THE VIRTUAL HIGH SCHOOL

10. Policy on Safety and Security of Learner Profiles and Data

WELCOME

THE VIRTUAL HIGH SCHOOL BEST PRACTICES FOR DIGITAL LEARNING

Digital technology has changed how we live, work, learn and engage with those around us. It has progressed more rapidly compared to any other innovation in history, having reached 50 per cent of the developing world's population. With digital technology and the internet being highly accessible, it is often assumed that students are fully competent with using digital tools or understand the responsibility associated with digital activity.

Cybersecurity is a general term for technologies, practices and processes used to protect digital data from unauthorized access or misuse. Everyone plays a part in cybersecurity when they follow internet safety tips and cybersecurity best practices. The following document will provide appropriate practices to optimise digital academic experiences.

1. Digital Safety while Using the Internet

We encourage parents to monitor their children's digital activity and instil digital safety practices from an early age. As children develop, they will use the internet without direct supervision. However, parents should continue having conversations about cybersecurity and digital safety in order to ensure their children are creating healthy internet habits. Some internet safety practices include the following:

- Activate parental controls and content filters.
- Use search engines that have "safe search" features for filtering inappropriate content, and there are also special search engines for children, such as "Google Family".
- Configure your child's mobile settings to ensure harmful sites cannot be accessed. Many Internet service providers (ISPs) provide parent-control options. There is also software that helps block access to sites and restricts personal information from being shared digital.
- Implement rules on internet usage, keep devices such as the computer in a common area where children can be monitored. Monitor any time spent on smartphones or tablets, and reinforce the rule that these should also be used in a common area.
- Bookmark common or favourite sites for easy access.
- Talk about the advantages and disadvantages of the internet and encourage them child to talk to you about any concerns they may have about using the internet.
- Teach and prepare them for independence as they grow older. Children often depend on their parents and caregivers to provide protection and advice, but you should also prepare them for independence.

- Make them aware of responsible internet usage, such as protecting their login details and data protection.
  - » When creating a new password, pay attention to strong password requirements, and change them often.
  - » Do not share your passwords with other people, other than the person supervising the digital activity.
  - » Make sure passwords and password hints are stored securely. Record passwords in an encrypted file on the computer, or select another secure password storage method.
  - » Never enter personal or financial information on a website that is not secure (look for the padlock or "https://" prefix in the browser address bar).
- Promptly install software updates, especially when they include important security upgrades.
- Do not trust public Wi-Fi security. Avoid connecting to unsecured public Wi-Fi networks.
- Enable two-factor authentication in order to prevent anyone from accessing personal accounts and information. Add this extra layer of security to keep your accounts safe even if someone knows your password.

2. Preventing cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is when someone uses technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. It happens on devices like smartphones, computers, tablets, and gaming systems. Cyberbullying has emotional and psychological effects, and in many cases is against the law. At times, cyberbullying can be easy to spot — for example, if your child shows you a text, comment, or post that is harsh. Other acts are less obvious, like posting someone's personal information, or using photos or videos that may hurt or embarrass another person. Similar to digital safety protocol, values of appropriate digital behaviour must be instilled early. Students should be educated on the lasting effects of cyberbullying, how to report on such, as well as the ramifications. When using digital communication platforms, all interaction should be lawful, and should not cause harm or infringe on other peoples' rights.

2.1. What Are the Signs of Cyberbullying?

Many children who are cyberbullied do not often want to confide in anyone because they feel ashamed, or fear that their devices may be taken away. If your child has not confided in you on whether they are a victim of cyberbullying, signs of cyberbullying vary, but may include:

- Being emotionally upset during or after using the Internet or their phone.
- Being very secretive or protective of their digital interaction.
- Spending more time than usual in their room.
- Withdrawal from or lack of interest in family, friends, and activities.
- Avoiding school or group gatherings.
- Deteriorating academic performance.
- Changes in their mood, behaviour, sleep, or appetite.
- Suddenly wanting to stop using their devices.
- Being nervous or jumpy when getting a message, text, or email.
- Avoiding discussions about their digital interactions and/or digital devices.

2.2. How to assist your child if they are a victim of cyberbullying.

If your child is being cyberbullied, we encourage you to follow these guidelines:

- Offer comfort and support. Talking about any bullying experiences you had in your childhood might help your child feel less alone and confide in you about their challenges.
- Let your child know that it is not their fault, bullying says more about the bully than the victim. Praise your child for doing the right thing by talking to you about it, and remind them that you are in this together.
- Reassure your child that you will work out what to do.
- Notify the school. Inform the Principal, Learning Support Coordinator, or Student Coordinators about the situation. Many schools and after-school clubs have rules for responding to cyberbullying. Before reporting the problem, let your child know that you plan to do so, so that you can work out a plan that makes you both feel comfortable.
- Encourage your child not to respond to cyberbullying because doing so only makes the situation worse.
- Keep records. Keep screenshots of the threatening messages, pictures, and texts. These can be used as evidence with the bully's parents, school, employer, or even the police.
- Get help. If your child agrees, meeting with a therapist may help work through their feelings.
- Block the bully. Most devices have settings that let you electronically block emails, messages, or texts from specific people.
- Limit access to technology. Although it is hurtful, many children who are bullied cannot resist the temptation to check websites or phones to see if there are new messages. Keep the computer in a common area in the house and put limits on the use of cellphones and games. You might be able to turn off text messaging services during certain hours, and most websites, apps, and smartphones include parental control options that give parents access to their children’s messages and digital activity.
- Consider monitoring your child’s social media use. Programs and applications are available that can monitor their social media accounts and alert parents to any inappropriate language or photos. Some can give detailed reports of a child's browsing history and tell a parent how much time they spent digital and on each site. Consider your child’s age and digital behavior when deciding whether to monitor devices. Then, if you choose to monitor, talk to them about it and explain why it is important.
- Know what sites your child uses. This is your chance to encourage them to teach you about something they know well. This demonstrates that you are interested in how they spend their time digital, while helping you understand how to best monitor their digital safety.

EDUCATION'S PURPOSE IS TO REPLACE AN EMPTY MIND WITH AN OPEN ONE

Malcolm Forbes

3. Preventing “Zoom Fatigue”

Zoom fatigue is regarded as the mental and physical strain one might feel after extensive time using digital devices. Although, digitization is moving at a rapid pace, it is important to maintain a balanced lifestyle. The following practices can be incorporated in your child’s studies to prevent zoom fatigue from occurring:

- Keep devices out of bedrooms. If computers, phones and tablets should be allowed only in common areas in the house, it is easier to monitor usage. You could implement a rule that all family members may not use their devices at certain times, such as:
  - » Meal times
  - » After a specific time
- Encourage differentiated forms of learning to limit screen time, such as simulations or encourage them to explain concepts to you and provide them with follow-up questions as they “teach” the topic.
- Encourage them to participate in co-curricular activities. Isolation may result in a lack social skills if they do not participate in any other social programs outside of school, this may lead to a deterioration of mental well-being.
- Set up a routine for learning, and digital recreational purposes. Monitor their time spent on the internet, as well as the sites that they frequently visit.

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