

## Guarding Your Child's Hearts with Internet and Social Media

We are in a time where internet and social media are part of our normal everyday life. This has proven to be true with kids as young as 8-9 years old. It is important to be aware of what your child is doing on their device, and to have a conversation as a family about how to maintain safety while using the internet/social media. **These conversations do need to start no later than 4<sup>th</sup> grade.** Some things to remember as a parent:

- Learn about the programs and apps your child is using. Some social media platforms have age restrictions to join, but it is easy for children to get around these.
- Show interest in your child's online life and ask questions.
- When possible, keep tablets and computers in common areas where you can watch while your child uses them.
- Get online family protection. Programs that provide parental controls can block websites, enforce time limits, monitor the websites your child visits, and their online conversations.
- Follow your child's online accounts and tell them that you are monitoring their online activity to help keep them safe. Some children or teens may create a fake second account for their parents to follow.
- Discuss what is okay and safe to post online, and what isn't. Online posts stay online forever. As a general rule, your child shouldn't post anything they wouldn't want a parent or teacher to see or read.
- People can't always control what others post about them. Explain that information and photos found online can turn up again years later.
- Ask them about the people they "meet" online. Showing genuine interest will help them feel comfortable talking about it. Explain that it is easy for someone on the Internet to pretend to be someone they are not.
- Model good behavior on your own social media accounts.
- Set screen time limits and set rules on when screens are appropriate to use.
- Teach your child the value of "unplugging" from devices for technology-free time. Social media can be exciting, but it should be considered entertainment. Remind your child that no message is so important that it cannot wait until the morning.
- Keep in mind that some children have "streaks" with online friends, which means they message daily to maintain a streak. Losing smartphone or social media privileges can trigger stress and anxiety if they cannot maintain their "streaks".

Let's do our part as the adults in student's lives by protecting/teaching them internet safety!