Online Gaming for Parents

Online gaming often involves interaction with other computers and live players. It's fun for kids to connect with others, but they also need to understand how to protect themselves so gaming remains an enjoyable activity. Though some parents might like to prohibit game use, the reality is that most young people have access to computers and online games, if not at home, then at friends' houses and possibly at school. As a parent or guardian, it's important to understand what the risks are and how to help your child navigate the gaming world. The first step is STOP. THINK. CONNECT.

Keep a Clean Machine.

Gaming systems are computers with software that needs to be kept up-to-date (just like your PC, laptop, phone or tablet). Security protections are built-in and updated on a regular basis. Take time to make sure all the online gaming devices in your house have the latest protections.

- **Keep security software current**: Having the latest security software, web browser, and operating system are the best defenses against viruses, malware, and other online threats.
- **Protect all devices that connect to the Internet**: Computers, smart phones, gaming systems, and other web-enabled devices all need protection from viruses and malware.

Protect Your Child's Personal Information.

Talk to your children about what constitutes personal information. Children need to know what is appropriate to share and what is not. Names, birthdays, age, geographic location, contact information, and photos with identifiable information all count as personal information. While it's fun to engage in games with players from around the globe, children should retain a level of anonymity to protect themselves from those who might not have the best intentions.

- **Secure your kids' accounts**: Ask for protection beyond passwords. Many account providers now offer additional ways for you verify who you are before you play games on that site.
- **Make passwords long and strong**: Combine capital and lowercase letters with numbers and symbols to create a more secure password.
- **Help your kids own their online presence**: When available, set their privacy and security settings on websites to your comfort level for information sharing. Remind them that it's ok to limit who they share information with.
- **Have your kids use an avatar** rather than an actual picture of themselves.
- **Use voice chat safely or not at all**. If your kids play a game that features live voice chat, make sure they disguise their voice. If the game does not have this feature, do not let them use voice chat.

Be Web Wise.

Stay informed of the latest Internet developments, know what to do if something goes wrong and be aware of what your kids are doing online.

- **Stay current. Keep pace with new ways to stay safe online**. Check trusted Web sites for the latest information, share with your children, and encourage them to be web wise.
- **Think before you act**: Teach your kids to be wary of communication that implores them to act immediately, offers something that sounds too good to be true, or asks for personal information. They should not accept downloads from strangers. This includes cheat programs that may claim to help them perform better in the game, but really could be carrying malware.
- **Know how to block and/or report a cyberbully**. Keep a record of the conversation if they are being harassed and encourage them not to engage the bully.
- **Read and understand the ratings for the games that your children are playing**. Some game sites have multiple games with different ratings, so check all of them.
- **Participate in the game with your kids**.

Be a Good Online Citizen.
It is easy to say things from behind a computer screen that you would never say face to face. Remind your kids to maintain the same level of courtesy online as they would in the real world.

- **Safer for me more secure for all**: What you and your kids do online has the potential to affect everyone – at home, at work and around the world. Practicing good online habits benefits the global digital community.
- **Be respectful of other players**. Playing games has always been a ripe setting for engaging in conversation that can provoke other players. Online gaming should be a place where good sportsmanship is practiced.

STOP. Before you use the Internet, take time to understand the risks and learn how to spot potential problems.

THINK. Take a moment to be certain the path is clear ahead. Watch for warning signs and consider how your actions online could impact your safety, or your family's.

CONNECT. Enjoy the Internet with greater confidence, knowing you've taken the right steps to safeguard yourself and your computer.

Additional resources:
- Sony Playstation Knowledge Center: http://us.playstation.com/support/parents/index.htm
- Microsoft XBOX – GetGameSmart: www.getgamesmart.com
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children – NetSmartz: http://www.netsmartz.org/Gaming