Pointers For Parents

Six Tips To Keep Your Kids Safe Online

(NASPA)—Steven, a 5-year-old in Houston who has been surfing the Internet since the age of 2, often shows his less tech-savvy mother how to access her favorite Internet sites and find information. These days, he's the rule rather than the exception.

Kids like Steven are the reason that America Online and the National School Boards Foundation have joined together to launch a new safety campaign—"Safety Clicks!"—offering parents and their children the tips and tools they need to stay safe online.

Steven's budding expertise illustrates the challenges parents face as their kids spend more time online and are often more sophisticated than Mom and Dad at navigating the Web. In fact, Nielsen/Net Ratings announced that 20 million surfers aged 2-17 accessed the Web in July 2002, spending on average more than nine hours online and initiating 16 sessions.

A variety of both information and technology resources is already available to parents who want to make sure that their child's online experience is both enriching and secure. Many leading Internet service providers build in technological tools such as online times and the ability to limit access to sites.

But National School Boards Foundation Director Robin Thurman cautions, "When it comes to keeping kids safe online, technological tools are only part of the solution. It's just as important that parents be engaged and involved in their children's online experience. Nothing is more valuable than spending time with your kids online and talking with them about how to stay safe."

That's where the "Safety Clicks!" campaign comes in. It offers parents and children two sets of six tips for online safety. The tips are featured along with information

When a child uses the Internet, it's important to set ground rules, but parents should also see it as a learning experience.

and resources for parents and educators at the AOL Safety Clicks Web site at www.safetyclicks.com. The six tips for parents are:

1. Use the Internet with your child. Be involved at all times in your child's online activities; talk to them about online safety.

2. Learn about and use parental controls, and set ground rules for online behavior.

3. Know at all times who your child is talking to online and what Web sites they visit.

4. Put your child's computer in a "family" area of the house and never in the child's room

5. Be sure to report conduct or material that is offensive to your ISP; if it is threatening, report it to local law enforcement.

6. Teach your child never to plan a face-to-face meeting with online friends, and to tell you if they are asked to meet someone offline.

With so many resources out there, the best news for parents is that it is easy to learn about ways to help protect their children online—without preventing them from exploring all the benefits that the Internet has to offer.