Crossing the Digital Divide (v45)

"Online Safety – Middle/High Schoolers"

By Joseph Feigon for the Observer

While we aren't the most "connected" community in the Bear Republic, many of our middle and high school students are as tethered online as their City counterparts. We understand the challenge of teaching a pre-teen or teenage child anything "new", particularly when it comes to their growing desire for privacy. Teaching your child the basics of online security will go far towards ensuring both their safety and growth while using the Internet for learning, sharing and development.

Teachers and Parents alike can learn:

- Students in this age group know a lot and most use the Internet regularly. Your best tool for keeping them focused is to engage them in the discussion and consistently ask them for their feedback. Ask them what they know about online safety, identity management, password security, and cyber-bullying.

- Students at this age level often crave privacy. An important underlying theme to your discussion should be for them to have open communication with parents, guardians, teachers, or other trusted adults.

Key concepts for students at this age level to understand and apply to their online experience:

- It is essential that students understand and commit to not sharing personal information with people they view as "friends" online. This includes their real name, address, phone number, financial information, school name, passwords, or other private information.

- Although many students at this age level know basic ways to stay safe while online, they must also commit to ethical online usage. Simple items to review include:

  - Post only what you would feel comfortable with the whole world seeing, including parents or college admissions personnel.

  - Never use the Internet to spread gossip, bully or hurt someone's reputation.

- Students should understand what security tools are available to use on most computers to further protect themselves, their personal information, and their computer from viruses, spyware, and spam.

- Students must also understand that they are in charge of their online experience and should manage it the way they would in the real world. If something or someone online makes them feel uncomfortable, they have the right to not respond, delete a post, and most importantly tell a trusted adult.

- Students must commit to never meet in person with someone they met online.

Keep control of those things you can control.