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## Stewards of Children® Participants...Never Stop Learning!

*You are receiving this email because you have attended a Stewards of Children training with Chaucie's Place. We want to continue to provide you helpful information, tips, stories in the news, trainings, and other valuable resources to expand your awareness and strengthen your role as a steward of children. Without ongoing education and dialogue in our community, it is impossible to move forward and end this epidemic.*

### **How Can I Best Protect My Children When They Use Technology?**

(Last in a series of four articles)

If you missed the first three articles in this series, click [HERE](#) for the full articles.

Children are "natives" when it comes to using technology: computers, the Internet, social media, smartphones, video games, and the list goes on. However, as parents and adults who care about children, we must learn about new technology, set boundaries, and openly communicate with our children about their "online" life.

### **How to Protect Your Children When They Use Apps and Videogames**

As you undoubtedly have heard time and time again, teens and children see video game chats, texting, Facebook posts, and other communications as normal extension of communication with their friends. For parents and/or trusted adults, this can be a hard to understand. Add to that new technologies are popping up all the time, it would be easy to feel overwhelmed. This article provides some tips and advice for parents to help keep their children safe when using apps and video games.

**Online vs. offline.** Talk with your kids about the importance of keeping their digital communication connected to their offline life and friendships. Discuss the differences between real-life and online friends. Questions to ask could be . . . Is this someone you would have come to your house for dinner with the family? Is this the way you would speak to someone if you had to say the words out loud? . . . are just a couple examples.

**Research.** Find out all you can about the apps and video games that your children view and

use. [Common Sense Media](#) is a great place to read reviews and information about the most current apps and games. Better yet, set all your devices for parent permission when downloading an app. If you have an Apple product, you can take any device to an Apple store and an associate will help you set up all parental controls.

**Check the ratings.** Both apps and video games are assigned age ratings. For apps, the age rating will be a part of its review. For video games, the Entertainment Software Rating Board's assigns age ratings (like E for Everyone, T for Teen and M for Mature) and content descriptors (like "Suggestive Themes," "Language" or "Violence") to all video games. But just remember, age ratings are guidelines - the final decision is up to you. If after checking the ratings, you're still not sure if a game or app is appropriate, there are resources you can consult, including ESRB's [Parent's Guide to Videogames](#) .

**Use the ABC rule** (Assess the site/app/videogame, oBserve the child's use, and Communicate about the experience). This rule, found in [The Sex-Wise Parent](#) book, is a great second step after you have researched the ratings of the app or videogame. When you have this conversation, make sure the conversation is calm, non-judgemental, and two-sided. Let your child tell you why they like the game and/or want to play the game. Explain your concerns, and then listen to their feedback. Of course, your decision as a parent is the final decision, but involving your child will help build their critical thinking skills and they will be more likely to follow the decision.

**Set safety settings.** All handheld devices and game consoles have helpful safety settings that families will want to go over together. Parental control options on gaming devices include: pre-approving friend requests to play online, controlling the types of games that can be played, disabling Internet access, and limiting the duration or time of day that a child can play. If you are unfamiliar with your child's gaming device, use the name of the gaming device plus "parental controls" in your Internet search bar. For example, "wii parental controls" will find instructions on how to set up controls on all Wii gaming devices.

For apps, parents can set their devices (phones, tablets, laptops) to restrict application downloads by age rating. [BeWebSmart.com](#) offers a simple step-by-step guide to restrict application downloads by rating for apple products. For others, please refer to the manufacturers' websites for details and instructions. For a list of apps that should NOT be

**Protect those passwords.** Virtual worlds are great places for kids to learn the fundamental rule of password protection. For children, as well as adults, a stolen password can turn into anything from impersonation and bullying to property and/or identity theft. Children are known to share passwords to gain acceptance or show "true friendship," forgetting that even friends get mad sometimes. It's a good idea to sit down with your child periodically to help them change their password to something that's hard for people to guess but easy for both of you to remember ([here's help](#)).

**Communication is key.** Your relationship with your children is one of the most important ways you can help protect them whether in their "real" world or online. That's why it's important to keep the lines of communication as open as possible and work together to figure out what's appropriate for them. It generally just works best to talk with your kids about apps and video games with genuine interest, not fear. This will make it more likely they will come to you if they ever need help.

**Have a family contract.** We have mentioned technology contracts in prior Never Stop Learning articles, so including social media and video games in those contracts is a natural next step. We encourage you to include your children's input in creating a family contract. Allow them to create a few of the contract points. Discuss appropriate consequences for breaking the contract. By involving your children in this process, they will be more likely to follow it.

**Hold you children accountable.** If they break the contract, make sure to enforce the consequences. Sit down and talk with your teen that you care about their well-being and this is why you have rules. Discuss the wrongdoing in a calm manner with your child and they will be more likely to come to you in the future when/if any other problems arise.

### **A Special Note about Video games . . .**

Much has been said over the years on how video games are bad for children. Video games can contain or encourage hyperviolence, bullying in chat rooms, sexism, excessive play, and pornography. Just one of these reasons would make any parent apprehensive. Researchers now point to multi-player video games and their online chat rooms as the new frontier for child sexual abuse perpetrators to interact with and lure children. They use online gaming to connect with children and groom their victims.

Why is this case? First and foremost, predators prey where kids play. Video games use avatars, or graphic representations of the user or user's ego, that provides the predator anonymity when communicating with a child. Another reason is chat rooms provides the opportunity for predators to develop and build a relationship with your child, getting to know their interests and likes. This is with the hope of getting the child to communicate offline and leading to a possible face-to-face meeting. Last, few parents regulate their child's use of the chat rooms like they would their social media use.

Hearing these reasons can terrify any parent into forbidding video games in the house. However, this can be counter-productive. Instead of outright forbidding games, engage your child in discussing the dangers and ways to keep themselves safe. You will be teaching them the critical thinking skills necessary to make the right decisions when you aren't there to guide them.

We hope this information can help you start the conversation with your children about technology. Please use the links below if you would like more information.

#### **Information provided by:**

[Connect Safely](#)

ConnectSafely.org is for parents, teens, educators, advocates - everyone engaged in and interested in the impact of the social Web and mobile technology.

[The Sex-Wise Parent](#)

This book, The Sex-Wise Parent, puts tools to protect their children right into the hands of parents!

#### **Additional Resources available at:**

### [Be Web Smart](#)

Be Web Smart is a web site offering articles, tips, guidance and reviews for parents who want to keep their families safe and productive online.

### [Common Sense Media](#)

Common Sense is dedicated to helping kids thrive in a world of media and technology. We empower parents, teachers, and policymakers by providing unbiased information, trusted advice, and innovative tools to help them harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in all kids' lives.

### [Entertainment Software Ratings Board](#)

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is the non-profit, self-regulatory body that assigns ratings for video games and apps so parents can make informed choices.

### [Media! Tech! Parenting!](#)

Media! Tech! Parenting! discusses timely topics on teaching & parenting digital children. This link provides a list of contracts for kids, teens, parents, and families.

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## About Chaucie's Place

Chaucie's Place works passionately to ensure the welfare of children by offering evidence-based; high-quality prevention programs to end the cycle of abuse and to empower children and adults to ensure that children of central Indiana have the opportunity to live to their highest potential.

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