

A Parent's Guide to Blogging, E-Mail, Instant Messaging and Internet Use

For the sake of their children, as well as for their own sakes, parents must learn and practice the skills of discerning viewers and listeners and readers, acting as models of prudent use of media in the home. As far as the Internet is concerned, children and young people often are more familiar with it than their parents are, but parents still are seriously obliged to guide and supervise their children in its use.
--Pope John Paul II, "Ethics in Communication," 2002

Why Should a Parent Monitor and Control Web Use by Children?

- Parents are the primary guide for values and ethics with their children and should guide the interactions their children have with unknown entities outside of the home.
- Much information on the web may be useful, but technology growth is so fast that children, even young adults, may not always have the level of sophistication or the understanding of human nature to recognize danger signals in communication and information use.
- Children's secrecy in web use is usually a sign that the child is doing something he or she may believe to be questionable.
- The Internet may be used for student-to-student harassment, bullying, exclusion or slander.

How do Adolescent Students Usually Communicate on the Internet?

- **E-Mail:** E-mail is fairly universal but has lost popularity with the younger generation. It is not as instant as chat. E-mail accounts are free using Hotmail.com, Yahoo.com or AOL. Many of the filtering and monitoring options will allow a parent to limit to whom their child can send or receive E-mail.
- **Chat:** Chat is also known as Instant Messaging or "IM." Many students just chat with their friends, but this is not always the case. There is usually a profile associated with a user. In the profile everything from the individual's address to his or her telephone number may be added for public view.
 - Popular chat sites include: Yahoo chat, MSN chat, AIM, and ICQ.
 - A "chat room" is where people of similar interest join in electronic conversation. Some chat rooms are "closed," with individuals only allowed in by invitation; others are open to the public.
 - **Danger:** A predator could start up a conversation with your child by getting their chat "handle" (name) from the child's blog/website, by searching the user database profiles or by joining a chat room for which the child is a member.
 - **Blogs:** A blog is basically an on-line journal. It is a very simple mechanism to control and provide content to a webpage. The user just creates an account and begins posting content to his or her blog. Content can be pictures, music, video or text. The blog is often available to the public; sometimes the access is controlled by the blog user.
 - Popular blog sites include: Xanga.com, Myspace.com, friendster.com and Blogger.com
 - **Dangers:**
Blog sites are generally open to anyone in the world to read. Personal statements, improper language, sexual connotations, slanderous references to others and substance abuse references provide glimpses of an individual's personality to anyone who might want to read them. The general rule of thumb is never to put on a website or a blog anything an individual might find uncomfortable to find on the front page of a newspaper.
 - Though blog sites may be opened or closed at the will of the user, the sites and their permanent content are owned by a company which has the rights to all content, into perpetuity. Information on a blog may come back to "haunt" a youngster many years later in their professional career or family life. Closing a blog does not erase contents of a blog.

Web Technology Communication - Parent Information

How Can a Parent Tell if a Child Has a Blog or Website?

Parents can search the Internet for their child's digital trail. These searches may not bring up everything. Some blogs are not searchable and some students may use an alias or pseudonym on their blog.

- To search the Internet for your child's name at <http://Google.com>, put their name in quotes as follows: "Jane Doe" (using quotes around the entire name searches the Internet for places those two names appear together)
- To search for a person's name at a particular website using <http://Google.com>, do the following: Type the person's name -- last name, first name or common name using "" (as explained above when using more than one name) -- then skip a space, then type: site: (put site name here)
- Example: "Jane Doe" site:xanga.com
- Example: Darla site:blogger.com

How Can a Parent Monitor Instant Messaging or Chat Rooms?

The only way to monitor your child's Instant Messaging is by purchasing monitoring software.

How Can Parents Monitor and Control Web Use?

The first step is to call your Internet service provider and ask if they provide any web filtering or monitoring services. If not, a parent should then decide on a software or hardware-based monitoring solution. A parent may also check a child's Internet Explorer history. However, this method is not always reliable because the history can be cleared. (A parent has every reason to have heightened concerns if the history folder on the Internet Explorer Browser is empty or has been erased.) A child, however, may be using a browser other than Internet Explorer.

- To check the Internet Explorer history:
Open Internet Explorer
Select View>Explorer Bar>History (*View is in the tool bar*)
A window with the history results will display on the left pane.

Does the School Ever Get Involved in Student Internet Use or Communication?

Christ the King Cathedral School has an Acceptable Use Policy for computer work done while a student is at school or participating in a school function, a policy which monitors all computer use from the school campus or communications related to school classes or activities done from any computer, even at home. Christ the King Cathedral school sometimes does become involved in student Internet use issues that have happened using computers off the school campus and outside of school time in the following situations:

- The school becomes aware of slanderous, hurtful, harassing comments in student communication about another individual, especially one in the school and / or church community. Fundamentally, such conduct is unlawful, unethical and unchristian.
- The school becomes aware of unethical or illegal activity in which a student might have been involved through an electronic source. In such cases, usually the school administrators meet with the student's parents.

(Portions of this Parent Guide have been copied with permission from Bishop TK Gorman Catholic High School – Tyler, TX)