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13th July 2017

A matter of concern

Dear Parents,

I am sure you have enjoyed the Summer Break with your child/children. This mail is to share a concern.

A Principal of one of the leading boarding schools of the country expressed his view that he considers smart phones to be more dangerous than marijuana or chemical drugs. Now, this may sound unrealistic, but it points towards the growing usage of the Internet (and in many cases - addiction); life in the virtual world and online pornography. This Principal, also shared with me his findings, that, 40 % of his students had seen pornography at home before getting admitted to the boarding school. This indicates unlimited and unchecked access of internet at home.

I am very concerned about this trend and what it does to young minds. I am attaching a Times of India article dated 6th June 2017, which has also raised this serious concern.

Restricting the use of Wi-Fi and or Devices with data plans is a starting point and the first thing you need to do. However, I think fool proof control of the Wi-Fi or the device will be challenging, since in many cases parents give their children smart phones to enable them to stay safe or perform family tasks like online shopping or purchase of movie tickets etc. The Internet is also used for research and learning.

You will need to do what parents need to do. That is be on top of the situation in a proactive way.

The following points (from an article on the internet, duly edited) may be considered to chart out the most effective approach. I do understand that the approach may vary from home to home.

Guidelines for keeping your children safe

It will be difficult to keep your kids completely safe online. Even if you set up parental controls on your home Wi-Fi and Computing Devices, your children will use many other Devices that don't have parental controls or any other smart device. To keep your children safe, **you'll need to teach them** to make good decisions online—**even when you're not around.** This last part is very important.

Below are some general tips you can use when teaching your children about online safety:

- **Parents must educate themselves and learn everything they can about the Internet.** Being familiar with the Internet will not only help you understand the risks, but it will also help you talk to your children. This is important – to keep talking to your children about everything in their lives and to be able to understand their situations.
- **Set standards for what your children can and cannot do online.** Ground rules just like for every other type of behaviour. It's important to make rules for your children so they know what's expected of them. Don't wait until something bad happens to start creating guidelines. We do that with Discipline and other Policies in School too.
- **Teach your children to keep personal information private.** It's usually not a good idea to post personal information online such as phone numbers, addresses, and credit cards. If criminals gain access to this information, they can use it to harm them or their families.
- **Teach your children to use social networking sites safely.** Sites like Facebook and others, allow children to share photos and videos of themselves, as well as have conversations with friends and strangers. If your children share something with friends, it's still possible for it to get into the wrong hands. Generally, they should only post something online if they're comfortable with everyone in the world seeing it.
- **Discuss with your children how porn affects the way you deal with and engage with the opposite sex:** You might like to go through the following link:
 - <http://fightthenewdrug.org/adam-savage-speaks-out-on-porns-harms/>
- **Encourage your children to come to you if they encounter a problem.** If your child gets into trouble online, you'll want him or her to come to you instead of hiding it. Keep in mind that your kids could accidentally encounter a bad site, even if they're doing everything right.
- **Share your knowledge of the SM sites** and what each allows and what they are used for respectively. You are advised to keep a continuous check on the type of Social Media sites being visited such as Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Kik Messenger etc.

You may access the link below for more such sites:

- <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/16-apps-and-websites-kids-are-heading-to-after-facebook>

You can never do enough when it comes to the safety of your children. But you can start today with the guidelines above and continue to apply your minds to other options. I would advise that parents ensure their smart devices are protected through an appropriate firewall software, establish parental controls and keep talking and engage yourselves with your children.

On this note, I have invited Mr. Rakshit Tandon, an expert on cyber issues, to conduct workshops for our students of Classes IV to XII on 20th July 2017. He has also agreed to take a session to discuss all such issues with interested Parents on Saturday 22nd July 2017 at 10:00 am. If you wish to take part in this session, kindly confirm your attendance to the class teacher of your ward latest by Wednesday, 20th July 2017.

Hope you would find this session relevant and useful.

Warm regards,

Pramod Sharma
School Director