Setting Online Boundaries for Elementary School Kids

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Every child is different, and children of different ages need to be addressed differently, especially when it comes to talking about Internet safety and boundaries. Open communication is key for every age group, but do you know what your elementary-schooler needs to hear and discuss about Internet safety?

Here are a few safety tips from CommonSenseMedia.org for any age group:

- Never share names, schools, ages, phone numbers, or addresses.
- Never open an email from a stranger – it may contain viruses that can harm a computer.
- Never send pictures to strangers or view pictures that strangers send to them.
- Keep passwords private (except to parents).
- Tell a trusted adult if something mean or creepy happens on the Internet.
- People aren't necessarily who they say they are in cyberspace.

Beyond the basics of maintaining general privacy and safety, children of different ages should have different boundaries because they use the Internet differently.

For example, elementary school children may want to use the Internet primarily to play games and send email to friends and family. Whereas middle school age children are beginning to participate in social networking, and high school teens are often immersed in all kinds of online activity.

So how do we, as parents and caretakers, help each of our children set boundaries for their Internet use? Here are a few tips from Common Sense Media for elementary school aged children:

- **Visit only age-appropriate sites.** Check out the site before your kids visit it. Know what features and what content exist and make sure they're good for your kids.
- **Search safely.** Use safe search settings for young kids or think about applying filtering software to limit inappropriate exposure.
- **Avoid strangers.** Tell your kids that people aren't always who they say they are online. Explain that if someone they don't know talks to them, they shouldn't respond but should let you know.
- **Be a good cyber citizen!** Remind kids that an Internet playground is still a playground and they need to play nicely. A good rule of thumb: If they wouldn't do something in real life, they shouldn't do it online. Find out how your children can report mean behavior or unkind content on their favorite sites and teach them how to do it.
- **Online cheating?** It's still cheating and it's a no-no – pure and simple.
- **Keep the computer in a central place.** So you can see what's going on.
- **Establish expectations and limits** about the amount of time your children spend online and what they do. Check out our family media agreement for a helpful place to start.
- **View your own habits carefully.** You are their role models.
- **But, mostly, be involved and have fun with them!** Keeping kids safe and teaching them how to use digital technology responsibly is all about staying involved. Start by showing interest in the sites they visit and the games they play, and your job will be a lot easier when they start exploring these technologies more independently.