

PARENTAL SUPERVISION AND CYBER SURFING

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Abstract

The increasing trend of Internet usage is continuously presenting new functionalities before us. Today, through more than 200 social networking websites the children are communicating over the Internet. The Internet has created a new communication tool, particularly for young people whose use of e-mail, websites, instant messaging, web cams, chat rooms, social networking sites and text messaging is exploding worldwide. Despite various benefits, internet has become a potential site for abuse and victimization, whereby young people can fall victim to sexual perpetrators, stalkers, exploiters, and peers who bully online. This requires being vigilant about related Internet risk behavior and safe Internet use. Parental control seems to be important considering the level of unsafe Internet behavior. Initiatives need to be taken to provide a framework for parents for teaching responsible Internet use to their children. Parents have to understand their responsibility in response to a growing emphasis on protecting their children from online dangers. Although internet is a powerful tool, but it's important to practice some safety measures and common sense while using it. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the various internet risks and parental role in supervising their children while cyber surfing.

Keywords: *Cyber surfing, Effects, Parents*

Introduction

Recently, a continuous increasing trend of Internet usage at home has been observed in developed countries. At a global level, an increase of 342.2% in Internet access is noticed since 2000 (Internet World Stats, 2009). This is a reflection of children having internet access at home. A recent study has pointed out that 92.8% of the children between 12 and 18 years old have access to the Internet at home (Walrave, Lenaerts and De Moor, 2008). Up to 91.2% of primary school children surf on the Internet at home. Another study shows that 36% of the children between 8 and 12 years old have access to the Internet in a separate room (Valcke et al., 2008). This increase in Internet access in a separate room such as a study or bedroom, without parent supervision has also been observed and confirmed by other studies done in this context. In the paper, we try to focus on the extent to which Internet use at home reflects unsafe behavior. As children know more about computers and the Internet as compared to their parents therefore, the role of parents has become more critical in the context of increased access of their children to the Internet.

Youth and Cyber Surfing

Despite the many benefits of electronic communication, youth are at risk of becoming victims of bullying and abuse while they surf the internet or use

their cell phones and other forms of electronic communication. A typical Internet usage of young children can be described in following three dimensions: (1) entertainment, (2) education, and (3) edutainment. We prefer to add a fourth category that stresses the consumer role of children via the Internet. Young children are more and more considered as active consumers via the Internet and engage in e-commerce or are addressed by e-advertising (Tuftte, 2006). The focus shifts to chatting, social networking and commercial usage from the age of 11 years on. Social networking dominates all types of Internet usage from 13 years on. The increase in the usage for commercial objectives is strange. In addition, it has been noted that girls use the Internet significantly more for social networking or chatting; boys tend to focus more on games and entertainment-related activities. Nevertheless gender differences seem to become less relevant (Brandtzeg, Heim, & Karahasanovi_c, 2011). The growth in Web 2.0 applications such as MySpace and Facebook, the sharing of pictures, videos and the use of webcams have affected the types of popular Internet applications picked up by children.

Prevention of Cyber Surfing

There is growing research about the impact of unsafe Internet behavior; though available research mainly focuses on content and contact risks. The studies briefed the negative consequences of risky Internet content such as aggression, fear, symptoms related to psychological trauma, negative self-image, and identity confusion (Cho and Cheon (2005). While focusing on emotional consequences other researches indicate that about one fourth of the teenagers between 10 and 17 years old were extremely upset due to exposure to harmful content. Therefore, to protect the young people against dangers of the internet, number of interventions has been increased. In this context the interventions namely I-SAFE, Missing and HAHASO were carried out in the US and Canada. I-SAFE and Missing are aimed at making children and young people more knowledgeable about internet safety and lessening their online risky behaviour. Internet safety can involve students discovering predators in cyberspace. In I-SAFE, students were taught in class how to avoid cyber abuse, while Missing used e-learning through computer game. HAHASO was set up as part of an evaluation of a large anti-bullying programme and therefore it concentrated primarily on cyber bullying. Just like I-SAFE, HAHASO comprised teaching in schools. Children are invited to register and pass their name, age, or email address.

Parental Supervision

There is crucial need for parental supervision (Wang, Bianchi, & Raley, 2005). There are two types of strategies namely restrictive mediation and active mediation. Restrictive mediation implies the definition of rules about Internet usage. Active mediation is linked to actual Internet usage. Generally, parents adopt an active position and stay around, talk about Internet usage, or check the computer screen. A research indicates the differences in perceptions about Internet-related rules between parents and children (Wang et al. (2005).

Parents and children seemed to agree in 30% of the families as to the rules; in 31% of the families both parents indicated there are no rules. It has been clarified in one study that parents define more rules when they are active Internet users themselves (European Commission, 2008). Mothers seem to adopt a larger extent restrictive mediation as compared to fathers. The results of some studies has shown that 64% of the parents talked with their children about the Internet; 34% got serious during Internet access; 46% checked the screen regularly; 38% helped their children; and 33% of the parents indicated they control Internet usage in an explicit way. However, one study shows that both active and restrictive mediation help to lower the chance of risky online contact (Lwin et al., 2008). We also have to consider that parental control at home is not the only solution but something more needs to be done.

What Parents Should Know

1) Cookies:

As the data contained in a cookie may reveal your personal information, you should learn to set the proper security controls on your browser software.

2) Knowledge about Acronyms:

Parents must know the acronyms e.g. - AFK / BAK (Away from keyboard/ Back at keyboard), 121 (One-to-one), WRN? (What's your real name?).

3) Email Safety Tips:

Parents must guide their children to select smart password, proper log out of account, no response to spam tec.

4) Knowledge of Parental Control Programme:

Any outgoing information can be filtered through parental control software programs that prevent certain words or phrases from being typed and sent out online.

5) Talk to your child about:

Nicknames and Profiles, Receiving Files, Strangers and ask not rely on software to do your job.

6) Participate with your child online:

Familiarize yourself with the services and programs your child uses.

7) Plan ahead along with your child:

About the things that could be encountered online and what he/she can do.

8) Encourage their other interests:

Encourage your children to spend the time online for participation in valuable activities rather than wasting unnecessarily.

9) Explore the Internet: Take the time to explore the use of your computer and the Internet to enrich the lives of every member of your family. Your knowledge of computer can better protect your family. (www.cyberangels.org)

Some Tips for Parents

1) Educate Yourself:

Parents must be aware about game ratings for age recommendations, the privacy policies of each site and review the acceptable use terms with your child.

2) Set Limits:

Limiting play time and never chatting with strangers or giving out any personal information, including the child's real name or where he or she lives.

3) Monitor Your Child:

Read his/her chat logs and discuss language and behavior that may be inappropriate. Point out examples within the logs and role-play ways to handle potentially unsafe situations.

4) Protect the Password:

Tell your child to never share a password with a friend or allow someone else to access their account.

5) Work as a team to set boundaries:

Make sure to use only monitored chat rooms and make sure your children avoid “.alt” chat rooms.

6) Together, agree upon family internet rules.

It includes:

- Never log in with user names that reveal true identity or that are provocative.
- Never reveal your passwords.
- Never reveal phone numbers or addresses.
- Never post information that reveals your identity.
- Never post inappropriate photos or ones that may reveal your identity (for example: city or school names on shirts).
- Never share any information with strangers met online.
- Never meet face-to-face with strangers met online.
- Never open attachments from strangers. (www.cyberangels.org)

It has been pointed out in a research that a significant number of girls adopt unsafe online contact behavior: they disclose personal information, send personal pictures, and engage in face-to-face contact after initial online contact (Berson and Berson; 2003b).

7) Miscellaneous:

It includes-

- Sign an agreement for appropriate online behaviour.
- Install security software.
- Check your computer's security software.
- Stay informed.
- View the Screen switching by your child.
- Install a caller ID program for Odd Phone Calls.
- Supervise the child typing at Odd Hours of the Night.

- Checking of Cash with the child.
- Prompt frank discussions with the child on unusual upset at an Internet Interruption.
- Checking on withdrawal of child from Family or Friends.

Conclusion

There is need to develop awareness and security skills. Internet safety measures and initiatives that target parents have to be incorporated. Further, we will have to shift attention to the younger age groups. A holistic approach should be adopted embracing children, parents, and the schools. Livingstone (2001) puts this as follows: "A coordinated response across school, community and home is essential for a constructive, safe and fair use of the Internet by children". To conclude, we restate the critical nature of Internet safety measures. There is need for taking accompanying measures when introducing children to computers and the Internet. These measures have to be continuous with more focus on role of parents in supervising their children while using Internet.

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