Online Etiquette for Kids

Teaching today’s children manners isn’t as simple as “please” and “thank

you.” Ninety percent of American kids have an online history by the time

they’re 2 years old, and almost 60 percent of kids ages 6 through 9 go

online every day. The Internet and fancy cell phones pose new dangers

to kids, but they also pose new ways for kids to flout society’s

conventions. Learn what good manners you should teach your little

techie.

**Learn about privacy settings.** Social networking sites and online

forums have plenty of settings, and you should learn them all. If you

allow your child to sign up for Facebook or any other online

community, walk her through the slew of options available. Who can

see her photos? Who can send her a message? She should

consider using a picture of something other than herself as her

“profile photo,” the one that anyone can see.

**Choose your online identity carefully.** For some online communities, it’s best to use a

made-up screen name that doesn’t give any clues that reveal your kid’s identity. However, when

children decide to communicate anonymously, they become less accountable. Teach your child

to own whatever she writes online, whether using her own name or a screen name. If she

wouldn’t post something under her own name, she shouldn’t post it at all.

**Imagine everyone can see what you write.** Communications expert Susan P. Ascher says

children often slip up because they write the wrong things online. “They think not everyone sees

their posts,” she says. “They think if they say it online, it's not out loud, and somehow they will

get away with it.” Even setting your child’s pages to private is no guarantee that her words won’t

spread. Social networkers share what they see, and emails can spread virally like wildfire.

“Nothing is ever deleted,” Ascher says. “It is always on someone's servers or email or

Facebook or phone.”

**Only writ e somet hing online you’d say in person.** This is commonly called the “golden rule”

of online etiquette. Following it saves everyone lots of trouble, yet it is violated time and again.

Your kid is less likely to damage peer relationships, get in trouble at school, embarrass herself,

or worst of all, make a mistake that affects her future, if she follows this rule. Make sure she

knows it, and repeat it often.

**Limit “net speak.”** Ascher urges against adopting the “netspeak” and Internet acronyms that

are prevalent, as these create bad habits. “We are becoming a society of people who can't

spell, can't speak and can't add,” she says. What might fly among peers might be disrespectful

to an adult family member. If your social media maven writes Facebook posts that would make

her English teacher proud, she’s actually building skills that help her in school and in life. Imagine

that!

**Don’t engage in flame wars.** There’s nothing wrong with a spirited debate, but it’s important

to teach your child to sign out if a conversation becomes too heated. Tempers can easily

escalate when conversations unfold in real time, and no good can come from joining in.

Encourage your child to vent any frustrations with you rather than continuing the debate online.

**It ’s not *always* nice t o share.** Websites of all kinds have made it easy to “share” something

with one simple click. This makes social networking more fun, but your child should resist the

urge to share private messages or pictures. Even limited-privacy messages and pictures—

those that are sent to a selected group of people—should be kept to herself. If someone sends

something inappropriate to your kid, she shouldn’t join in the sharing frenz y that may follow.

**Don’t st eal online.** The Internet makes it easy to enjoy an unlimited supply of entertainment.

One in five 11-year-olds say they regularly download music illegally. Video games, movies and

TV shows are also easy to download illegally. Remind your child that obtaining entertainment

through file sharing websites is stealing, and it’s punishable by fines or even jail time. Point your

child toward free streaming websites and gaming platforms that play by the rules.

**Know when to log off.** Social networks, instant message programs and texting make it easy

for children to communicate with their loved ones, but it’s important that they know when to log

off. Ascher says children must learn when it’s better to talk on the phone or face to face. “Ninetythree

percent of what we communicate is nonverbal; it’s what we see,” she says. “And even a

great video of me won't communicate the confidence of my handshake, my smile or how I enter

a room.”

Teach your child these modern manners and feel confident that she’ll behave as well in the virtual

world as she does in the physical one!