



Before They Connect:

A Mini Guide
for Parents
Before
Their Children
Plug In



PREPARED BY

WORLDWIDE ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN



BEFORE THEY CONNECT

Digital Citizens

The moment anyone connects to the Internet, he or she has entered a community of over 3 billion people and growing. Connection online dubs any person of any age a *global digital citizen*. Connection is just about as main stream for children as it is for adults. 93% of youth ages 12-17 use the internet, and 73% have their own cell phones.ⁱ The problem is, as a child engages in technology and social media, becoming a digital citizen participant, his or her vulnerability of sexual exploitation and other harm increases. One study demonstrated a skilled predator can groom a child online in about 20 minutes.ⁱⁱ Families are the only protection between children and the digital community. This brochure is meant to empower parents in preparing the family for entry into responsible digital citizenship.

Digital Rites of Passage

Entering the digital community can be thought of as a rite of passage for youth. Rites of passage usually involve activities that prepare the individual for a new role in society. It often involves youth being prepared to enter an adult community with opportunities and privileges held by that community. The digital community is a worldwide, adult community that allows human contact and influence in a way the world has never experienced before in history. A survey of the digital landscape is necessary in order to prepare responsible digital citizens, and for staying any potential dangers that may harm an individual or interfere with family relationships.

A deliberate process of thinking about digital citizenship should take place before children's entry into it, and should be similar to thinking about our physical communities. Boundaries such as: where, how far, how long, how young, and with who; expectations of responsible behavior; and a framework for healthy, constructive contribution; should get established before connecting. The time for establishing boundaries and responsibilities for digital citizenship is before they connect. If parents are not ready or willing to take the time to safely navigate the digital world community with their children, then it is probably not the time to let your child have access to devices.

“One study demonstrated a skilled predator can groom a child online in about 20 minutes.”

“93% of teens, ages 12-17 use the internet, and 73% have their own cell phone.”



Worldwide Organization for Women
Faith, Family, Sovereignty Since 1977

Digital Grooming

Children are getting groomed and recruited for sexual exploitation and abuse.

1 in 25 youth have received an “aggressive” online sexual solicitation, that included attempts to contact them offline.ⁱⁱⁱ

Grooming is psychological manipulation a sexual predator uses against a child over a period of time to gain their trust, desensitize the conscience, and remove sexual inhibition to commit a sexual assault. Two main elements needed for grooming are deceit and secrecy. This makes the internet prime real estate for perpetrators. *Digital Grooming* takes place online between perpetrator and victim. Online grooming goes beyond prurient driven crime, and into a very lucrative sex industry. Predators are grooming youth online for prostitution, child porn, sextortion and blackmail.

There are several factors that distinguish the digital environment to the perpetrator’s advantage. There is the anonymity of it, where anyone can pose as anyone without any way to verify. Another is the secrecy aspect. Teen thinking is 71% believe what they do online should be secret^{iv} The majority of youth digitally navigate in private or alone, which means the majority of parents are facilitating this misguided behavior, whether intentional or not.

Perpetrators are extremely skilled in what they do, and will carefully single out a victim. Online, children carelessly leave digital crumbs, which can cue predators. Predators look for anything to indicate vulnerability in a child. Predators are deft in giving immediate, positive feedback, to a child, providing instant gratification. Predators hangout online where youth go; chat rooms either through gaming or social media.

Predator Hang-outs

Do you know if your child is playing MMORPGs? It’s the acronym for *massively multiplayer online role player game*. MMORPG games open the playing up to millions of other players. There are MMORPG guilds with chatrooms your child may get invited to, or seek to join. There are guild sub-groups according to every perversion and pleasure, which are controlled by a host or manager. If online gaming has already been allowed, parents should immediately get involved. Gaming devices should be kept in the family’s public space, and never allowed in bedrooms. A computer and smart phone is also a gaming device. Questions for opening the dialogue include:

- ❖ Do you chat when you game?
- ❖ Do you belong to a guild?
- ❖ Who is your guild manager?
- ❖ What do you know about the guild manager?
- ❖ Which friends play MMORGS games?



Parents often become their child's friend on Facebook and message their children regularly believing it is good digital supervision, unaware that there are thousands of apps that encourage secrecy and facilitate the sharing of personal information, location and money exchange among youth. The fact that so many are not US based makes investigation difficult for law enforcement. Current popular apps among youth are:

- ❖ Omegle, whose moniker is, "Talk to Strangers," which your child can, picks strangers randomly to chat with, and no registration is required.
- ❖ Snapchat is popular for snapping a quick picture and sending to someone, that is supposed to disappear after a few minutes, but that does not count the receiver's ability to take a picture of the snapchat sent with their phone.
- ❖ Snapcash allows the exchange of money as easily as snapchat, as long as there is a debit card.
- ❖ Periscope allows live video broadcasting and exploration with others.
- ❖ Kik allows messaging and picture sending privately.
- ❖ Meetme is new technology that allows disclosure of location to find others near their location to chat with.
- ❖ WeChat is another GPS based app allowing users to look around and see if others are near by to chat with or meet.

The above listed apps all have millions of users worldwide, are very popular among young people, and are commonly used for sexting. That's the exchange of sexually illicit photos and video. Apps are easily installed and then uninstalled, when parents are around. Do you know your child's favorite app?

Moral Grooming

The type of grooming your child will most likely encounter online is moral grooming. The internet is full of ideas that conflict with religious and family values. What we practice is what we become as people. There are no digital exceptions. There is a prevalent moral disconnect online among teens with behavior in taking the low bar, and that they are getting away with, because Mom and Dad aren't observing and able to correct it. Discussion of family morals and values applied to internet behavior and use is vital. Parents must take the time to sort through the digital flood of information with a child, and although important, protection involves more than making shelter against the storms of exploitive material available online. It involves moving the young digital citizen away from value eroding elements to higher ground.

An obvious moral eroder is pornography use and addiction. The addiction factor, especially of pre-adolescent and young adolescent boys is heightened. Instant gratification, which online pornography delivers is the foundation for any addiction.

Children and youth cannot do this on their own. Their brains are still in the process of development, and thoughtful decision making hasn't set in. Adding to the mix hyper states of hormones, mingled with fantasy, especially while online using social media or gaming, even the most responsible child can't be expected to maintain good judgment.



Make a Family Plan for Digital Use

Parents can brainstorm, discuss and record first privately, what their family plan will be. This should generate a checklist for both the parent and the child. The process of making a plan will help determine your family's unique rites of passage.

WOW recommends some essentials:

- ❖ Establish the rule that all devices capable of connection online stay out of the bedrooms and remain in the family's common space.
- ❖ Meeting face to face with someone online is not allowed.
- ❖ Parents are permanent observers and participants
- ❖ Set up accounts in the parent's name, or set up with your child.
- ❖ Privacy and secrecy are not acceptable.
- ❖ Install parental controls and filters on computers, tablets, and phones. There are many apps and software that can be installed. Some are free, but most carry a fee or are for purchase.
- ❖ Make devices password protected, that only parents know the password and can log in the child.
- ❖ Make a time management plan that spells out when and how long.
- ❖ Establish the understanding that if certain rules are broken, the device is will be removed.
- ❖ Create clear instructions for the child of what to do if pornographic material is stumbled upon.

Needful dialogue between parent and child should be noted as well:

- ❖ Teach the child to never give personal information such as last name, address, phone number age, geographical location, etc.
- ❖ Introduce the concept of digital citizenship with the child, and lay expectations for responsibilities and
- ❖ Talk about the potential dangers that are associated with internet use: predators, bullying, sexting, addiction, pornography, disruption of family relationships, idle time, etc.
- ❖ Establish ongoing evaluation and discussion time with your child about their internet use and applying family values.

Some families are printing out contracts that children sign.

The Secret to Digital Health & Safety is Building Strong Family Relationships

By Nicholeen Peck

Filters, Software, and Safety Precautions

It is vital for parents to take all safety precautions possible to keep their children safe from elicited and graphic images, videos and websites, as well as from ideas that would undermine their family's faith, values and worldview. Families must be the dominant influence in their child's moral, social, emotional,



and cultural education in order for family cultures, religious cultures, and national cultures to remain strong and intact and for a healthy childhood.

Installing filters on computers is usually thought of by involved parents, but many parents still don't know that filters can also be installed on iPads, tablets and phones. This practice is highly recommended.

It is important to realize however, that filters do not always work with all applications and that some websites or applications purposely circumvent filters. So, the rule to remember is, filter and protect through passwords, programs and software and consistently check up on the sites the child is accessing through parental controls, but never assume the child is fully protected because a filter or program has been installed.

The wisest of parents will teach their children that a digital device, like a phone or tablet is a tool, not a toy, and should be respected as any other power tool is respected. If parents define digital objects as tools and expect children to use them as such, and set the example of proper usage for their children, then a healthier relationship with the devices will develop.

As we all know, digital devices are becoming smarter and smarter as years go by. Digital devices are so smart that they often end up controlling the people who are using them. Children and adults need to be aware that a person isn't ready to safely use a digital device until the person has adopted and utilized self-mastery skills that promote giving yourself a no answer when a craving for stimulation comes.

Impact on Relationships

Relationships are the most stimulating aspect of human life. From the time a child is born the stimulation, in the form of security, nourishment and comfort they get from their mother is vital for thriving and survival. Functional family relationships provide safety, love, connection, meaning for life, identity, cultural awareness, basis for confidence, life skills, and happiness. It is important to realize that we develop relationships with things and situations as well as develop relationships with friends and family. Connective stimulation that occurs in the brain through person to person contact is comfortable and healthy for the brain to experience.

At an increasingly alarming rate children are choosing to connect to their devices in a human to device, human to game or human to social media relationship rather than connecting deeply with family and often times even live friends. The stimulation a person experiences when attaching to a device, digital game, or the internet has a different effect on the brain than connecting to live people. The chemicals that create safety and provide for clear problem solving are over run by chemicals that induce a chemical high which creates dependency.

As children attach to social media, online gaming groups, and the digital stimulation of the internet they detach from live people. The more time spent in a digital world the harder real people are to connect to and focus on. Real people cannot be controlled or manipulated like digital events and real people have feelings and physical needs.

Likewise, if a person has a problem with someone else online they can ignore the person or rant about them to their other online friends. They can also choose to post angry comments and lecture their enemy with no chance of personal harm coming to them. They can be aggressive and even bully other people without anyone finding out they are doing it. Cyber-bullying effects all sexes and ages of online users, but primarily teenaged girls, who are oftentimes more deeply attached to social media platforms where bullying can easily occur.



The global increase in cyber-bullying occurrences is evidence that there is a negative relationship impact on young people who consistently use social media and chat groups.

The best way to stay safe from cyber-bullying is to focus energy on live friendships and family relationships. Youth who disconnect from devices for an extended period of time often report that they are happier with their family life and feel more positive and more productive. However, they do admit that they feel out of the social loop because the majority of modern social interactions among teens are often happening on social media.

Wise parents will help their children choose connectedness to family over digital social inclusion. It can be hard to make that choice, but with a little bit of effort a family can supportively help a child create a live peer group and sponsor live activities, which will provide much more meaning and social fulfillment.

If parents don't explain the purpose of digital devices and be willing to give no answers about access, including amount of time and time of day or night they can be used, then they will inadvertently turn their child over to a digital world that will make them seem far away, hard to reach and unattached to family and to real life cares and responsibilities. This is a source of extreme frustration for parents and youth because a basic relationship need is not being met.

How Strong Relationships Can Keep Children Safe

The single most effective way to prepare youth to have safe digital device boundaries before and during the years of device usage is to establish a strong, open bond with parents throughout development. Parents who talk regularly with their children and who maintain a leadership role in the home are more likely to have children who will follow their counsel and accept their no answers about device usage.

Parents need to spend time discussing with their children daily and weekly. Each day families parents and children can talk about the news of the day and how it relates to their values, faith, and worldview. They can expose misinformation and morally destructive ideas encountered online and in the news. They can also talk with their children about friends and social concerns or dilemmas they may be having and help them plan for social success. They can offer their home for parties and get to know their child's live friends as part of this process.

Each week parents should have a one on one talk with their child to provide direct learning time and to talk about the child's desires, questions, concerns and goals.

The single-most effective way to help children not desire a deep connection with the digital world is to have a fully engaging real world, starting with an active and exciting family life. Part of creating this exciting family life is scheduling fun family and parent/child activities each week.

Parents often complain of being too busy to incorporate family time or individual time with their children, but it need not be complicated, expensive or even take the parent out of the home. Playing a card game, reading a story, going for a walk, flying a kite, cooking a special meal together, or riding bicycles together are all examples of simple ways parents can unify and bond with their children as they grow.

If bonds between children and parents are strong and communication lines are open then children will not abuse digital privileges if parents tell them no, and they will talk about what they are seeing and learning online and on social media as well. This is the very best way to keep children safe for the long-term.



It greatly undermines a parent's influence.

The Most Obvious Online Danger

Pornography has a strong-hold upon the online world. Even the characters in digital games can be dressed pornographically and perform pornographic acts. They can even rape other characters in some games. The things children see, hear and allow to access their minds are who they become mentally, if not physically as well.

Obviously it is dangerous to the health and happiness of people everywhere to engage in the pornography world of the objectification of women and children as sexual toys for adult pleasure. When people are fed a steady diet of sexual acts they don't value people as human beings, but instead see people as things to be manipulated and used and then turned off or discarded.

Young adults used to begin adulthood by looking for a lifetime companion and to begin a family, but now many young adults aren't even dating because they are able to get their sexual appetite fulfilled by online pornography sites. Sadly, many marriages and sex lives are failing because of pornography as well. Men and women are expecting their live partners to behave in non-natural, animalistic ways as they have seen on pornography sites. This objectification within a relationship makes couples not feel sexually safe and comfortable and leads to emotional disconnection. So, to prepare for future happy relationships young people should avoid pornography at all costs.

Viewing pornography should *not* be a private matter for youth. Some people think that things like kissing, teen relationships and pornography are private and that parents shouldn't get involved in their child's private life. When parents are asked if they want their child viewing pornography or having sexual relationships before marriage they report that they do not, but they don't know how to stop the practice. Having regular parent/child talks with youth about what they're viewing and giving understood no answers about elicited material and pornography helps youth make more informed choices and stay away from pornography, which has been declared a "public health crisis" in some places.

Teach children about how pornography is a lie. It shows sexual activity that a loving couple would never do to each other. It is not about loving and cherishing a devoted companion, but instead about selfishly using another person to get a sexual high for yourself. As parents openly explain to their children in a timely manner about how a healthy sexual and marriage relationship is meant to be the more the child will see pornography for the lie it is and choose to not engage in it.

It is not a matter of *if* a child will see pornography, but *when* the child will see it. Even the more diligent parents will end up talking to a child about how to get a graphic picture they stumbled upon or saw on a billboard out of their child's disturbed mind. Since seeing a pornographic image at some point is inevitable parents need to teach their children what to do to stay safe when they see it.

Step number one: say out loud, "No! That is pornography."

Step number two: put the phone or tablet face down on a surface and leave the room.

Step number three: alert parents that they have seen something and that it needs to be deleted from their device.



ⁱ Lenhart, Amanda; Purcell, Kritsten; & Smith, Aaron; & Zickuhr, Kathryn; "Social Media & Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults," *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, February 2010, pg 4

ⁱⁱ Lorenzo-Dus, Nuria, Izura, Christina, Perez-Tatum, Rocio, "Understanding grooming discourse in computer-mediated environments" *Discourse, Context & Media: Elsevier*, volume 12, June 2016, pg 40-50

ⁱⁱⁱ Janis Wolak, David Finkelhor, Kimberly Mitchell; "1 in 7 Youth: The Statistics of Online Sexual Solicitations:" *Crimes Against Children Research Center: Dec. 2017*

^{iv} Lenhart, Amanda; Purcell, Kritsten; & Smith, Aaron; & Zickuhr, Kathryn; "Social Media & Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults," *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, February 2010, pg 4

