Castle Rock School District No. 401

Promoting Online Safety

Guidelines for Parents

Your child needs the Internet; it is a wonderful research tool that schools use to enhance the education of your child. Even if there is not a computer in your home, it is nearly assured that your child is online at school, and likely at their friends’ houses as well. Your child has dozens of encyclopedias and experts in any field of information at his or her fingertips; he can play, communicate with friends, meet new ones, and explore new ideas.

But the Internet isn’t all good. Dropping your child off online is no more advisable than dropping him or her off at the mall unsupervised. Just as you don’t give your child unrestricted access in a video store or theater, and just as you monitor what types of books and magazines he or she reads, you should also be in charge of your child’s Internet use in your home.

Parents who take responsibility for their children’s online computer use greatly minimize their potential risks while online. Make clear, easily understood rules for your children when they are traveling around in cyberspace. Make it a family rule to:

- Never offer identifying information in a public message such as a chat or IM - including home address, school name, or telephone number. Be sure anyone your child communicates with in person or online is someone both you and your child knows and trusts before giving out any information via email. Think carefully before revealing any personal information such as age, marital status or financial information.

- Get to know the online sites your child uses. If you don’t know how to log on, get your child to show you. Find out what type of information is offered on the sites your child visits and whether there are ways for parents to block objectionable material.

- Never respond to messages or blog items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you uncomfortable in any way. Encourage your children to tell you if they receive such messages, or encounter them online. If you or your child receives a harassing or threatening message or one of a sexual nature, forward a copy of the message to your Internet service provider and ask for their assistance. Immediately report any transmission of child pornography encountered while online to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678.
Never forget that people online may not be who they seem. You can’t see or hear the person on the other end of messages; it would be easy for someone to misrepresent his or herself. A “12-year old girl” could in reality be a 40-year old man. Let your child know responsible adults do not pursue relationships with minors.

Remember, not everything your read online is true. An offer that’s too good to be true probably is. Be very careful about any offers that involve you coming to a meeting or someone visiting your home.

Teach your child responsible use of online resources. Set reasonable rules and guidelines for your children’s computer use. Discuss the rules and post them prominently near the computer as a reminder. Monitor your children’s compliance of the rules. A child or teen’s excessive use of online sites, especially late at night, may be a clue to a potential problem. Remember, computers and online services are not electronic babysitters!

Reduce the Risks—Be Involved in Your Children’s Online Activity

Make ongoing computer safety a family project. Consider installing the computer in the family room; always keep your child’s computer in an open area. Never allow a computer with Internet access in your child’s bedroom Get to know their “online friends” just as all their other friends. Regularly review your computer files.

To restrict your child’s access to discussion, blogs or other forums that contain inappropriate textual or graphic material, many commercial online services have systems in place for parents to block out parts of the service they believe to be inappropriate for their children. If you are concerned, contact the service by telephone or email to find out how to add these restrictions to any accounts your child can access.

The best way to assure a positive online experience for your child is to be aware of what they are doing. Stay in touch; spend time with your children while they are online. Have them show you the sites they visit and the functions those sites contain. Talk to your child about online dangers and let them know you are there to help them get out of a bad situation.

Children and teenagers need a certain amount of privacy. But they also need parental involvement and daily supervision. The same parenting skills you use in the real world also apply while your child is online.

If you have concerns about your children’s online activity, talk with them. Open communication with your children, using online safety resources, and getting online yourself to be aware of what is out there and accessible to your children will help alert you to any potential problems that may occur with their computer use.

Information courtesy of Eugene School District 4J and CyberAngels.org