AVG Technologies Digital Diaries: How to talk about safety and limits for children ages 10-13

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Introduction

The AVG Digital Diaries Survey of parents with 10-13 year old children highlights how confusing it is for families to support healthy development and positive values in the digital age. Being a parent of a child who has a cell phone, a profile on a digital social network, and video game console means doing your best to set limits in a world where change happens fast and struggling to find the balance between snooping and privacy.

The confusing set of choices that parents face can be clearly seen in the survey results:

- Children graduate to adult social networks by 11 while the age limit set by these sites is 13.
- Most parents check their kids' PCs to see what they are doing when they aren't around.
- Few parents credit their 10-13 year old with knowing more about the Internet than they do.

One tool that parents have when it comes to implementing restrictions is Internet safety software. This software provides families with a way to manage what information kids are allowed to access and how they communicate online. Like most decisions that you make as a parent, it is not only *if* you decide to use Internet safety software but, *how* you go about doing it.

Here are some tips about how to thoughtfully integrate Internet safety software in a way that supports a strong relationship with your child:

- Start off with an open conversation about what your family is up to when using digital tools and toys. Be sure to cover not only concerns, but also what's exciting. Have your child give you a tour of his or her digital life.
- Review basic safety concepts with your child. Remember that taking risks (both positive and negative) is a normal part of this phase of development. Be sure to discuss privacy settings, who is appropriate to connect with online, and how to reach out to a trusted adult when help is needed. Try this safety quiz as a way to get started: http://www.safekids.com/quiz/.
- Find Internet safety software that fits your child's age and level of development. You should feel comfortable with using the tool and it should also fit with your values around safety, trust, and respect.
- Present the tool you find to your family and discuss what influenced your decision. Be willing to let your children influence your decisions about how it will be implemented.
- Get your agreements in writing, post it in a place where it can be easily accessed, and shake on it. Here is a sample of a Teen Pledge from SafeKids.com that can be adapted to fit your needs: http://www.safekids.com/teen-pledge-for-being-smart-online/. There is also a Parents' Pledge for you to sign. http://www.safekids.com/contract_parent.htm
- Make a reassessment period a part of your agreements.
- Keep up to date and stay engaged with your child and the Internet safety software. You often need to adjust Internet safety software to keep up with your child's development. For example, when your child starts doing research papers you probably what to adjust what search terms are appropriate.

The Bottom Line

Your attitude and ability to communicate respectfully will impact the experience that the whole family has in making sure that Internet safety software truly sets limits and guidelines. The conversation that you have around safety, trust and respect is often as important as actually using Internet safety software. The great part about these conversations is that they can provide the blue

print for other areas where the balance between freedom and restrictions needs clear limits and guidelines.

Resources

- **ConnectSafely** is for parents, teens, educators, advocates - everyone engaged in and interested in the impact of the social Web: http://www.connectsafely.org/
- **Google**'s official site for family safety: http://www.google.com/familysafety/
- **Microsoft**'s official site for privacy and online safety guidance and information.: http://www.microsoft.com/security/default.aspx
- **NetFamilyNews** is the "community newspaper" of a vital interest community. Founded in 1999, it has become the journal-of-record on all aspects of youth and technology, serving readers in more than 50 countries: http://www.netfamilynews.org/
- **SafeKids.com** is one of the oldest and most enduring sites for Internet safety: http://www.safekids.com/
- The **Web Wise Kids** mission is to teach kids, parents and the community the value of making safe and wise choices in a technologically evolving world: http://www.webwisekids.org/

To learn about Jason Brand, visit http://www.jasonbrand.com.
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