

Empower Children to Be Safe in Cyberspace

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Abstract

Cyberspace has opened up new vistas for this digital generation with seamless access to knowledge (good & bad) and new frontiers which could have never been imagined until a few years ago. Today, individuals are presented with the power to choose the kind of information that they wish to consume and the way they want to consume it. This unprecedented power called the Internet is becoming more and more accessible to one and all.

With all its positives and a few potential pitfalls, the nuances of cyberspace are introducing new questions but more amorphous answers for all of 'netizens', especially for young adults and children of all age groups and even younger ones. The virtual world has also opened up before us, the opportunity to participate in unsupervised online environments; the stakes are higher and the responsibilities greater.

Considering easy availability and accessibility to digital tools, we must understand and uphold our obligation for safe, moral, ethical and legal behavior. The article enlists five simple cyber safety rules which are essential for keeping children safe in the online world and empowering them to be responsible digital citizens. The five rules discussed in this article are: 1. Pause before post, 2. Privacy of personal information, 3. Limit Screen Time, 4. Don't befriend strangers, 5. Deal with Cyberbullying.

Keywords : *Virtual World, Cyber space, screen time*

Introduction

With its millions of web sites and thousands of social media platforms and apps, there's never really been any medium like the World Wide Web! The Internet is like an 'information superhighway' or a 'huge bulletin board', where things change at the blink of an eyelid.

The misunderstanding that nothing in this dynamic environment is permanent further leads to a misconception. It makes the Internet like a safe haven, anonymity and impermanence adding to its fake aura, but actually the opposite is true. As a naive user, you tend to overlook the fact that whatever you post on the Internet stays on the Internet and that it's far more permanent than you can imagine - a simple fact with deep ramifications. The digital footprints are not just superficial but are very deep. Children as young as 4-5 year old are posting videos on youtube or are making fake facebook accounts and posting pictures. They don't understand the repercussions it can have on them or their families. To safeguard our children from these it is very important for teacher, caregivers or parents to discuss the following rules with them. They will help them in getting trapped.

Rules for cyber safety

Just like following traffic safety rules can help avoid road accidents, following **five smart cyber safety rules** can ensure online safety. As a parent and a teacher

Rule 1: Pause before You Post

Let's understand that sharing information online is not a bad thing, especially if you are using the experience to spread good things. The peril is that - unlike a chalkboard that you can write on and erase at will, the Internet has no 'delete' button.

Information which people thought was private doesn't always become public, through the machinations of predators and hackers. Often it's people's own misunderstanding of the nature of digital communication and so the best way to protect yourself is by developing your digital consciousness.

Now many netizens believe that - Whatever happens in Cyberspace remains in Cyberspace.... Forever!

This is a myth. Unlike something that you can write on a blackboard which you can rub or change, an online comment /picture/video/email

once posted can never be removed. A few seconds after posting it, you might want to go back and delete it, but someone, somewhere on the World Wide Web would have already read, copied, downloaded, and forwarded your post. It's like putting up a notice on the school notice board and going back after sometime to remove it. By then it would've been read by many and spread by word of mouth.

Prior to the advent of the Internet, youthful indiscretion might only have existed in the memories of people who were present there, or in the form of blurred, easily destroyable Polaroid photographs. Now, in the digital era, these things can be posted online and broadcast to the world and even if they are taken down, cached versions of web pages can still be viewed, copied, morphed and re-posted. Images and text messages can be forwarded, screen shots can be captured within seconds and even corrupted or deleted files can be easily retrieved.

Remember there is no delete button on the Internet, so before posting anything online, ask yourself:

- Who will be able to read my post?
- Am I proud of what I am posting?
- Will I be comfortable if my parents or peer or teachers view my post?
- Rule 2 Privacy of Personal Information

We've all heard the story of little Red Riding Hood. She would have never got into trouble had she not told the wolf that she was visiting her Granny, at the other end of the forest. Her story is relevant even in today's digital world because it can help you relate to the dangers of disclosing personal information to a stranger.

Would you ever share personal information - such as name, age, address, school name, phone number - with a stranger on the street? You would **never do** that. However, when it comes to Cyberspace, we tend to lower our guards. You know, sitting in the comfort of our homes, surrounded by four walls and a just screen in front of us - we feel safe. But are we really safe?

Unfortunately, this tiny gateway that has given us unlimited, instant access to information is also turning out to be a breeding ground for bullies, paedophiles, unethical activities and cybercrime. Dating and social networking sites allow people to make new connections, but also harbor risks

such as 'stranger danger', identity theft, cyber bullying and abuse.

So it's important to keep your personal information, private.

Rule 3: Limit Screen Time

Another harsh reality is that we have become slaves of the very technology that was meant to free us. From smart phones to laptops, one click is never enough. You start, but you can't seem to stop! With its never-ending supply of games, apps, social networking sites, instant messaging and information sources, users often forget to hear the clock ticking.

No wonder 'Internet Addiction' has been recognized as a 'disorder' by WHO and the numbers of sufferers seeking help for 'technology addiction' is sharply on the rise.

Simple technique like ABC of screen time

ABC of Limiting Screen Time in children where each alphabet has a meaning

Alternatives - If you wish to cut down screen time, you'll need to think of **activities to fill in place of screen time**. Each child has a unique talent, a passion that excites them. Explore that passion and interesting fun activities that excite you, steering you away from screens. It could be anything from singing, dancing or playing a musical instrument, playing football or tennis, skating or swimming. The idea is to generate the same feeling of fun and excitement that unsupervised screen time fills you up with.

Budget - Depending on the age of the child, certain daily screen time is permissible. Decided on X amount of time per day, and in case you don't use those minutes, you could **bank them for later use**.

With its unlimited scrolling potential, social media doesn't have a natural end point, likewise YouTube and online games, use a **timer** to keep track of time or use apps such as stay focused to clock the minutes.

Create a Digital Detox Plan - Set aside times for the entire family to unplug devices and connect with each other. For instance, meal times or an hour before bedtime could be family time for quality time together without TV, smart phones, online games and computers. Families could also consider a longer digital detox over the weekend and improve family bonding. Take out those old

games-name place ,animal thing,chinese whisper,Ludo,Bingo etc just to name a few.

• **Rule 4 – Don't befriend strangers, online**

Often, the need to attract more 'likes' for social media posts encourages users to accept friend requests from strangers. What we don't realize is that – The internet gives people the freedom to create an online identity which may be very different from their real identity. In the real world it might be impossible for a 40 year old to pretend to be a 14 year old girl. But when it comes to Cyberspace this kind of impersonation is possible.

This means that you need to be very cautious! Don't assume that strangers you first meet online are really who they claim to be. It could be a big, bad, hungry wolf, pretending to be granny or a predator pretending to be a princess.

• **Rule 5 – Deal with Cyber Bullying**

Technology is taking bullying beyond the school premises and teenagers may not be sure how to handle the impact. Rather than speaking up, victims just stay silent while trying to figure out ways to get out of it. There have been instances world over where children have resorted to taking extreme steps, because they silently suffered the trauma of being bullied, until it became unbearable.

One thing is very clear - Silence is not the solution.

In fact, there are various coping strategies you can adopt if you're being targeted by online

bullies. Victims could initially try passive ways to deal with them - such as blocking the bully, ignoring or avoiding messages and protecting personal information.

At the same time it's important to keep a record of what is happening and where. This could be done by taking screenshots of harmful posts or content. Most laws and policies note that bullying is a repeated behavior, so records can help document it, if required.

Depending upon the gravity of the situation, it could include parental involvement, reporting abuse, legislative action and evidence-based intervention by professionals, counselors or teachers.

The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal is an initiative by the Government of India to facilitate victims to report cybercrime. This portal caters to complaints pertaining to cybercrimes such as cyber bullying. Complaints reported here are dealt by law enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

In the times to come we all will rely more on cyber space but as parents, caregivers and teachers we have to be watchful for our children. These simple cyber safety rules will empower and enable young netizens to be safe in the online space. Children studying in the preschools or primary classes all are relying on online teaching and learning but as their caretakers one has to be extra conscious so that they are in safe hands.

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Web links

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