Internet Safety and Security Tips for Parents

The Internet is a wonderful place for learning and entertainment, but like the world around us, it can pose dangers if precautions are not taken. Allowing free access puts your child, your computer and your personal data at risk. Help to instill good judgment in your children by encouraging them to take some common sense steps. The first step is STOP. THINK. CONNECT.

Keep a Clean Machine.
- **Keep security software current:** Having the latest security software, web browser, and operating system are the best defenses against viruses, malware, and other online threats.
- **Automate software updates:** Many software programs will automatically connect and update to defend against known risks. Turn on automatic updates if that's an available option.
- **Protect all devices that connect to the Internet:** Computers, smart phones, gaming systems, and other web-enabled devices all need protection from viruses and malware.

Protect Your Child's Personal Information.
- **Help your kids own their online presence:** When available, set their privacy and security settings on websites to your comfort level for information sharing. Remind them that it's ok to limit who they share information with.

Connect with Care.
- **When it doubt, throw it out:** Remind your children that links in emails, tweets, posts and online advertising are often the way cybercriminals compromise your computer. If it looks suspicious, even if you know the source, it's best to delete or, if appropriate, mark as junk email.

Be Web Wise.
- **Stay current. Keep pace with new ways to stay safe online.** Check trusted Web sites for the latest information, share with your children, and encourage them to be web wise.

Be a Good Online Citizen.
- **Safer for me, more secure for all:** What you and your kids do online has the potential to affect everyone – at home, at work and around the world. Practicing good online habits benefits the global digital community.

STOP. Before you use the Internet, take time to understand the risks and learn how to spot potential problems.

THINK. Take a moment to be certain the path is clear ahead. Watch for warning signs and consider how your actions online could impact your safety, or your family's.

CONNECT. Enjoy the Internet with greater confidence, knowing you've taken the right steps to safeguard yourself and your computer.

More family online safety practices:

- **Know the protection features** of the ISPs (Internet service provider) and software your children use. Your ISP may have tools to help you manage young children's online experience (e.g., selecting approved Web sites, monitoring the amount of time they spend online, or limiting the people who can contact them) and may have other security features, such as pop-up blockers. But remember that your home isn't the only place they can go online.

- **Remain positively engaged.** Pay attention to and know the online environments your children use. Surf the Internet with them. Appreciate your children's participation in their online communities and show interest in their friends. Try to react constructively when they encounter inappropriate material. Make it a teachable moment.

- **Support their good choices.** Expand your children's online experience and their autonomy when developmentally appropriate, as they demonstrate competence in safe and secure online behavior and good decision making.

- **Teach critical thinking.** Help your children identify safe, credible Web sites and other digital content. Encourage them to be cautious about clicking on, downloading, posting, and uploading content.

- **Explain the implications.** Help your children understand the public nature of the Internet and its risks as well as benefits. Be sure they know that any digital info they share, such as emails, photos, or videos, can easily be copied and pasted elsewhere, and is almost impossible to take back. Things that could damage their reputation, friendships, or future prospects should not be shared electronically.

- **Just saying "no" rarely works.** Teach your children how to interact safely with people they "meet" online. Though it's preferable they make no in-person contact with online-only acquaintances, young people may not always follow this rule. So talk about maximizing safe conditions: meeting only in well-lit public places, always taking at least one friend, and telling a trusted adult about any plans they make – including the time, place, and acquaintance's contact information (at least a name and cell phone number).

- **Empower your children to handle problems**, such as bullying, unwanted contact, or hurtful comments. Work with them on strategies for when problems arise, such as talking to a trusted adult, not retaliating, blocking the person, or filing a complaint. Agree on steps to take if the strategy fails.

Content developed collaboratively by the STOP. THINK. CONNECT. Messaging Convention and NCSA's K-12 Working Group.