ON-LINE SAFETY TIPS AND CYBER BULLIES

To Our Hampton Parents:

Cyber Bullying and Online Predators can be a big problem for the safety of students and schools. While chat rooms and a variety of sites are blocked from the district's network, tech-savvy students may venture to these web pages from home. Online predators work to gain the trust of children and teenagers, usually for the purpose of exploitation. Some sites also foster cyber bullying – name-calling, telling of rumors, harassment and intimidation – which can often create conflicts at school. Because the welfare of your child is of the highest importance to us, the Hampton School Board and administration wish to provide some tips for keeping your child safe.

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ONLINE SAFETY RULES FOR KIDS

Place your computer in an area of your home where you can easily supervise your child's Internet activity.

Use the Internet with your kids. While you're spending time with them, you can help them to be safe and responsible online. Learn about the technology together, ask lots of questions, and don't be intimidated if it seems like your kids have a better understanding of the technology than you.

Teach kids never to give their personal information or any personally identifiable information to people they meet online, especially in chat rooms and on bulletin boards. To do so is the equivalent to sending an e-mail or talking to someone in a chat room.

Do not permit your child to have an online profile. With this restriction, he or she will not be listed in directories and is less likely to be approached in chat rooms where pedophiles often search for prey. (Some Online Service Providers such as America Online, offer subscribers online profiles.)

Block instant/personal messages from people you and your child don't know. Regularly check your child's buddy list to ensure that it has not been altered.

Instruct your child never to plan a face-to-face meeting with online acquaintances, and to notify you if they are approached for an offline meeting.

Establish clear ground rules for Internet use for your family. Think about signing a Contract with your children that reflects those rules. Learn about the different parental control tools, protective software, and controlled access options that are available, and decide which, if any, are best for your needs.

Tell your children not to respond if they receive offensive or dangerous e-mail, chat requests, or other communications, and to leave if they go to a web site that makes them uncomfortable. Also tell them to show you anything they receive that makes them uncomfortable. Assuring them that you won't be angry with them and that they are not to blame can help you to develop a trusting, open relationship.

If you become worried that your child or another child is in danger, don't hesitate to contact the authorities.

ON-LINE SAFETY TIPS AND CYBER BULLIES

Cyber Bullying has been described as more harmful and dangerous than traditional bullying because of the always-on access to technology so many kids have today. There are even a few websites designed to harass other students, all under a cloak of anonymity.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

GET INVOLVED AND BE AWARE.

Learn everything you can about the Internet and what your kids are doing online. Talk to them about the places they go online and the activities that they are involved in. Be aware of what your kids are posting on Web sites, including their own personal home pages. Encourage your kids to come to you if anybody says or does something online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened. Stay calm and keep the lines of communication and trust open. If you "freak out" your kids won't turn to you for help when they need it.

Encourage kids to develop their own moral code so they will choose to behave ethically online. Talk to your kids about responsible Internet use. Teach them to never post or say anything on the Internet that they wouldn't want the whole world - including you - to read. Create an online agreement or contract for computer use, with your kids' input. Make sure your agreement contains clear rules about ethical online behavior.

TAKE ACTION IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED ONLINE.

Watch out for signs that your child is being bullied online – a reluctance to use the computer or go to school may be an indication. If the bully is a student at your child's school, meet with school administrators and ask for help in resolving the situation. Report any incident of online harassment and physical threats to your local police and your Internet Service Provider (ISP). If your child is bullied through a mobile phone, report the problem to your phone service provider. If it's a persistent problem you can change the phone number or block text messages.

THE #1 THING KIDS CAN DO:

Take a stand against cyber bullying with their peers. Kids should speak out whenever they see someone being mean to another person online. Remember: Most kids respond better to criticism from their peers than to disapproval from adults.

TIPS TO COMBAT CYBER BULLIES

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