

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

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INTERNET SAFETY FOR PARENTS

Last week we promised you a **“BE SAFE”** article that dealt with being safe on the internet. After a week of researching this topic it became clear that this is not a subject that can be covered in one column.

Like many of you, we have a fifteen year old daughter who would LOVE it if her parents would buy her a computer to use at home. Many of her friends have their own and she is probably one of the few who relies on those at the high school or at the local library.

Every time the topic comes up in our house it turns into a heated debate. Our daughter makes a good argument for having one – it would make doing homework easier, it would be more convenient, it would be there when she needs to do research. My husband supports everything she says. So what’s the problem? ME!

I’ve already had bad experiences with her older brother misusing a computer when he accidentally (or maybe on purpose) got onto sights he should never have been on. That was seven years ago and things have changed dramatically since then. Now we have more than just the porn sights to contend with: there are blogs, predators and cyber-bullying that can result in some horrible things.

If you’re a parent or grandparent 45+, you’re probably “technologically challenged” just as I am. We didn’t grow up with computers, but have been forced to become more computer literate than we really want to because of our jobs or to keep up to date with this new world we live in. That’s the bad news. The good news is that our children are grown up or in college and know most of what we’re going to share with you.

But if you’re a parent under 45: good luck. Your children range from 0-18 and the bad news is that they know more about computers than you probably do. If you doubt that statement, just ask them how to copy a file or check something on the internet and they will be gloating while showing you how to do it in two or less steps.

When it comes to being a parent of a literate and computer trained child, we are definitely at a disadvantage. That makes it more difficult to set the rules, monitor usage and to understand the risks.

As parents, we have spent the majority of our time trying to keep our children safe. It was easy to put up safety gates, buckle them into a car-seat and to teach them not to touch a stove burner when it was turned on. However, the internet is a different animal and allows them to go into this world we don't always have control over. This means taking steps to protect them there as well.

Much of this first article is taken from a great website: <http://wiredkids.org>. If you have computer access check out the "Parenting Online" guide provided there. If not, please read on for further information that is paraphrased below from that article.

Let's talk about some general information:

Search engines are a tool used to find out about a particular topic. There are two that are particularly child appropriate: "Yahooligans!" is a good search engine for children ten or younger that hand-selects sites for kids making sure that nothing slips through. Another is "Ask Jeeves for Kids" which is recommended for children ten or older. It contains more sites, but isn't as "scrubbed" (cleaned up) as the Yahooligans! site.

Search engine filtering options limit the types of information the search engine can feed back to you. This is done by restricting certain words and/or certain images from being searched for. It is important to filter BOTH!

Family friendly sites are those that hand-select what sites can be opened up. They are reviewed regularly by employees or volunteers for the site to check content and appropriateness.

Online safety sites are everywhere on the internet. Some of the best are WiredKids.org, StopCyberbullying.org and Internet SuperHeros.org. Other sites are also available and are geared towards specific age groups and provide safety information relating to viruses, privacy, netiquette and responsible surfing. Disney's Surfswellisland.com is one of the best and available without charge. Another is Larry Magid's Safekids.com which has a teen version called Safeteens.com.

Specific sites geared towards helping with homework are Discovery.com, Nationalgeographic.org, PBSkids.org and The National Gallery of Art kids page www.nga.gov/kids.htm. You can also ask your school or public librarian for sites that they recommend as safe for children.

Join us next week when we will talk about internet safety rules for you and your children.

This information is sponsored by the Marshall Independent and brought to you by the American Red Cross – Prairie Winds Chapter serving Lincoln, Lyon, Pipestone and Yellow Medicine Counties.

If you have any questions or need further information on the topic covered in this article, please contact the local Chapter at 507-532-5565.