

PERSONAL POWER

PARENT LETTER 5: ISOLATION: STAYING SAFE IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

In the fifth lesson of *Safer, Smarter Teens: Personal Power*, your child learned about safety concerns in our growing virtual world of social media with texting, online gaming, and apps. This lesson features two characters: Jacob and Stephanie. Jacob has friends he only knows online, and Stephanie's parents are out late every night. Lauren noted that it's never been easier to connect with people online. This open communication is great, but it can open up teens to what is known as cyber-grooming, which is the use of technology to groom someone for abuse. Cyber groomers sometimes pretend to be kids themselves.

Lauren discusses power plays for cyber-safety:

1. Play online games only with people you know.
2. Don't post revealing photos or information about yourself like where you live, go to school, play sports, or other identifying information that someone you don't know could use to find you.
3. Never agree to meet someone you don't know.

Social media is a great communication tool, but we all must use it responsibly. Lauren discussed the dangers of electronically sending messages or photos. What a child may think is funny at the time can quickly get out of hand and become inappropriate. Lauren explained that exchanging revealing photos is called "sexting."

PARENT CONNECTION

Your child is growing up in a cyber world with access to information and people like never before. In today's lesson, both students from the video used positive power plays to stay safe. Continue to talk about potential dangers, as well as appropriate use of technology. Many teens are victimized by cyber-bullying. It is important to keep the lines of communication open between you and your child. Regular family dinnertime can reduce the chances of children becoming victims of cyber-bullying.

TIPS TO FURTHER TODAY'S LESSON

Review the Cyber P.L.A.N. with your child and add additional rules and responsibilities that are important for your family:

P stands for Permission: Students should have permission each time they go online. Protecting passwords for their computer and their phone is important.

L stands for Location: Students should only visit approved Internet locations, websites, or game sites. Students should never enter chat rooms because they NEVER know with whom they are really communicating.

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A stands for Activity: Students should only use their devices for an approved activity, such as a game, site, or app that is allowed. Posting personal information about yourself, such as where you live, can enable someone you don't know to find you. Students should never agree to meet someone they don't know or only know online. Posting revealing photos of yourself or others may be considered sexting and can be illegal. Posting threatening or harassing comments or embarrassing photos of others can be considered cyber-bullying and may also be illegal.

N stands for Name: Students need to know the name of anyone with whom they interact online. Students need to know that they are a real person and that they are who they say they are. Abusers may pretend to be kids or misrepresent themselves in other ways. Students should not misrepresent themselves and pretend to be someone they are not. Students should not chat or reply to a stranger online, just like they would not talk to strangers alone in person.