Online Safety Tips
for Parents and Students

Teens Lead Nation in Use of 21st Century Information and Communication Services

According to the report **Teens and Technology**, released by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (http://www.pewinternet.org/), about 21 million American children, aged 12-17, now use the internet. This represents 87% of all youth in this age group. The internet's reach extends beyond teens. Children younger than age 12 also report internet exposure. About 30 million children of all ages access the internet.

Children access the internet routinely and the nature of their internet experience has intensified in the four years since the last Pew report. The report states that children play online games, get news, purchase goods and services, and utilize the internet as a tool for communication.

In particular, teens routinely use the internet for research and play, and view the medium as an extension of their real-world social environment. The use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, and web logs (blogging) permeates their online experiences. Coupled with the increased use of text messaging from cell phones, teens are immersed in communication with their peers, parents, and the outside world.

Not surprisingly, children are often more technologically sophisticated than their parents. However, teens — particularly younger teens — lack the psychological maturity and experience that only comes with age and may not be aware of problems often associated with the internet.

Phishing, Pharming, Identity Theft, Spyware, Spam Scams, Fraud, Flaming, Cyber bullying, and sexual exploitation of children have all been associated with use of the internet.

It is the job of parents and school staff to educate our children to the risks associated with the internet. Our job is not to instill fear in children, but to guide them with knowledge and rules to allow them to safely partake of the information bounty of the internet. Children play a role in this, too. Children who are informed about appropriate online behavior will help their peers navigate safely through the internet.

The tips and links on the flip side of this document will provide students and parents information needed to help them protect themselves while online.

Albemarle County Public Schools

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Top Tips for Online Safety

- Be involved. Have a conversation with your child about the online services he or she uses. Learn how to login to the services. Have them give you a tour. Get to know your child's online friends as you do their other friends.

- Never provide personally identifiable information to anyone you do not know. Students should never post information such as home or school address, email address, phone number, or daily schedule to a public space (chat room, blog space, etc.). Extreme care should be taken in sharing photos over the internet. Such information is readily available to all internet users.

- Set reasonable rules and guidelines for internet use, including the amount of time students are allowed to stay online, times of day they may use the computer, sites that are off-limits, and what to do if they encounter material or messages that make them feel uncomfortable. Find out whether there are blocks, filters, or parental controls that can be used to control access to objectionable material.

- Place the computer in a family space rather than a bedroom and make sure the monitor screen is in plain view. Make the internet a part of family life. Learn more about the resources of the internet from your child!

- Teach your children to **never** meet with someone they've met online without your permission. Any offline meeting should be with parents in attendance and in a public place.

- Never respond to messages that are mean, hurtful, obscene, or inappropriate. Students should tell their parents. Parents should contact the Internet Service Provider (ISP) if the situation warrants.

- Protect your computer! Download and install all patches and security updates. Use anti-virus and anti-spyware software. Use the tools provided by your ISP (parental controls, anti-spam, etc.) Consider installing filters or blocking software.

Where to look for more information...

Albemarle County Schools *Acceptable Use of Technology Policy:* http://www.k12albemarle.org/Board/Policies/IIBE_0404.pdf. Regulations that govern student and staff use of technology.

SafeKids.com: http://www.safekids.com/. Articles and links that cover the gamut of online activities and risks. Check out the Family Contract for Online Safety.

Onguard Online: http://onguardonline.com/. Government web site devoted to helping you secure your computer, avoid fraud, and protect personal information.

GetNetWise: http://kids.getnetwise.org/. An industry/public service group site that provides guides for kids, teens, and families; reviews of software tools; and links to reporting trouble.

Netsmartz: http://www.netsmartz.org/index.htm. A cooperative effort of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children & the Boys and Girls Clubs. Information for every age group, parents, and educators. Features videos, tips, and games.

FamilyTechTalk: http://www.familytechtalk.com/. Features weekly podcasts on all things digital, with an emphasis on safety.

FBI: http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm. Parent guide to internet safety.

Material in this document is based on the suggestions found at the resources listed above.