The Leader in e-Safety Education

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REFERENCE—Text Messaging Information Sheet

Instant Messages (IM)

Notes back and forth with someone who is online in real time.

Instant or text messaging are easy ways to communicate! However, there are dangers that should be considered when texting.

Buddy List

Just who are the people on your buddy list? Some people consider it a status symbol to have the most "buddies." Do you really know them, or did you just meet them online?

Tip: Be careful about who you add to your list!

The Instant-Messaging Profile

When signing up for the typical instant-messaging software service, people are asked to complete a profile.

This profile can ask for information like name, hobbies, and address. This profile is then available to anyone who wishes to IM you. Even worse—anyone can do a search to locate profiles of people based on characteristics.

They can click on your name and read your profile. For predators and others, this information can be used inappropriately.

Tip: Choose not to fill out your profile or make sure to leave out any personal or identifying information.

Cyber Harassment:

Unfortunately, the very features that make instant and text messaging so user friendly and fun also make it a great tool for cyber bullies and harassers. Via cell phone, harassment can occur 24/7. Another issue to consider is that instant-message harassers are alerted via their buddy list when their victims are online.

Tip: Victims of online bullies need to be aware of how to block harassers, keep records of harassment, and most importantly, get help—even if that means going to multiple sources before help is received.

Malicious Code

One great aspect of instant messaging is that it allows for not just the transfer of text messages but also the transfer of files. Unfortunately, that means instant messengers can transfer worms and other malware.

Hackers can use instant messaging to gain access to computers, bypassing most firewalls. Another concern is that many IM networks bypass safety and security precautions like firewalls, virus-protection software, and filters.

Use text messaging, but use it safely!

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ACTIVITY—Netiquette Rules

Name _____ **Date** _____

Netiquette: informal rules of Internet etiquette or how to behave in a polite way online

In small groups, brainstorm a list of five netiquette rules that apply to instant messaging (IM). Present these rules to your class when finished.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

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PARENT PAGE—Text-Messaging Safety

Instant messaging (IM) works by allowing you to maintain a personal list of people with whom to interact. You can send messages to people on your "Buddy List" if they are online (sending a message opens a small window in which you can chat directly with friends). Text messaging has also become 24/7 with cell phones allowing one to text a message to others at any time.

However, the development of instant messaging has its own set of issues, including cyber harassment, malicious code, and unauthorized information disclosure. So what can you do keep your child safe from the above dangers? Use these tips.

Protection Tips

Protection begins with youth understanding the potential dangers of instant messaging. By understanding and acknowledging these dangers, your child can take the steps needed to be more cautious. The following should ensure youth are correctly and safely using IM.

Set up rules for IM. Make sure all rules are understood. By having rules that are clear and understood, children are more likely to follow them not just at home or in school but in other environments where they may have unrestricted and unmonitored access to IM.

The following are some suggestions for rules.

Set limits on the use of IM.

1. No IMing during homework time
2. No IMing late at night, when the potential for chatting with strangers goes up
3. Implementation of a time limit for use of IM

Review IM profile and screen name.

1. Make sure profile does not contain personal information.
2. Make sure there is no picture on the profile.
3. Ensure the profile does not link to a personal Web site.
4. Check IM screen name to ensure it is not similar to the real name or other personal information. Also, check to make it isn't sexual in nature.

Cell Phone IMs

1. An option is to block instant text-messaging capabilities on a cell phone.
2. Cell phone IMs are, unfortunately, an easy way for predators and bullies to affect their victims.

In addition to rules, make sure to do the following:

1. Discuss IM safety issues with your child.
2. Teach your child good netiquette.
3. Inform your child not to respond to flames (hateful or obscene messages).

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4. Keep track of your child's IM member number, screen name, and password.
5. Make sure screen names or IM numbers are not given out to strangers. Remind your child that people met online are still strangers and should not be added to buddy lists (that great friend met in a chat room might really be a cyber predator).
6. Carefully monitor online interactions, and keep track of online friends. Make sure to keep avenues of communication open.
7. Stay educated—know the current messaging terminology.

Remember

When a child meets someone online in a chat or forum and adds that person to his or her buddy list, that person is forever notified when the child goes online. They will have access to the child in private instant messaging.

By keeping these rules and guidelines in mind, safe text messaging is possible!

Children who participate in activities and share what they have learned about Internet safety are more likely to practice safe habits online.

Additional lessons and support for students, teachers, and parents on Internet safety topics are available from i-SAFE Inc. **www.isafe.org**.

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