Being Cyber Smart

With the summer holidays fast approaching it is inevitable that students will increase internet use to maintain contact with their friends. Mobile phones are now the more common tool for this cyber communication.

Earlier in the term we wrote an article about cyber bullying. This week we would like to focus on cyber smart behaviour. Although the topic is address in IT classes, we are keen to reiterate the possible dangers to their present and future well being as a result of the things they actually do and say themselves on line.

www.cybersmart.gov.au is a fabulous website containing useful information relevant to all age groups, parents and schools about safe and smart internet use in Australia. It has user friendly videos and interactive learning sites you can visit with your children, and straight talking information sections that older students can access. Among other things, the site provides appropriate warnings about the pitfalls of what appear to be free downloads, how to protect your privacy and security on your mobile phone, and the dangers of letting people know where you are at any given time. (For example: announcing to your 786 friends on Facebook, that your family is in Melbourne for 10 days over Christmas is the same as announcing that your home is unoccupied!)

It gives advice on what to look for when buying a phone, what to do if a phone is lost, and how to activate and deactivate certain settings on the phone. For example, the GPS which automatically identifies your location at any gave time.

The website also talks about the importance of protecting your reputation, present and future and points out that photos, once posted, are there forever. Only the careful **opt-in** selection of appropriate security settings can keep them private, and even then there is no guarantee that friends won't copy them and paste them in to a less secure location. Want to check? Check your child's name on Google Images. You may be surprised by what comes up.

As parents we know we play a crucial role in helping our kids have safe and positive experiences on- line. The scary thing is that often they know much more than we do about the technology. Talk to your children about the technology they are using. Aim to understand it as well as you can, even if you do not use it yourself. Encourage them to delete the random "friends of friends" they have on Facebook. Check the security settings on their phones or help them to do it themselves.

Mobile phone technology is here to stay. Don't be alarmed. Be informed. Be pro-active not reactive. Be smart. Check out www.cybersmart.gov.au together.

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