

# The LIGHT Post

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This month's LIGHT Post addresses responsible internet usage and safety. The world is online! As parents and educators, we can help ensure children and teens develop safe and healthy internet habits by addressing the acronym **N.E.T.** which stands for: **N**et Safety, **E**valuating Online Presence, and **T**aking a Break from Screen Time.

## **N** = Net Safety

Discussions on internet safety must begin early as children are introduced to and begin exploring an expansive online world. NetSmartz<sup>1</sup> provides the following discussion starters for parents and educators when talking with children:

- "What are your favorite things to do online?"
- "What is personal information? Why should you keep it private?"
- "What could you do to be safer online?"
- "What would you do if anyone online asked to meet you face-to-face?"
- "Besides me, who do you feel that you can talk to if you are in a scary or uncomfortable situation?"

## **E** = Evaluating Online Presence

Regarding reputation, billionaire Warren Buffett remarked: *"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."* When it comes to internet usage, adolescents must realize that internet behavior has lasting consequences. As teens prepare for future opportunities, whether educationally or vocationally, maintaining a positive digital reputation is essential. *Digital Media in the Classroom*<sup>2</sup> provides several recommendations educators may share with students to ensure they create a digital footprint they can be proud of.

- Remind students that college admissions officers and future employers often view an individual's online presence.
- Encourage teens to consider digital citizenship. Include discussion on the benefits of a positive digital reputation.
- Information posted on the internet is permanent. Caution and consideration are essential prior to posting any personal information. Also, teens should ensure privacy settings are enabled.
- *Tweet people the way you want to be tweeted.* Once a post about another individual has been sent, there are no guarantees that it may be permanently deleted.

## **T** = Taking a Break from Screen Time

A recent article through the Pew Research Center (Jiang, 2018) noted that approximately half of 743 surveyed U.S. teens (ages 13 to 17) believed they spend too much time on their cell phones.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, when without their cell phones over half of participants reported feelings of "loneliness, being upset or feeling anxious" In addition, 60% of teens surveyed believed spending too much time on devices is a major problem among peers in their age group. Morin (2018) provides several strategies parents may use to limit teen screen time.<sup>4</sup>

- Remind teens that screen time is a privilege—not a right.
- Parents must model healthy screen time habits.
- Rather than multitasking, encourage teens to work on one task at a time. Complete homework *then* text.
- Set clear rules about electronics, including turning off devices at bedtime.
- Have electronic-free mealtimes and family activities—schedule screen-free days.
- Set aside time to revisit and discuss screen time expectations and usage.

### References:

1. Basic internet safety. Retrieved from <https://www.net-smartz.org/internetsafety>
2. 10 things your students should know about their digital footprints. Retrieved from <http://www.teachhub.com/10-things-your-students-should-know-about-their-digital-footprints>
3. Jiang, J. J. (2018, August 22). How teens and parents navigate screen time and device distractions. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/08/22/how-teens-and-parents-navigate-screen-time-and-device-distractions/>
4. Morin, A. (Updated 2018, August 27) *10 strategies to limit your teen's screen time: set limits on TV, computers, video games, and smartphones.* Retrieved from <https://www.verywellfamily.com/strategies-limit-your-teens-screen-time-2608915>