

Chapter 8

Children's Internet Safety Websites

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ABSTRACT

Children's Internet safety websites come in many varieties, each with a focus on providing resources or education to help children learn to stay safe while using the Internet. Seven websites that have a focus on children's online safety are reviewed: (1) WiredSafety.org (2) WebWiseKids.org, (3) Netsmartz.org, (4) KidsInTheKnow.ca, (5) KiwiCommons.com, (6) TextEd.ca, and (7) DefineTheLine.ca. While each of these websites share a common goal of helping children remain safe they do so in unique ways and focus on a variety of Internet safety topics. To date, scholarly material on the subject remains largely unwritten. Nevertheless, the need for additional websites of this type, particularly for children, is expressly supported by government bodies worldwide.

INTRODUCTION

Children's Internet safety websites are websites which are mandated to provide the resources children require to counter potential risks to their privacy and security online. In many cases these websites are specifically designed to facilitate adult instruction of Internet safety guidelines. These websites contain resources which are directed at one or more age groups (e.g. kids,

tweens, teens, adults), however there has been a shift by many organizations towards designing sites to provide these resources directly to youth audiences.

These websites typically focus on addressing key issues of online safety and appropriate online behavior which put children at risk (e.g. cyberbullying, online predators, social media privacy). Additionally, many websites focus on teaching children about aspects of Internet safety

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0315-8.ch008

for devices other than the computer (e.g. instant messaging, sexting, gaming addiction).

Seven websites which have a focus on children's online safety will be reviewed: (1) WiredSafety.org (2) WebWiseKids.org, (3) Netsmartz.org, (4) KidsInTheKnow.ca, (5) KiwiCommons.com, (6) TextEd.ca, and (7) DefineTheLine.ca. Each of these sites has been proven to provide valuable resources and will be examined in order to provide initial insight into existing major websites and the approaches which they use to convey relevant safety information improve children's online safety.

OVERVIEW

Although Internet safety has been a concern since the early 1990's with the wide spread of public Internet use, the concern for family and child safety online did not appear through websites until the mid-1990's. The first Internet safety website in the U.S. was WiredSafety.org. Created in 1995 to address growing concerns regarding online safety, the site focused on disseminating information on Internet safety by volunteers to the public, including children. Since then, there have been a number of national and international reports identifying the growing concern and need for Internet safety resources, especially as they pertain to keeping children safe online.

The Commission on Online Child Protection (COCP) issued a report in 2000 to U.S. Congress identifying a need for safety resources to keep families and children safe in their use of the Internet. Amongst their report, it was identified that, "[e]ffective protections for children must accommodate the Internet's convergence with other media and extend to new technologies and services offered on the Internet, such as instant messaging, interactive television, or broadband access" (CCOP, 2000). Based on the analysis of various safety means (e.g. websites, software, community outreach), it was found that no single technology or method will effectively protect

children from harmful material online and that instead there needed to be a broad methodology to resource provision.

The ultimate message from the CCOP report was that "online information resources (websites) are essential to protecting children, as they can effectively provide access to technologies, information for families online, and hotlines to reach and report to authorities" and that online resources are increasingly effective when coupled with family and youth education programs (CCOP, 2000). Many important and influential government, corporate, and not-for-profit websites have since emerged internationally to help children remain safe online because of this message.

While the CCOP report focused on a need to protect and shelter children from the potential risks of the Internet, the Online Safety and Technology Working Group identified that the resources required to keep children safe online needed to be provided in the form of fluid and up to date information and education through websites, education programs, and software inclusively. It was identified that the available websites provided by corporations, government, not-for-profit organizations had a positive impact on the safety of families and children, but that available resources and access to information needed to improve and be expanded to keep pace with the ever changing online environment (OSTWG, 2010). However, this work does not examine the impact of each of these sites individually, but rather the efficacy of Internet safety websites individually, but rather their necessity and impact on the safety of children as a whole.

There is an ever present challenge in conducting an examination of children's Internet safety websites as the online environment is rapidly changing and what is relevant and valuable at any given time is purely a snapshot of the industry, the issues, and the online lives of children. In order to provide an accurate overview of existing websites, the current relevancy, availability, and quality of Internet safety material to children's lives must be considered.

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