INTERNET SAFETY INFORMATION

Almost all of today's kids have access to the internet. Whether from home, school, public library, internet cafe or a friend's house, your child can (and surely will), get on the internet --unsupervised. So what's a parent to do to protect them, (as much as possible) from being exposed to the "bad" side of the web?

In short, you must educate yourself about the web, about computers, about software and how they all work together. In many cases, kids know more than their parents about this technology and this can be a problem. If you leave it up to them to install the software that you purchased to filter and limit their online surfing, they will know how to circumvent the protection. So at least get enough training to enable you to understand the basics of using a computer and it's software. Pay special attention to learning to use and configure a web browser. Learn how to check a browser's surfing history, and how to view temporary internet files which are stored on your computer every time you (or your child) visits the internet.

No matter what you do, your child will most likely encounter material on the internet which is inappropriate for their age. As a parent, you should discuss these things with your child beforehand so they will know what to do when they happen upon it and will not feel awkward telling you about it. Make it clear to them that you will not be mad it if happens and use it as an opportunity to calmly educate your child about bad things or inappropriate behavior of some people. The key is to ensure that your child knows he/she can tell you something without you getting mad. The goal is to know what your child is doing online, thus letting you take the necessary steps to prevent something even more serious from happening to your child.

Allowing school age children to have a computer with internet access in their bedroom is asking for trouble. It's common I know, but don't do it. When they reach college age they are much better equipped to handle what they find, and what they can do on the internet. Keep the computer in a common area where an adult can monitor their computer use at any time. Visit these great sites to learn more:

NetSmartz.org - From The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
Federal Bureau of Investigation - FBI website has a Parents Guide to internet safety
i-SAFE.org - Worldwide leader in Internet safety education
CommonSenseMedia.org - Ttrustworthy information to help manage your kids' media lives
KidsHealth.org - From the Nemours Foundation (Also in Spanish)
SafeKids.com - One of the oldest and most enduring sites on this subject