

## HOW CHILDREN CAN KEEP THEMSELVES SAFE & SAVVY

If your parents have given you this chapter of our book to read it is because they want you to be safe and savvy users of the information superhighway. They care about you and, likewise, you need to care about yourself in how you use all the screens in your life: your cellphone, tablet, the family computer, your gaming console and whatever other new devices have come on to the market in the few months since we finished this manuscript and it went to print.

Yes, you live in such an exciting world that is changing in some way almost every day. You were born into a digital world and are wired to use today's technology without having to read an instruction manual. You are the envy of every adult on the planet.

You are probably between the ages of 13 and 18 and you own sophisticated pieces of technology that you interact with every day, many times a day. Did you know that your smartphone has more computer processing power than NASA's *Apollo 11* when it made its trip to the moon? Now isn't that something?

You live in a plug-and-play world. If you can connect any of your devices to the Internet you can play, whether you are connecting to a friend on Facebook, playing Minecraft or The Sims, sharing information with members of your chat group on WhatsApp, sending information about a school project to someone via Dropbox or downloading information from your school server.

The world has changed considerably since your parents were children. The public library is now the Internet. The books in the library are all the websites (both good and bad ones), and the letters you write are in the form

of emails, SMSs, social media posts and more. The post office consists of many different social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram, for example, and pen pals have been replaced with ‘friends’ and ‘contacts’ online.

There are so many ways to engage with your world today and that’s awesome, but owning a sophisticated piece of technology doesn’t necessarily mean you are a responsible user of it. The world holds so many amazing opportunities for you to take advantage of, but there are also dangers that you need to be aware of so that you can try to avoid the potholes in the road, or getting yourself into trouble or a sticky situation.

You need to remember that you are a human being first, and a ‘digital native’ second. Celebrate all that there is to celebrate about being human and learn how to integrate the best of what technology has to offer. In the next few sections we are going to give you some guidelines on how to do this by sharing with you some things you need to know that may surprise you, some guidelines to help you navigate this new world wisely and some short soundbites to remember that will make all the difference to your future.

## **THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW**

We live in an increasingly high-tech era and are all linked to the digital skin of the world. All of this is new to us and hasn’t been around for long enough for us to know everything about it so we are learning the rules of this new game together. One thing we are very sure of, however, is that the Internet remembers everything.

### *The Internet remembers*

In our regular digital safety presentations to learners in schools, one of the facts that shocks kids most is that the Internet remembers everything – even what they have deleted.

In just the same way as we do regular backups of the content on our computers, search engines and social networking sites do exactly the same thing and they keep multiple versions over time. It’s called a cache. The only way to have something permanently removed from a cache is through a legal process, which is costly and can take a long time.

Also, don’t fall into the trap of thinking that if you delete a photograph from Facebook, for example, it is gone forever; it is only deleted off your timeline and remains on the timelines of all your friends who may have reposted what you posted. When you share something with a friend, know

that they have the ability to share it with their friends too and this is how content goes viral. That's great when it is something you want the world to see, but if it is private you need to keep it so. It is your choice.



*Anything posted in social media becomes permanently available, even if not on the site where it was first posted. Inexperienced users or those who are not very clued up on how social networks function will often create default settings that compound the problem. For example, they link Twitter and Facebook, so that anything posted on one automatically appears on the other (a big no-no, as material crafted for Facebook is usually too long for Twitter, and Twitter content like hashtags and user IDs make no sense on Facebook). The result is that when they've posted something inappropriate or embarrassing on one site, and quickly delete it when they realise their mistake, they often forget that it remains alive on the other site. If it's outrageously offensive, or sexual in nature, it will usually have been reposted or shared many times before the creator of the message realises what's happened. It is not a pretty sight!*

### ***The Internet is neutral – we are the problem***

In 2014 the Internet turned 25 years old. It's been around for quite a while, for longer than members of the public have had access to it. It was originally developed for academics in universities to share documents with each other, but it is now used for so much more – both good and bad. But the point is that the Internet itself is not a place; it is just a communication channel – and a powerful one too.

The Internet is neither good nor bad; it is what you do with it that makes it either one or the other. Human beings have the choice as to what they share on the Internet – great ideas that might change the world, building web-based businesses, sharing friendly conversations or information about events and more, or it can be used for cyber-bullying, cybercrime, for sharing pornographic material, to stalk other people and other dangerous activities. All of this can be done on the same system. It is a matter of choice what you do and how much of it you do.

It might be helpful to think of the Internet as the sea. It can be a really fun place, especially if you know how to swim, but you can also drown.

### ***Your online reputation will affect your future***

Everything you do online contributes to your digital footprint, which shapes your digital reputation. And this follows you wherever you go. It's a

bit like a tattoo: if you had a tattoo all over your face, it would be very hard and painful to get rid of. Your digital footprint is much the same. Whether you carve out a good or a bad one, you have it with you for life. This means you need to choose wisely.

The Internet is able to track all our online activities, remembering:

- what you say in your posts
- what photos you share
- what you buy
- what you recommend to others
- what you read
- what websites you visit
- the chat rooms you were part of
- and much more ...

Employers and educational institutions are starting to do online background checks of potential employees or students. Examples abound where people are not getting jobs or are being fired for what they have said or posted online.

### **IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF**

Before posting anything, quickly ask yourself these questions:

- What would my best friend's father/mother think if they saw this post? If you would be embarrassed or horrified, take this as a sign not to press the post button.
- What if this post landed up becoming the front-page story of the *Sunday Times*? Would you be proud of it? If the answer is no, then don't post it.
- Does this text or photograph portray me or my friends in a positive light, or is it embarrassing or degrading? If the answer is not positive, then don't post or send it.
- Would I say this to the person's face if he or she were here? If not, then don't post it.
- Am I being respectful?
- Is it good manners?

Rather be safe than sorry. We often post things when we are feeling emotionally charged. When you have just had a fight with your friend, a disagreement with your parents or have split up with a boy- or girlfriend, rather don't post anything rash because you may not be thinking straight.

It would be far better to go find a real shoulder to cry on or talk to. That's what human beings are there for, particularly your parents. Online pity parties can be a recipe for disaster so try to avoid them.



Fill in the blanks:

- If I want to be safe online .....  
.....
- If I want to be successful .....  
.....
- If I want to be connected .....  
.....
- If I want to be part of my family .....  
.....

### **THINK ABOUT HOW YOU WOULD ACT IN THE REAL WORLD AND BE CONSISTENT**

- If you wouldn't say horrible things to people face to face, then don't do so online. It is cowardly and will most probably get you into trouble. It's not worth it for that brief instant of feeling vengeful.
- If you wouldn't stand up on stage in front of the whole school and strip naked, then don't post photos of your private parts online or share them via instant-messaging services, such as WhatsApp or Instagram. The online world is a far bigger stage and news travels faster than you can imagine. Even if someone dares you to send a naked selfie, you need to make a decision *now*, a pact with yourself, that you will *never* do this.
- If you would never cut out paragraphs from a magazine or book and stick them into a school project, then don't borrow content from websites and pass it off as your own. This is plagiarism and, in matric and when studying at tertiary education institutions, plagiarism software is used to detect what percentage of your assignment is copied content. You will fail if you do this. Don't be lazy. Learn to put things in your own words. Get into a good habit from a young age. It's a skill that will serve you well for the rest of your life.
- Always behave in a crowd as you would behave when you are alone. In other words, don't get so caught up in crowd behaviour that you forget who you are and how you live your life. Stand up for yourself and your

values. Ask yourself, “If I was alone, would I do this?” or “If I was feeling strong, would I do this?” The same goes for online behaviour: rather be a stand-out positive brand of one than follow a bunch of sheep into trouble.

## **UNDERSTAND THE ATTENTION GAME**

People of all ages play the attention-seeking game – it is the most popular game in town. Understand this and you will understand what drives a lot of human behaviour, even yours.

Everyone wants to be noticed and everyone needs to belong to a group. One of the most upsetting things that can happen to anyone, but particularly to teenagers, is when they are shut out or left out of a group or ignored as if they don't exist. It can lead young people to do terrible things to themselves and others out of anger, spite, despair and loneliness.

When we feel these emotions we tend to resort to negative attention-seeking behaviour because we would rather get negative attention than nothing at all. This is what often happens in abusive situations. Being verbally or physically abused is a form of attention and if that is the only kind of attention the victim can attract they will accept it no matter how denigrating it can be.

Don't fall into this trap! If you are feeling empty, broken or lonely, find a real human being to talk to face to face rather than trying to fix yourself online by doing horrible things to other people to make yourself feel better, just as a weak bully would in the real world. When you are feeling down and looking for attention, you are at risk of visiting websites that encourage high-risk behaviour from violence to sex, drugs and more, and you could find yourself getting caught up in something that may be very hard to pull yourself out of.

## **DON'T HITCHHIKE ON THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY**

Just think about some of the lessons your parents have taught you to keep you safe in the real world:

- Look left, right and left again when you cross the road.
- Don't talk to strangers.
- Don't catch lifts with strangers or hitchhike.
- Don't accept sweets from strangers.
- Don't swim anywhere if you are alone.

In just the same way, there are rules to help you to navigate the information superhighway safely. In the real world, there are two types of people who hitchhike: those who are desperate and out of options and those who are ignorant and don't know any better. When you make friends with strangers online, they might not be who they say they are. Photographs lie. Someone posing as a 16-year-old girl or boy may in fact be a 50-year-old adult. How are you to know unless you know them in the real world?

## **YOU NEED TO PROTECT YOURSELF**

As you get older you will spend more and more time away from your parents: at school, on school camps or tours, at parties or sleepovers. When your parents are not around they cannot step in to protect you or help you to make a wise choice. This responsibility now falls on your shoulders and you need to make the best possible choice in whatever situation you find yourself.

When faced with a decision, bear in mind that there are three things you 'own' or are ultimately responsible for:

### **1. Your mind**

You only have one mind, and your brain is like a sponge, absorbing your experiences – what you see/watch, what you hear, taste, smell or do. It all goes in and shapes who you are and what you become. Be selective about the computer games you play, the television programmes you watch, what you download and share.

Watching or playing excessively with violent or aggressive content on TV programmes or in computer games has been linked to aggressive tendencies.

Watching pornography online is highly addictive and can shape your attitude towards your own sexuality and how you think about others. Remember that porn is a fantasy – it is not what happens in real life.

When you are feeling down or upset, you become vulnerable to others who might promise you all sorts of things to get something out of you. "I'll never treat you like your mother, just send me a photo of yourself." You, therefore, need to protect your mind.

### **2. Your body**

You only have one body and you need to protect it from physical harm or indecent exposure. Do not give out too many personal details about yourself on your profiles or online. The more you share the easier it is to

track you down in the physical world. You do not have to fill in the name of your school or your home address. Making friends with strangers online can put you in physical danger. And don't ever arrange to meet an online friend without your parents knowing.

When people ask you to send them a picture of your private parts online, don't believe promises, such as that they will never show anyone else. Lies, lies, lies. Don't be fooled.

### **3. Your reputation**

Your reputation will be determined by the choices you make both online and offline. You need to take responsibility for these choices because they will have an impact on your future.

So, to recap, you own three things – one mind, one body and one reputation – and *you* have to protect them. Your parents will give you the information and tools to do this, but ultimately it will be up to you when they aren't there to protect you. Use this easy-to-remember mantra to assess your thoughts, behaviour and actions online. It could save your life.



### ***Be an 'upstander' not a bystander***

If something were to go wrong with a friendship in real life or you had a problem at school, the likelihood is that you would tell your parents about it so that they could help you. If something horrible was happening to a friend, you might also share that with a parent or maybe a teacher who could help. Often such problems spill over into the online world and you may see a friend or someone you know getting dissed or cyber-bullied. Will you stand by and watch (be a bystander), or join in, or will you call for help (be an 'upstander')?

Choose to stand up and do something about it instead of standing by. It is one of the most powerful ways of protecting each other online. Have your friends' backs instead of becoming a silent collaborator in the crime.

### ***Stop, block and tell***

So, what if someone was sending you rude or nasty messages ... insulting you on social networking sites, blogs, and public websites ... posting embar-

rassing or revealing pictures of you ... forwarding your private emails to others ... spreading rumours and accusations about you ... impersonating you or starting an online fight with you? What would you do?

Do you remember how the words “Stop, drop and roll” were drilled into you in primary school so that in the event of a fire you could take positive action that could save your life? In the world of cyber-bullying, the words “Stop, block and tell” are becoming an essential safety mantra to help you to protect yourself. If you find yourself in any of the above situations, do the following:

- **Stop** what you’re doing and take a deep breath: do *not* answer or get into an argument online.
- **Block** the person who is harassing you – for example, use the blocking feature on BBM or WhatsApp so that the bully can no longer connect with you.
- **Tell** a parent or another adult you trust, otherwise no one can help you.

### *Don’t play tricks on people online*

It might seem like a fun idea to play a practical joke on someone online, but these often backfire and you’re the one who will get into trouble.

For example, phone-jacking is popular among younger teenage boys. While having friends over, a boy may leave his cellphone lying around. A couple of his friends get hold of it, and start sending obscene messages to the boy’s social circle – boys and girls. One of the recipients is bound to show it to a parent, and the fallout can then be massive, ranging from social embarrassment – for the parents of the perpetrators as well as the children – to disciplinary action at school, to the extreme case of legal action.

## **RESPECT YOUR PARENTS**

We know that sometimes you may think your parents are old-fashioned or too conservative, but one thing we know is that they love you and have your best interests at heart. Respect them – if only because they survived the world without Google! And they do know a thing or two about living successfully in the world.

- Teach them about technology and how to use it.
- Share your world with them. Keep them in the loop about where you are and what you are doing, even online, so that they can help you if need be. If you keep them guessing they’ll probably think you are up to no good.
- Ask for help when you need it. Even if they don’t know how to fix it, they

will find someone who can. If you can't approach your parents with a problem, find another adult you trust and confide in them.

## **DIGITAL SAFETY NO-NO'S**

Your behaviour online and how you use technology are choices. You are responsible for each and every choice, each and every connection that you make. Here is a list of actions you should *avoid* in order to keep safe in the digital world:

- Don't create porn (videos or photographs). If you are under 18, it is illegal and you can get a criminal record.
- Don't send porn to anyone. If you are under 18, it is illegal and you can get a criminal record.
- Don't cut and paste directly from other people's work or websites without putting it into your own words – and even then you should acknowledge the source. Plagiarism is unethical and could cost you your matric or tertiary qualification.
- Don't open links in emails and posts from people you don't know. You could open yourself up to being hacked, blackmailed or scammed.
- Don't make friends with strangers.
- Don't give out too much personal information on your profiles.
- Don't diss other people. Words can harm so be careful what you say online.
- Don't overshare your thoughts and feelings online. If you are very upset or angry, rather stay offline and find a real shoulder to cry on.
- Don't post mean comments about others. Never text anything you wouldn't say to someone's face.
- Don't post embarrassing pictures of others. Only post things that put them in a good light.
- Don't spread rumours or lies about others.
- Don't play tricks on people online.
- Don't buy into peer pressure and following the crowd. Be your own person.
- Don't cop out and hide behind a screen – engage with real life.
- Don't text anything you wouldn't say to someone face to face.
- Don't fall asleep with your phone under your pillow while listening to music. Protect your brain from radiation and sleep with your phone far away from your head.

## **HOW TO STAY SAFE AND SAVVY**

Actions you can take that will keep you safe and savvy in the digital world:

- For better sleep, switch your phone off completely so that you aren't disturbed by or tempted to check for messages or social media updates in the night.
- If you want to study better, switch your phone off completely.
- Keep your cellphone charged at all times. A dead phone cannot help you in an emergency.
- Make sure your phone – as well as any other device you may use – is password-protected, and don't share that password with anyone unless you want to be phone-jacked.
- Switch off the geo-location settings on your phone and don't use apps such as Foursquare. Geo-location tells people where you are, so that even predators will be able to find you.
- Make sure you implement privacy settings on your social media profiles to give you some control over who sees what.
- Make sure that what you post is a good representation of who you are as a person and what you and your family stand for. It is like an advertisement.
- Google yourself from time to time to see what comes up.
- Do learn how to block and 'unfriend' others.
- Do break the silence around cyber-bullying – be an 'upstander', not a bystander.
- Do let someone know if you get into trouble.
- Do be discerning about what is good and bad, what is okay and not okay for you. This might be different for someone else. Stand for something or you will fall for anything.
- Do think before you post.
- Do engage with social media as if the whole world is watching you.
- Do make wise choices by thinking through the consequences.
- Check yourself before you wreck yourself.



There are a number of ways in which you can break the law when you are online that could result in a criminal record. Paul Jacobson, director of Web•Tech•Law, lists 10 ways to get into trouble with the law online:

### **1 Share explicit photos and videos of yourself with others, especially adults**

If you are under 18 and you share explicit photos and videos of yourself with others, you may be distributing what the law regards as pornography and both you and the person you are sending it to could be prosecuted under a number of anti-child pornography laws.

### **2 Share explicit photos and videos of other children with other people**

The same child pornography issue applies here. In addition, you are also violating the other child's right to privacy and that can lead to your parents being sued (because they are responsible for you) or, if you are old enough, you being sued.

### **3 Share music, TV episodes and movies without permission**

Most of the music, TV episodes and movies you enjoy are protected by copyright laws. It is illegal for you to make copies without permission and share them with other people. Unlike in the United States, where something called 'fair use' allows people to make copies for personal use, we don't have the same sorts of permissions in our laws. If you infringe copyright, you (or your parents) can be sued for losses and even prosecuted in a criminal court.

### **4 Take videos of kids fighting on the playground and posting them to YouTube**

The law is getting pretty serious about tackling bullying in schools. If you take videos of kids fighting or bullying each other and post it for fun, you are probably violating their privacy and defaming them. If you see kids fighting and you want to capture the fight so you can report it to adults, take it to a responsible adult directly. Don't stop to share it on YouTube.

## **5 Make fun of other people, especially kids, on Twitter, Facebook or even in private chat groups**

If you make fun of other people you are defaming them. This means you are harming their reputation – a reputation to which they have a right. What you are saying might be factually correct but that may not excuse you making harmful comments. Remember that whatever you say about someone online, even if it is in a private chat group on WhatsApp or Snapchat, can still be stored and turned over to law-enforcement authorities and used against you.

## **6 Impersonate your friends online and post embarrassing things on their behalf**

Sometimes this is funny (if the prank is harmless), but when you impersonate your friends online you may be breaking the terms and conditions that govern use of the service, defaming them by publishing comments that appear to come from them and even infringing their privacy if you also go through their private communications and data.

## **7 Check in at schools and people's homes without their permission**

Checking in at your current location is a great way to let your friends know where you are but not everyone likes that. If you check in at schools, you may be helping nasty people find new victims for their crimes and checking in at people's homes without their permission may violate their privacy.

## **8 Copy someone else's work and say it is yours**

When you copy or use someone else's work and claim that it's yours, that is plagiarism and plagiarism is illegal. Always say where you got the material you are using and whether you have permission to use it.

## **9 Bully other kids online**

Picking on other kids online and sharing embarrassing or offensive stuff about them is both harmful and illegal. Under recent laws, you could be prosecuted for harassment. It may seem like fun or you may think that your actions are justified, but think about the effect your actions have

on others. There are many reports about kids who are bullied online and who hurt themselves or even take their own lives because of the bullying. It's not a game.

### **10 Share stupid stuff online**

Posting photos of you and your friends doing foolish or even illegal things can really harm your future. What you post online is often permanent (even when you use services such as Snapchat) and can be found by future employers, police and other people who will use what you share to make decisions about you when you apply for a job or take part in certain activities. Photos or videos of you acting illegally can be used to hold you responsible for your actions by the police.

## **BE SAFE AND SAVVY ONLINE**

There are so many amazing opportunities available to you that were never possible before simply because you were born in this era. We want you to be able to take advantage of new ways of connecting with people, innovative ways of building businesses and alternative ways of drumming up support for causes and funding for ideas. And you can: if you are smart and wise about the ways in which you put the digital world to work for you and not against you.

May you always remain curious about your world – that's the way you learn and get better at doing things – but never forget that curiosity also killed the cat, as the saying goes. Forewarned is forearmed and may you never forget the safety mantra:

*One Mind, One Body and One Reputation.*

We wish you good luck on your journey into cyberspace. Be successful and make yourself proud.

## FROM THIS CHAPTER ...

- One Mind, One Body, One Reputation.
- Be an upstander, not a bystander.
- People are more important than screens.
- Stop, block and tell.
- Think before you post.
- Check yourself before you wreck yourself.
- Tweet as if the whole world is watching you.
- Respect and manners, ladies and gentlemen.
- Social media is like a tattoo.
- Be your own hero.