

School Counsellor Newsletter



Taking an active role in your son's device use - Part One

Edition Fifteen

Netsafe Safer Internet Day NZ was last week on 11 February. Netsafe's research shows a quarter of New Zealand children were bothered or upset by something they experienced online, and parents were the most common port of call. It can be alarming to read articles that talk about young people being addicted to the internet and that internet use, such as gaming and social media, is a leading mental health issue for young people, potentially damaging self-esteem and wellbeing. Lack of sleep, changes in behaviour, loss of control and violence, refusing to go to school, as well as lying and deception in relation to device use, are some of the main concerns raised by mental health professionals in regard to internet use. Research into this area has an important message: Adult intervention is required to help young people develop healthy habits with their device use. Children's brains are still developing right through into early adulthood and so as adults, with fully-developed brains, it is essential that we set clear boundaries and take an active role in our children's device use.

This newsletter, Part One and Two, aims to provide some starting points for parents to think about so that you can best support your son to use his device/s appropriately. Even if your son does not have a device yet you can still have conversations with him about the internet and model suitable use

of your own devices. For example, not using your mobile phone at meal times. Your family values, and indeed the Medbury Values, should apply to device usage as they do to everyday life.

A great place to start as a parent is to encourage face-to-face activities as much as possible and make family time screen free. Keep devices out of bedrooms and in a common area of the house so you can monitor your children when they are online. Consider turning off internet access at night, or from a certain point in the evening - this could have positive benefits for your own internet use as well! Set clear time limits for device use each day, even if your son is not happy about this. A handy tip for helping your child to get off their device is to employ a bridging technique. This involves asking your son to show you what he has been doing with his device time. Even if you do not understand what he has created on Minecraft, for example, your interest will make a connection, or bridge, to help him feel better about finishing. You may even find that over time he will offer to show you what he has been doing and then finish without argument. Give it a try and see!

If your son would like to try a new game check it out with them and get them to explain it to you. If you allow them to communicate with others online talk to your son about who they are. John Parsons,

a leading New Zealand Internet Safety expert, uses the analogy of a child going to the park on their own for the first time when accessing a new online world. You wouldn't just let them go to the park; you would talk to them about how long they can go there, you might go with them the first time, you might talk about how to cope with any strangers and you would talk about how to get help if needed. All of these same safety steps and measures from the "real world" should also be applied when your son is doing something by himself in the online world. John Parson's book, [Keeping your children safe online: a guide for New Zealand parents](#), is an excellent, very readable resource, if you would like further support and advice.



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If you wish to discuss the services the school counsellor can provide please see your son's homeroom teacher or Amos Pilgrim
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