

PROTECT EVERY CHILD

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT INTERNET SAFETY FOR KIDS

SECTION 2

BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION OF NORTH CAROLINA

SPIRITUAL 411

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GETTING THE WORD OUT

- Copy the participant guide. You will need to make one copy for each participant.
- Copy the bulletin insert. You will need to make one copy for every two bulletins. Cut the inserts in half and place in the church bulletins the week before the meeting.
- Recruit volunteers to hand out the participant guides at the door on the meeting day.
- Preview this session's DVD segment and meeting plan.
- In addition to the bulletin inserts, promote this "Internet Safety" series during announcement times, in the church newsletter, on the church Web site, through Sunday School class e-mails, and at any other opportunity. Use the following information to promote this series of programs:

Remember when your children thought you were so smart? Your influence was without question and your ability to protect your children from "questionable influences" was as easy as grabbing the remote control.

That's not the case anymore. Today's teens are masters of technology in a culture sadly short on restraint. Our children need our guidance and our encouragement when it comes to navigating the minefields of digital media.

Unfortunately, many parents and guardians are a little like dinosaurs when it comes to understanding and appreciating the ways teens communicate. But never has your presence and your input been more needed.

Keeping our children safe on the Internet is a big job, but it is a task well worth the effort.

You don't have to be a technology guru to help your child set healthy and safe limits on the Internet, you just have to be willing to learn and to ask questions. Come find out more!

GETTING STARTED

- Opening – Welcome the group. Say: NC Baptist Men produced a series of short programs on Internet safety. For about the next 30 – 45 minutes, we will watch the second program in this series entitled "The Spiritual 411". We will follow up with a short time of discussion.

- Prayer – Pray for our children and for the privilege of being parents. Pray for God's protection of our children and for opportunities to share our faith with them, especially in the area of the internet and digital media.
- Pre-video comments – Say: As we've said before, this session focuses on "The Spiritual 411" – making certain that the image our kids project while on the Web is not going to lead them down a road full of spiritual pitfalls. The Internet is fun and informative. But there are dangers, and we must provide clear direction to our children regarding their use of the Internet.
- Show "The Spiritual 411" segment on the DVD.
- Allow a few minutes for participants to read through the participant guide.

CHAT IT UP

- Does anyone use Facebook or some other social networking site? What are the differences in your use and your child's use of these sites?
- One way many parents hold their teens accountable is through parental controls. Basically, this is a term used to describe software and other tools that allow parents to select appropriate content for their children. What are your thoughts on this type of software?
- How can parents effectively monitor and support their teens as they use technology?
- What types of guidelines do you have in place at your home?

CLOSE

Thank the group for coming. Remind them of your next meeting date and close with prayer.

SPIRITUAL 411

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Staying connected with friends is like breathing to today's teen. One way they do this is through IMing and texting, but a growing number rely on social networking sites like My Space and Facebook. For many, these sites not only provide a way to stay in touch with friends, but also a means of expressing themselves and who they are to the world.

Checking out your teen's profile can give you a real insight to what being a teenager is all about these days – and what they spend their time talking about. While some teens are using this abundant technology in a very responsible fashion – others are playing with fire.

The desire for significance and acceptance can dim your teen's view of reality. They post things on a whim that could follow them for years. Remind your children that although their conversations are "instant" they are also "permanent." Their online profiles can be viewed by anyone, including coaches, employers, and college admissions officers. You might want to remind them that God sees those profiles and IMs as well.

Our kids don't always think about those kinds of things. With fingers flying across their phones and keyboards, things like authenticity and spiritual walls of protection can be overlooked. That's where we as parents, guardians, and youth leaders can help ground our children and point them in a direction that will build their faith and protect them from potential pitfalls.

"Children and teens aren't asking to be told what to do, but they are desperately seeking to be told what direction they should go," points out Mike Sowers of NC Baptist Men. "You can't make every decision for your child, but you can lay the foundation for them to make godly decisions. It will be then, when they are faced with dangers from technology, that they will make the right decisions in their lives."

But sometimes the decisions are not so easy...

In fact, it only takes a few typos for a child's online homework to turn into something really serious.

A few sobering facts from Focus on the Family: (<http://www.citizenlink.org/FOSI/pornography/A000001625.cfm>).

- A 1999 study found that one in four minors had at least one inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit material that year, with the majority of these exposures occurring to youth 15 years of age or older.

- By 2003 the number of children age 8-16 who had viewed pornography online increased to 90 percent. Most of this exposure happened while doing homework online.

- Twenty-three percent of youth who reported accidentally viewing a pornographic site were "very or extremely upset by the exposure."

- The children who inadvertently saw these images saw them while surfing the Internet (71 percent) and while opening e-mail or clicking on links in e-mail or Instant Messages (28 percent). Sixty-seven percent of these exposures occurred at home, but 15 percent happened at school and 3 percent in libraries.

- Inadvertent exposures happened on the Web as the result of searches (47 percent), misspelled addresses (17 percent), and links in Web sites (17 percent). And, in 26 percent of those exposed-while-surfing incidents, youth reported that they were brought to another sex site when they tried to exit the site they were in.

- For those exposed through e-mail, 63 percent were associated with an email address used solely by the individual; 93 percent of inadvertent email exposures came from someone unknown to the individual.

The bottom line is to be on guard. Know where your child is going online and whom they are talking to. Remember, there is a right and a wrong way to handle inappropriate information on the Web.

It is a violation of federal law to knowingly send or attempt to send obscene material to a child under the age of 16. Report incidents to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

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HOW YOU CAN PRAY

Pray for God's protection over your children.

Colossians 3:17 (NIV) tells us "whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Ask God to show you opportunities to share that truth with your teen. Help your teen set healthy parameters that allow them to express themselves through their profile pages, yet do nothing that could cause serious consequences down the road.

"My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil." Proverbs 4:20-27 (NIV)

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Understanding the draw of social networking sites is easier if you at least have one. Parents, if you do not already have your own profile page, it's time to get started. Embrace this new technology. It's actually quite fun. Your teens need to see you involved and enjoying some of this technology that plays such a huge role in their lives. Your teens also need you to keep them accountable. Maybe move the computer into a more central location or install special Internet software that helps protect your children from dangerous situations. The rules are much tougher to implement if your child is already busy communicating via the Internet – but you can do it.