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FOR FAMILIES

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Guiding children in online use

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❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from an article written by Larry Magid and published on www.safekids.com.

As parents, it is your responsibility to set reasonable rules and guidelines for computer use by your children. By taking responsibility for your children's online computer use, you can greatly minimize potential risks of being online.

- ❖ Make it a family rule to:
 - Never give out identifying information — home address, school name, or telephone number — in a public message such as chat or news groups, and be sure you're dealing with someone both you and your children know and trust before giving out this information via e-mail.
 - Think carefully before revealing any personal information such as age, financial information, or marital status.
 - Do not post photographs of your children in news groups or on web sites that are available to the public.
 - Consider using a pseudonym, avoid listing your child's name and e-mail address in any public directories and profiles, and find out about your ISP's privacy policies and exercise your options for how your personal information may be used.
- ❖ Get to know the Internet and any services your children use. If you don't know how to log on, get your children to show you. Have your children show you what they do online, and become familiar with all the activities that are available online. Find out if your children have free web-based E-mail accounts, such as those offered by Hotmail and Yahoo!®, and learn their user names and passwords.
- ❖ Never allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they "meet" on the Internet without parental permission. If a meeting is arranged, make the first one in a public place, and be sure to accompany your child.
- ❖ Never respond to messages that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you feel uncomfortable. Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages. If you or your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy of the message to your ISP, and ask for their assistance.
- ❖ Instruct your children not to click on any links that are contained in e-mail from persons they don't know. Such links could lead to sexually explicit or otherwise inappropriate web sites or could be a computer virus. If someone sends you or your children messages or images that are filthy, indecent, lewd, or obscene with the intent to abuse, annoy, harass, or threaten you, or if you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography while online immediately report this to the NCMEC's CyberTipline at 1-800-843-5678 or www.cybertipline.com.

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- ❖ Remember that people online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person it would be easy for someone to misrepresent him- or herself. Thus someone indicating that "she" is a "12-year-old girl" could in reality be a 40-year-old man.
- ❖ Remember that everything you read online may not be true. Any offer that's "too good to be true" probably is. Be careful about any offers that involve you going to a meeting, having someone visit your house, or sending money or credit-card information.
- ❖ Set reasonable rules and guidelines for computer use by your children. Discuss these rules and post them near the computer as a reminder. Remember to monitor your children's compliance with these rules, especially when it comes to the amount of time your children spend on the computer. A child's excessive use of online services or the Internet, especially late at night, may be a clue that there is a potential problem. Remember that personal computers and online services should not be used as electronic baby-sitters.
- ❖ Check out blocking, filtering, and ratings applications. Be sure to make this a family activity. Consider keeping the computer in a family room rather than a child's bedroom. Get to know your children's "online friends" just as you get to know all of their other friends. If your children have cellular telephones, talk with them about using the phones safely. The same rules that apply to computer use, also apply to cellular telephones.