ONLINE CHAT BEGINS AT HOME 1:21:20

NARRATOR
For some it comes easy, for others it does not. Regardless of where you see yourself, talking with your children and keeping them safe when they are online should be one of your top priorities as a parent, grandparent, or guardian.

Unfortunately, however, this is often easier said than done because for many of us, understanding the virtual world of the Internet can be confusing – not to mention, time consuming.

But, the fact is, the Internet is where our kids spend a lot of time doing homework, talking with friends through instant messaging, social networking, and playing games. It's up to us to help keep our children safe when they are online.

Not surprisingly, developing an adult identity is a teenager's rite of passage. And along with that comes autonomy. As your child pushes to become more independent, it's normal and natural for him to put distance between the two of you.

ELIZABETH MOON (VO)
She must be doing something, but every time I walk in the screen goes blank.

AMANDA (VO)
What now? Why can't I ever be left alone? She always pops in right when I get online.

NARRATOR
If you invade her space– especially her private world online, she may tell you to stay out of her business or make it perfectly clear that you are not welcome. It's quite natural for you to feet hurt, confused, or frustrated by these efforts to close you out.

AMANDA
"It's not that I'm doing anything wrong, it's just that when I'm playing games online or I/Ming my friends it's my space. It's not like I would listen into her conversations on the telephone. So, when did my business become her business?"

NARRATOR

As parents and grandparents, it is important to help keep our children safe when they are on the Internet. But, first, we need to know just exactly what it is they are doing when they are online.

Most kids log onto the Internet with good intentions to do homework. Case in point: Amanda needs to find information on the penguins of Antarctica for a research paper. She does a Google search on the subject and instantly many possible sites appear on the screen. She clicks on Antarctica Penguins and Cool Antarctica appears on the screen. She looks at the pictures…checks out the facts…wonders if taking a cruise would be fun…and then clicks on the Ugg sale and clothes link.

AMANDA
"You get on line to do home work, but then all of a sudden you see "oh hey what's that ad for? What's this about"? And two hours later you haven't done any homework." I try to get my homework done, but then I remember that "Oh, I haven't checked my email since yesterday".

NARRATOR
And then friends start instant messaging or text messaging and while kids may think they are masters at multi-tasking, the urgency of homework is something that is not quite as urgent any more. Catching up with friends is much more important right now.

As a parent or grandparent, it's important to stay connected to your teen and often that means knowing what is going on in his world without being too intrusive.

ELIZABETH MOON
"Do we need to limit your Internet time"?

AMANDA
"No, I'm telling you, I'm doing my homework".

ELIZABETH MOON
"Where"? "Let me see what you've done"

NARRATOR
The opposite approach - letting your teen do as she wishes without setting any limits, without providing any direction, and without maintaining your emotional connection might be interpreted by your teen that you don't care.

If you haven't done it yet, now is the time to set up clear, simple, easy-to-read rules for Internet use. This includes: what web sites are okay for them to visit, who they can talk to, when and how long can they be online and where they can use a computer.

Ask your teens about their online activities – especially about email, blogs, gaming and their social networks. Social networking sites are the "go to" sites to meet and be with friends. They are also one of the best places for online predators to find potential victims.

Understanding how the social networking sites work will help you to initiate a dialogue about the rules and potential risks involved. Teens want you to respect their privacy, but when it comes to keeping them safe online, it's time for you to ask a few questions.

For example, begin by asking your child what he does online. Does he use MySpace or Facebook for social networking? If so, what kind of a profile has he posted? Does he use privacy settings to control the friends he adds? How does he decide who to add as a friend? Does he think everyone is who they say they are?

MICHAEL
Yeah, when my parents try to like watch over me you know, and especially if they do it too much, I feel like if it's the email, I feel invaded a little bit. It's an invasion of privacy and I think kind of it's a curiosity but it's also a trust issue. And I respect that they are just trying to be cautious about what their kid is doing on the internet but I think sometimes that it can go just you know, too much.

COURTNEY
My parents have looked at my emails. And so I have become very cautious in what I tell my friends. Usually yes or no answers and so they can't really get mad at me if my friends or peers say something that irritates them a little bit. So they can't really shoot it back at me for like promoting this.

COLTON
Well if my parents came in and were like looking over my shoulder I'd probably just stop because it is really uncomfortable. Its like, I feel like I'm being censored. There are certain things that I can't say even though it would be something that I would say in front of them, you feel a little uncomfortable, you feel a little censored because of them standing behind you going like… you know? A little off topic. And I think what you talk to with your friends is way different than what you talk to with your parents. So it's a little, it'd be really uncomfortable.

Well I was really big into writing and my friend started his MySpace and so I put, I made my own MySpace which I was a little kind of etchy about but I still put it up there. And I just put my writing on there. And I hopefully get people to read it and I try to promote it as much as I can.

NARRATOR

Does he post a personal blog? Does he think that sharing personal information can be dangerous? Has he used his real name and age in his blog or profile? Does he understand that once information or a photo is posted, it cannot be taken back?

Has she thought about the consequences of what is posted for everyone to see? How would a potential college recruiter or employer react to the content?

PAIGE
My photos really are just of my friends or of different pictures that I think are cute or whatever that I want to put as my background. But there is nothing bad that I would take. I've heard of things though that are inappropriate so, going on at my school.

NARRATOR
Finally, while it is impossible to constantly monitor your child's online activity, it is very important to locate the computer in a central location, never in a child's bedroom.

By taking the time to explore the Internet with your children, not only do you gain greater understanding of the virtual world, it also opens the door to discussion along the way.
Helping to keep your children safe on the Internet is your responsibility.

For more information go to netsafeutah.org

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