safe technology use

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At Strathcona, we recognise that many of you have questions about the technologies that are being used by your daughters, and how you can best manage them. We want to support you to the best of our ability and part of doing this is by alerting you to some of the dangers as well as giving you some suggested strategies for managing technology access in the home.

The internet can be a very dangerous place. In the course of your daughter's studies, she will use a variety of technologies that exist 'in the cloud'. Strathcona’s Learning Management System (LMS) called BlackBoard is hosted at the School and part of the reason that we have done this is so we can provide a secure environment which we have full control over. You can be assured that your daughter’s teachers thoroughly examine all of the resources (internet sites, apps, etc.) that are part of our curriculum as well as those that are used on a daily basis. The School utilises a very strong filtering system and your daughter’s technology use in class is supervised at all times. What we cannot control is the way in which your daughter uses technology when not at school. One of the ways in which we can work to ensure that your daughter is safe not only from the dangers of the internet but also in terms of her wellbeing, is to have a consistent approach.

The School outlines specific expectations in terms of homework for students at all year levels. In many cases, this will involve the use of technology.

Strathcona also recommends that:

- Parents directly supervise their daughter's technology use
- Students have regular breaks from technology
- Parents set realistic time boundaries on technology use
- Students do not go to sleep with their phone or mobile device by their bed

You will find information in this booklet informing you of some of the technologies and trends to be aware of, as well as some of the strategies that can be used at home. Each of the strategies above will be discussed in more depth in the pages that follow. I hope you find this booklet to be both useful and informative.

Adrian Janson
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Managing your daughter’s internet use can be a very tricky thing to do. Although she may not appreciate this fact immediately, it is in her own best interest. Let’s look at some specific goals and strategies that can be used.

Parents should directly supervise their daughter’s technology use

This is easier said than done! However, there are some strategies that you can use to assist with this. The suggestions below can form part of ‘an agreement’ that you negotiate with your daughter. Your daughter has signed a Responsible Digital User Agreement (RDUA) with the School and is aware of what is contained within it (as well as the consequences for breaching it). A document of this nature would not be appropriate for the home, however. Your agreement should take the form of an open discussion and a shared understanding. There are certainly some things that will be non-negotiable, but try to involve her in the decision making as much as possible so she feels that the rules (as well as the consequences) are fair.

- Set a time when you expect your daughter to be in bed.
- Negotiate her homework time/s around family time, chores, sport, dinner and her study preferences.
- Locate her computer in a public space (if she is using her iPad or a Notebook – this is easy).
- Consider installing a web-filter such as ‘K-9’. K-9 is a free web-filter for PC or Mac that not only allows you to block categories of websites but to also turn the internet ‘on’ or ‘off’ at times that you set. It comes highly recommended from parents who have installed and used it already. It also works on the iPad.
- Negotiate a time with her when she can use social media (Facebook, etc.), play games or generally ‘surf’. This is very important as there needs to be a balance that she perceives as ‘fair’ (or at least a compromise). Somewhere between 45 – 60 minutes would be recommended and in balance with other activities.
- As part of the negotiation, your daughter should agree that, when she is using technology during her homework time, all social media, games, etc. should be turned off. Those of you who have a good understanding of technology will be better able to police this – try to get used to what your daughter’s screen looks like when she is doing these things.
- Listening to music or watching television while studying are also big distractions. Despite what your daughter may say about multi-tasking, the research does not support this – she cannot do both at the same time effectively!
- Your daughter should not have her phone or her iPad by her bed. Now I know what your daughter is going to say when you propose...
this! She will tell you that she uses her phone as her alarm and she reads books on her iPad. These are very valid points – and the response to this is that both need to be ‘muted’ at night time. This will at least prevent the constant alerts and notifications that are delivered via social media and apps.

• Insist that she takes small breaks – whether she gets up to have a drink, go to the toilet, walk around the house, etc. Breaks are important to allow her eyes to rest and to prevent muscle or back strain.

Consequences for breaching the internet use agreement

Just as it is important to negotiate your daughter’s internet access and homework times, it is just as important to discuss and agree upon consequences for not following these rules. Your daughter is a teenager and she will almost certainly try to push the boundaries of your agreement! In addition to this, the lure of social media is very strong – it has a strong addictive quality and ‘demands attention’.

The best form of punishment is to remove the privilege of being able to use the internet for a period of time. Try not to be too harsh, but as your daughter has taken it upon herself to use these technologies at times outside of the agreement you have made and discussed, she has effectively taken some time ‘in advance’. As stated earlier, if you have previously discussed and agreed upon the consequences, she is more likely to accept them.

Managing your daughter’s internet and technology use is not easy and hopefully these suggestions assist you in creating a fair study routine for your home. There are certainly lots of other strategies that work and we are happy to discuss some of these with you.
Inappropriate websites
Search engines on the internet provide a wealth of access to sites on any given topic. The problem is that students can be exposed to both sites and/or images that are inappropriate or harmful even when they are searching for everyday topics.

While at school, technology use is highly supervised by teachers to ensure that this does not occur. This, in addition to the strict internet filtering that Strathcona uses, makes technology use at the School reasonably safe. Even so, the creators of ‘suspect’ websites are very clever and do find ways to attract traffic from internet search engines as well as disguise their site so that it defeats our filters. We frequently add to our list of blocked sites, but the nature of the internet means that it is near impossible to block all the inappropriate sites that are in existence. The key to safe internet use is good supervision.

When your daughter is using the internet at home, whether this is on a family computer or her own device, it is important not only to supervise her use but to have an idea of some of the harmful sites that she may encounter. What follows is a list of some of the common internet threats:

Sexually explicit material
This could include graphic pictures and videos intended for adults, some of which can be confronting in nature.

Violent and disturbing images
This could include such things as crash scenes and even mortuary sites. Research has shown that violence in any form of screen media, that is, films, videos, television, computer games and the internet, can have a negative effect on children.

Making purchases or gambling online
Students may encounter sites that encourage them to purchase goods online. Online gambling is also a serious issue. A credit card number is all it takes for someone to ‘play’.

Incorrect and inaccurate information
Students are much more trusting of the information that they find on the internet. Any person can put any information they like up on the internet and there is no guarantee that the information is accurate. It is important to develop critical thinking skills so that information can be evaluated for what it is worth – considering not only who has written it but also where they have sourced their information from.

Inadvertently form ‘friendships’ with strangers
Your daughter may come into contact with people who are pretending to be something or someone they are not. Students need to be wary of paedophiles or others seeking to make contact and should never give their personal
details to strangers or arrange to meet those they have just met.

**Become victims of cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass or intimidate another person. Teasing, false rumours, intimidating messages and threats can be spread by email, via social media, blogs and mobile phones (to name just a few). The anonymity of the internet seems to give power to those that seek to belittle others. The School views cyberbullying as being equivalent to bullying and will treat incidents of cyberbullying and bullying in the same manner. All of the girls are aware of this through the RDUA as well as the many sessions we run on cyber safety and bullying over the course of the year. While other inappropriate uses of technology in the home are not covered by the RDUA, cyberbullying is - whether it involves students of Strathcona or those from other schools.

**Be subjected to advertising pressures**

Once on the internet, students are likely to be subjected to unsolicited advertising. This could take the form of pop-up advertisements or ads embedded into particular websites. Such advertising often has bright colourful images and catchy phrases designed to put pressure on students to purchase goods online. The frequency of such advertising increases on websites for games and illegal downloading and they can be pornographic in nature.

**Excessive use**

The internet can become addictive. It is important that your daughter does not use the internet to the exclusion of other things such as physical activity, spending time with her friends and family, chores, homework and simply having some ‘downtime’.

**Privacy concerns**

Some websites encourage visitors to join clubs and enter competitions. In doing so, they reveal their name and address and may become the target of unwelcome marketing and other material.

As with many of these dangers, an awareness of their existence is half the battle. Discuss these with your daughter and what she should do should she be confronted by these.
For those of us with an online presence (and isn’t that everyone?), it is important to understand that there is no privacy on the internet.

Everything that you do on the internet exists in some form, somewhere. Profiles that you create, photos that you upload, comments you make, your ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ are all on the internet for people to see. This information is known as your digital footprint. You may feel that this sort of information is not of interest to others, but this is far from being true. Increasingly, marketing companies are using the information that they ‘mine’ to build profiles of you – so that they can direct market products to you as well as gather data on your browsing habits. This may not be a concern to you and you may only supply your personal information in situations where it is necessary. This is a good policy, but it is not always convenient or possible. Everyone has connections on the internet from social media profiles to their own websites and the use of these is far from anonymous – it can be quite personal.

Your daughters will have some idea of what makes up their digital footprint, but they may not understand the importance of it and the impact it has on their digital identity.

Your digital identity is your cyberspace profile – consisting of the personal information, photos, messages and connections that you make on the internet. A common way that people use to get an idea of what their digital identity looks like is ‘Googling’ themselves. It is something that you should do on a regular basis to see what results appear (especially near the top of the list). ‘Googling’ yourself can not only alert you to connections, comments or interactions made by others that mention you in some way, but also gives you an idea of what others will see when they ‘Google’ you!

So why should you be concerned about what will appear when your daughter is ‘Googled’? The answer to this question really begins with the question: ‘Why is someone Googling your daughter?’ There could be a number of reasons for this – think about the reasons why you may have ‘Googled’ someone before. People you may have just met, people you are doing business with, an employer – are all examples of people that may have an interest in finding out more about you or in this case – your daughter.

So what information will they be presented with when they do this? Is this the sort of information that you are comfortable with?

One of the problems with information on the internet is that it (generally) is quite persistent. What does this mean? It means that once information is on the internet, it is very difficult to get rid of. Some of this information is in your direct control, but some isn’t. For example, your daughter may upload photos of herself, or her friends may ‘tag’ her in their photos; her name could get mentioned in a discussion, she may belong to a sporting team or club that has a website, etc.
Your daughter’s digital identity could well have a negative effect on her personal life – changing the way that others perceive her. This is certainly one reason to be aware of this issue. If for no other reason – you should be concerned about your daughter’s digital identity with regards to her future employment. When applying for a job, your daughter will list a number of referees that the employer can contact to learn more about them, but they should consider their digital identity as their ‘unlisted referee’ – whether they like it or not. Most employers will ‘Google’ the names of those who are applying for a job at their company. Does the content that your daughter has uploaded to social media portray her as a responsible person an employer would want?

Some suggestions to help your daughter control her digital identity:
• Make her social media pages private

• If one of her friends tags her in a photo that she does not approve of, she should ask them to remove it (or the tag)
• Better still, your daughter should ask her friends never to post photos of her without asking her first
• Your daughter should be aware of comments she makes that are attached to an online profile of hers – especially ones that could be considered racist, sexist, contain swearing, bully or slander others – even if she is joking!

Someone reading something out of context will not know if she is joking or not! While there are aspects of our digital footprint that are hard to control, it is our digital identity that can have a much more damaging effect on our lives and the way that people perceive us. The aspect of a digital footprint that is perhaps of the most concern, is that companies or individuals could build a profile of us without our knowledge or consent.
what is cyberbullying?

Digital technologies provide individuals with a powerful and possibly anonymous means of communicating instantly with others in both positive and negative ways.

Cyberbullying is bullying which uses technology as a means of victimising others. It is the use of services such as email, chat rooms, messaging or blog posting with the intention of harming another person. Examples can include communications that seek to intimidate, control, manipulate, deride or humiliate the recipient. Activities can include flaming, sexual and racist comments on blogs and ‘walls’, denigration, impersonation, trickery, exclusion (‘un-friending’) and cyberstalking. The targeted person often feels powerless and may need help.

The school views cyberbullying as being equivalent to bullying and will treat incidents of cyberbullying and bullying in the same manner. The RDUA (which you can read on BlackBoard), discusses cyberbullying extensively and we run a variety of activities during the year in which we teach the girls how to respond if they find themselves victims of cyberbullying. Some of the advice that we give the girls is included below.

Ignore/Do not respond

Bullies of all kinds seek to elicit a reaction from their victims. It is very important that you do not react in any way – even if it is to tell the bully to stop. The nature of the internet means that responses are often very public and the interaction not only continues, but often escalates.

Collect evidence

Print out or take a screen capture of the message or image that has been sent or ‘posted’. This needs to be done immediately, as it is very easy for the bully to remove the message or image and claim that none was sent. Evidence such as this assists the School in enforcing the School rules and ensuring that the bullying is stopped.

Tell an adult

Your Form Tutor, Year Level Coordinator, one of your teachers or a parent can all help you deal with cyberbullying and will be able to take steps to put it to a stop.
We hope this guide is useful to you and has given you some strategies to help keep your daughter safe in her use of technology.

The advice in this guide is consistent with the advice that we give the girls, as well as that contained in the RDUA.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss aspects of this guide or your own situation with us, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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