your child.

- *Tip #2:* **Consult with the school library teacher**. The library teacher is aware of current Internet trends among young people and the research that has been done about Internet Safety. The library teacher can offer suggestions to guide you as you establish parameters for your child's Internet use.

- *Tip #3:* **Stay informed**. Facebook? Sexting? There is always something new on the Internet that involves teens – and invites misuse. Keep up to date on how the Internet and especially social networks are evolving. There is a range of web sites that are useful resources for you at: **http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Technology/library_media/cybersafety/index.html**

- *Tip #4:* **Take charge of how the Internet is used.** You've already heard the recommendation to place the computer in a common area. Did you know that you can set "filters and privacy settings? "Your Internet Service Provider includes this with your service. Check and see what is available and what you can do that will give you peace of mind. Virus protection is also available, along with alerts as to harmful scams, viruses, etc. to avoid. Set the Internet rules as to what your child can and cannot do.

- *Tip #5:* **Engage in continual conversation with your children**. Filters may give you peace of mind but be careful! This could be a false sense of security. Children are savvy and quickly figure out "work arounds." By continually discussing how your child is using the Internet, you stay informed and can tackle issues "on the spot" as they arise. For example, one parent read an email while her child composed it and used it to speak with her child as to how easy it is to misinterpret sarcasm or humor. She and her child had a thoughtful conversation about expressing emotions online and off.

- *Tip #6*: **Model appropriate use.** As you use a site, or delete an email that is suspicious to you, explain to your children why. Using a social network site? Talk to your children about the strategies you use to keep you and your computer safe online, such as blocking pop-ups. Shopping online? Be sure your teens check with you. Downloading music, files, or photos? Be sure your child checks with you and that you discuss what is legal to download and what is not. Be sure to also discuss what is appropriate and not appropriate when it comes to posting pictures/videos of themselves or others. What they view as funny and harmless can potentially be hurtful and embarrassing – for themselves and others.

- *Tip #7:* **Use the Internet as an information source.** As you use the Internet to help your child with homework and school projects, evaluate the pros and cons of a site. Is the site up to date? Is there a bias? Do you know who created the site? Talk about why one site might be better than another.

- *Tip #8:* **Use databases.** A reliable source of information can be found in the variety of databases available through the public library/school library.

- *Tip #9:* **Define private and personal information.** As kids sign up to participate in social networking, they will need to include information about themselves. Consider establishing a Gmail account for this, and using an "avatar" for a photo. Be sure your child understands what is "off-limits" to share online and to talk with you if asked for phone number, address, or meeting in person. On social networking sites, know who is a friend, and ask your child to share emails with you so that you can monitor and be alert to inappropriate behavior. Speak up when necessary.

- *Tip #10*: **Discuss cyberbullying openly and honestly**. The risk of harm to your child from an online predator is small compared to being cyberbullied. Kids are spending more time online and cyberbullying is on the rise. More than 40% of teens reported being cyberbullied. Encourage your child to be an ethical user of the digital world. Report incidences of bullying to your ISP and the school principal. Gather evidence – print the emails and retain them. If a threat of violence is made, report it to the police. Discuss what bullying looks like online (spreading rumors, excluding, harassing, belittling, name calling etc.) and be sure your child understands his/her responsibility in not engaging in these activities and what should be done if it happens to them or others. Let your child know you *are* a trusted adult to speak with and define other trusted adults your child can turn to.