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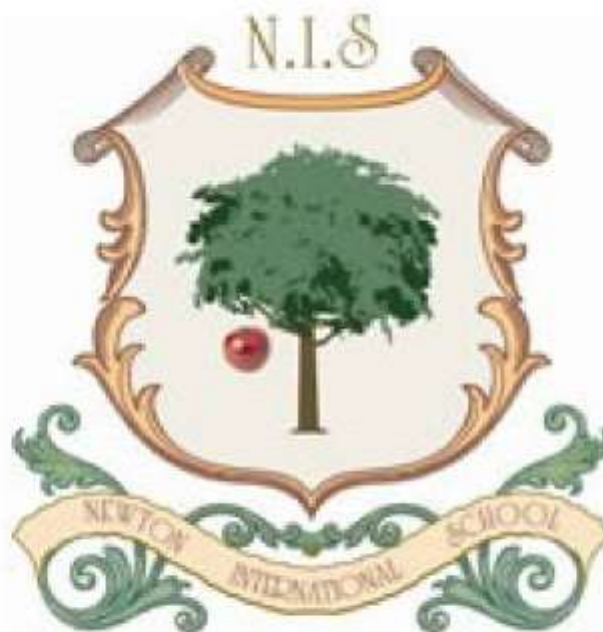
Newsletter-From Head of Wellbeing

Keeping children safe online during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Parents/Guardians,

How to help kids stay safe online

Even if you are at home together, it is not possible to monitor your child's online activities every second of the day. It is important to talk with them about online safety issues to help develop their critical thinking and ability to make good choices.

Here are 10 top tips to help protect your children online:

1. Build an open trusting relationship around technology keep communication open and supportive so your child knows they can come to you if something goes wrong or does not feel right online.

2. Co-view and co-play with your child online. This will help you better understand what they are doing and why they enjoy an app, game or website, as well as providing a great opportunity to start conversations about online safety.

3. Build good habits and help your child to develop digital intelligence and social and emotional skills such as respect, empathy, critical thinking, responsible behaviour and resilience and practice being good online citizens.

4. Empower your child wherever possible, help them make wise decisions for themselves, rather than telling them what to do. Try to provide them with strategies for dealing with negative online experiences that will build their confidence and resilience.

5. Use devices in open areas of the home this can help you manage and be aware of who your child interacts with online through phones, tablets, smart TVs, gaming consoles and other connected devices.

6. Set time limits that balance time spent in front of screens with offline activities a family technology plan can help you to manage expectations around where and when technology use is allowed search online for templates or examples.

7. Know the apps, games and social media sites your kids are using, making sure they are age-appropriate, and learn how to limit messaging or online chat and location-sharing functions within apps or games, as these can expose your child to unwanted contact and disclose their physical location.

8. Check the privacy settings on the games and apps your child is using and make sure their profiles are turned on to the strictest privacy setting. Restrict who can contact your child or ask them to check in with you before accepting new friends.

9. Use available technologies to set up parental controls on devices that can filter harmful content, monitor your child's use and limit or block their time on connected devices or functions (e.g. cameras, in-app purchases).

10. Be alert to signs of distress and know where to go for more advice and support

Time online

If your child is using online platforms or programs for schoolwork, ensuring a healthy balance between non-school related online activities and offline time is especially important.

Here are some helpful tips:

• During non-school hours at home, establish time limits around when and for how long your child can be online.

• Use the available technologies parental controls and tools to monitor online time allow you to measure and set time limits on device use or internet access. Be honest and open about why you want to use these technologies.

• Turn off notifications for social media apps to help minimize distractions.

• Depending on your child's age, you can establish a family tech agreement that balances time spent in front of screens with offline activities. You can find templates by searching online.

• Include 'offline' activities in your routine at home — this can include family exercise, reading time or board games.

• Reduce your own time online to model positive behaviour!

Increased connectivity may have negative health impacts. Signs to watch for include:

• tiredness, sleep disturbance, headaches, eye strain

• changes in eating patterns

• reduced personal hygiene

• constantly talking about particular online programs, such as a gaming site

• extreme anger when being asked to take a break from online activity

• appearing anxious or irritable when away from the computer/device

• becoming withdrawn from friends and family.

If you notice your child experiencing these issues, you might need to take further steps to help encourage balance. Consider contacting a counselor.

Online gaming

Online games can be great fun and a good way to help children stay connected to friends while at home. Games can also improve coordination, problem-solving and multi-tasking skills, as well as help children build social skills through online interactivity with other players.

For a healthy balance, encourage offline as well as online games and activities, such as home exercise, playing board games, drawing and reading books.

If your child is online gaming, it is important to be aware of risks, including:

• spending too much time gaming, which can have negative impacts on your child's health, ability to study, and social and emotional wellbeing

• cyberbullying through online or in-game chat

• games with gambling-like elements which can normalise gambling for young people

• costs of in-game spending.

What can I do?

• Prepare locate the computer, device or games console in an open area of your home and use available parental controls and safety features for devices, browsers and apps.

• Stay involved talk regularly with your child about their gaming interests and who they play with online. If you're also spending time at home, now might be the time to play alongside your child to get a better sense of how they handle their personal information and who they communicate with. Gaming with your child can also be fun!

• Be aware of what they are playing games vary in their level of violence or content, and may contain themes, language and images that are unsuitable for your child.

• Build good habits help your child protect their personal information by using an appropriate screen name that does not reveal their real name. Teach them not to click on links provided by strangers or to use 'cheat' programs to help with game play, which can contain viruses or malware.

• Empower your child wherever possible, help them make wise decisions for themselves, rather than telling them what to do. Try to provide them with strategies for dealing with negative online experiences that will build their confidence and resilience.

• Agree on strategies to help them switch off for example, a timer that signals game time is nearly over, with consequences for not switching off.

• Learn how to help if your child has experienced bullying or unwanted contact when gaming.

Please do not hesitate to ask for any help needed.

Contact me via email:naseredines@nislagoon.com

"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."-Aristotle
 "An international community of learners striving for excellence and celebrating success."

Suzan B.Naseredien, Ph.D-C Counsellor 3 of 3