Internet Safety for Kids

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When I was in middle school, I recall watching Channel One, a news program for teens, during my homeroom period every day. The news and the commercials were designed specifically for kids and teens, and I remember one commercial that was played frequently in the early 90s during the daily broadcast of Channel One. I recall a young girl at the front of the screen, and behind her was a road from the perspective of a driver. It looked as though we were navigating very quickly through the curves of the road, as the girl narrated. She talked in a British accent about "The World Wide Web," something I had never heard of before. Fast forward to high school when we were all on America Online (AOL) and AOL instant messenger.

We were the first generation applying to schools online and receiving our acceptance letters (at least some of them) via email. We knew little about Internet safety,

and we were more focused on the prospects of the Internet than the dangers. What I experienced as a teen was just the beginning and I could never have dreamed how intertwined our lives would be with the web when I became an adult.

Internet Family Risks

Today, kids have the world at their fingertips. They literally have unlimited information in their pockets at all times. They are always reachable, always connected, and always entertained. There is extensive research on how this is harmful to childhood development and how it negatively affects their ability to learn and grow. There hindrances and barriers to happiness in the real world caused by a dopamine addiction that is fed through constant interactions on social media. There is a strange dichotomy of having this level of access and information, and the negative effects and dangers of being perpetually connected online.

Internet Family Safety Plan

So, what can parents do to help their children learn to harness and access the powers of technology without exposing them to its potential darkness? Here are five things all parents should do to help their children learn to use the internet safely:

> Talk openly with your children about this topic. Don't shy away of fear that you are being too intrusive. Discuss your expectations, potential benefits, and potential risks. Consistent talks will

help to build trust between you and your child when it comes to social media.

Make a rule that you will be checking your child's social media interactions regularly. It is a must that you are friends with your child and that you follow each other on social media.

Use a resource like Common Sense Media to help guide you in your conversations with your child.

Discuss the permanence of the internet with your child. Once something is posted, it's saved forever online.

Set rules for phone and internet use, including limits on how much time they can use their devices.

Set an example by following these rules for yourself too! The whole family will be happier and healthier!