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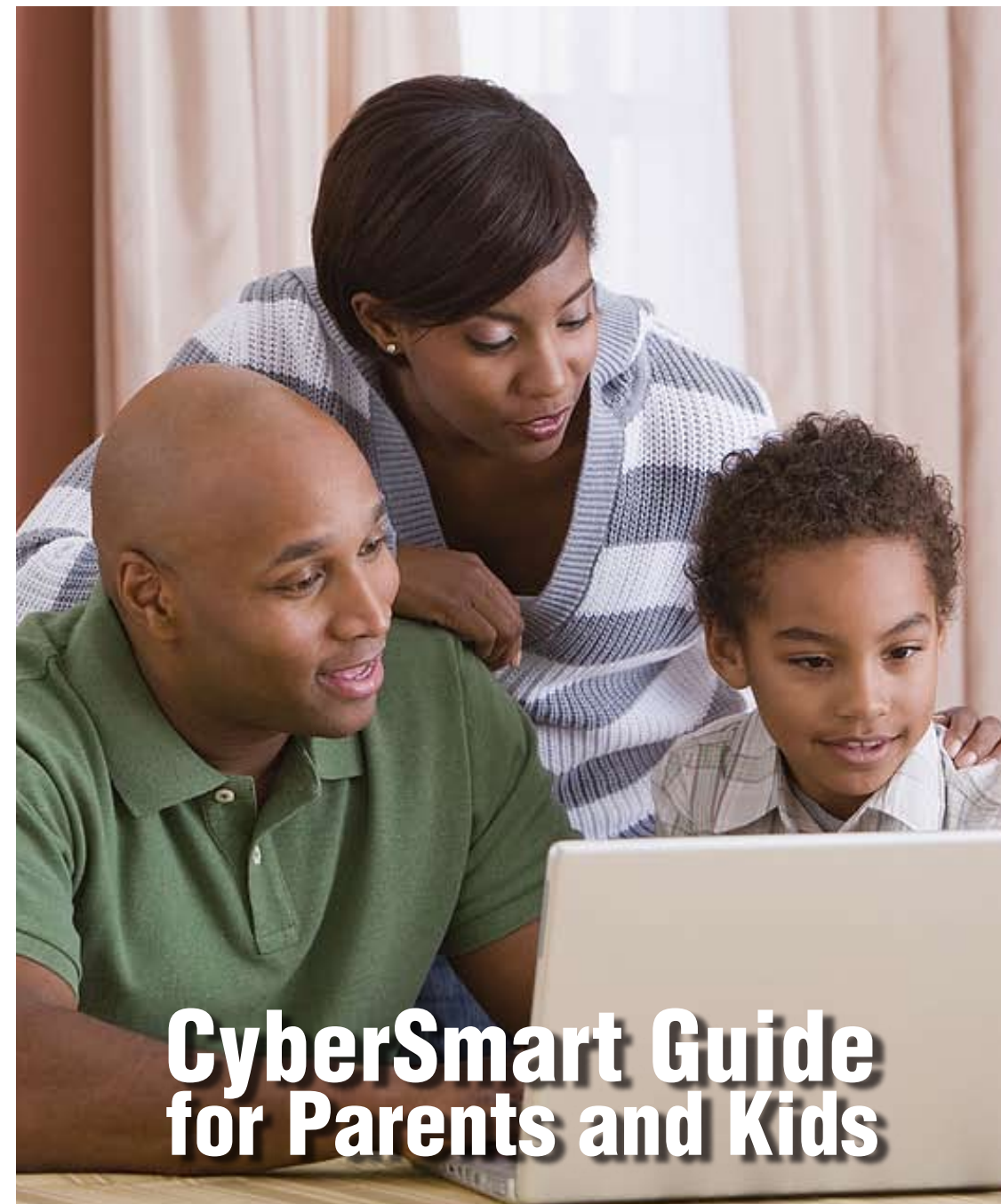
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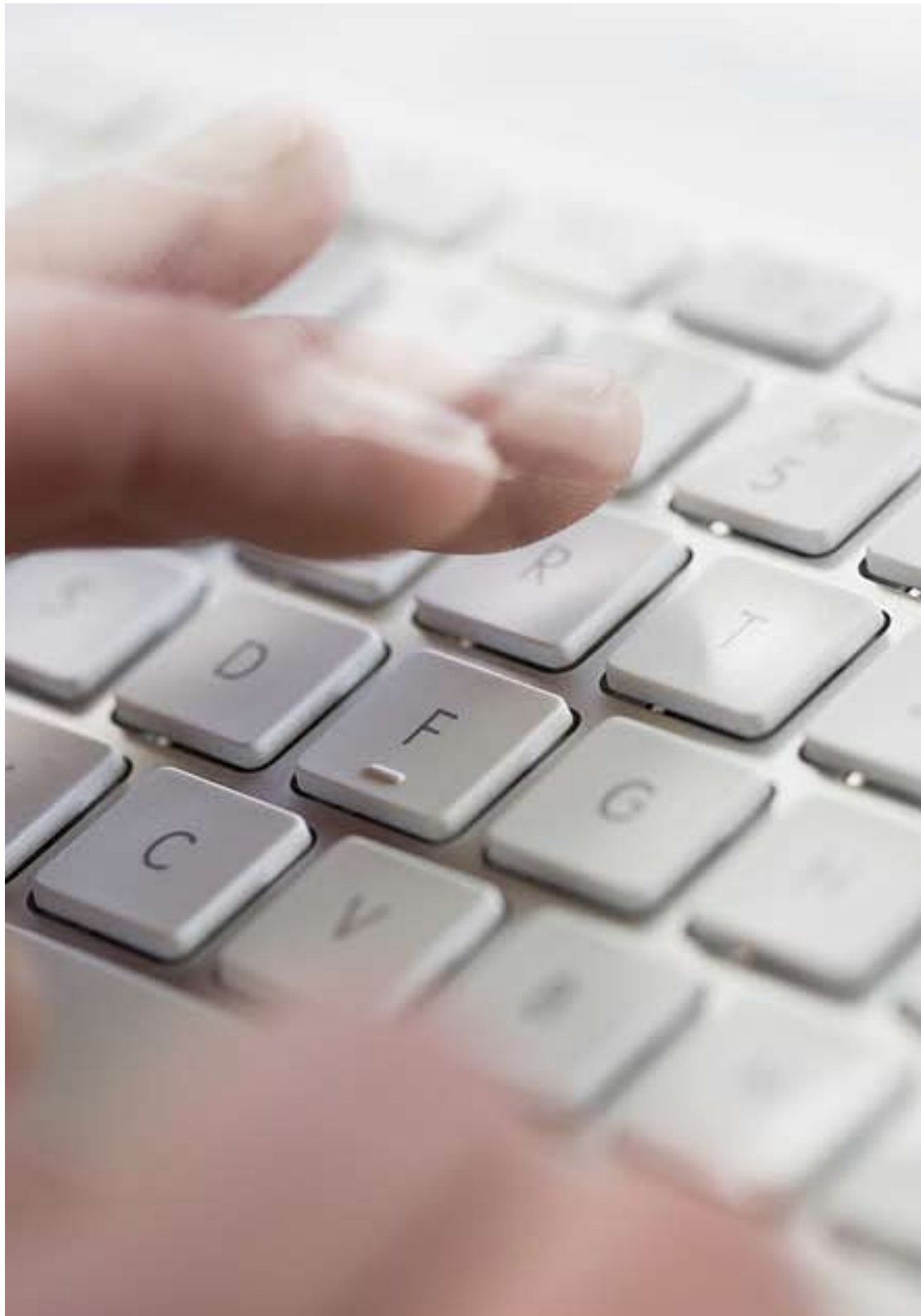
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CyberSmart Guide for Parents and Kids



The Internet has become an integral part of life as it connects you to the world and brings with it a wealth of new possibilities. The Internet has provided people of all ages a new platform to socialise, learn, have access to information, entertain, shop online and communicate through different channels. Apart from adults, the Internet is an important learning tool for children as well as a great way to keep in contact with their friends. Children use the Internet for many purposes, for example to:

- Gain knowledge
- Learn Knowledge
- Find assistance with school assignments
- Keep in touch with friends

The Internet can be beneficial to children in many ways but it is equally important to know how to use the Internet safely in order to have a positive online experience. The Internet is a blessing as well as a curse. Parents should be aware of their children's activities on the Internet, the dangers they can face and how they must deal with these threats.

This guide aims to provide information on the potential risks facing children on the Internet and advices on how parents can help to keep them safe, and ensure that the whole family enjoys positive Internet experiences.

Children Activities on the Internet

The Internet is an incredible tool as it offers the possibility to become part of an enormous virtual community connected by mutual interest. The Internet can provide the younger and the older generations' users with benefits such as independent learning, improved research and communication skills, learn new technologies, access and create resources.

Children access the Internet for different purposes including entertainment, research, school assignments and to communicate. While doing so, they can often unknowingly place themselves in risky situations. For example by:

- Giving out personal information about themselves to people or organisations they do not know
- Posting inappropriate information on the Internet
- Accepting to meet people they have met online, without speaking to their parent
- Sharing passwords
- Posting public profiles about themselves
- Unsafe browsing or searching
- Opening messages from people they do not know
- Responding to unpleasant or suggestive messages
- Accessing illegal or inappropriate material.

Know the risks...

Exposure to Inappropriate Content

Children using the Internet can be exposed to content which is inappropriate for them. This could include images, text or games that are sexually explicit or offensive, violent or encourage activities that are dangerous or illegal. Some websites promote extremely political, violent, racist or sexist views. This content can be accessed through website browsing, through newsgroups, shared in peer-to-peer networks or sent by email or instant messaging services. Young Internet users can access inappropriate material accidentally especially when mistyping for words, searching for content about people, places or issues. However, in the quest for curiosity, it might be intentional.

Advice for parents

Parents must adopt mechanisms that will enable them to reduce the children's risks of exposure to unsuitable contents. For example by installing filters on the home computer, parents can monitor the child's activities on the Internet. In addition, the filters have certain features such as:

- Category blocking which enables parents to select from a range of content categories, for example, pornography and violence and then decide which to block and which to allow.
- Time controls which allow parents to limit Internet access to certain times of the day, including the amount of time a child spends on the Internet. This can help ensure children can only use the Internet when parents are available to supervise and can restrict late night use.
- Logging which enables parents to track and record a history of sites visited by their child
- Service blocking which allows users to block or filter access to certain services, such as peer-to-peer, social networking or online games.



Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is often referred as the verbal harassment that takes place through Internet applications and technologies. Children on the Internet can also become victims of cyberbullying or harassment through Internet services like email, chat rooms, instant messaging, social networking and through other websites. Cyberbullying can be very harmful and in some cases, it can even be a criminal offence. Most victims suffer from shame, embarrassment, anger, depression and withdrawal.

Advice for parents

Cyberbullying often include teasing, spreading online rumours and sending unwanted or threatening messages or defamatory materials. This can have a damaging effect on children. The best weapon against cyberbullying is awareness and parents can help in taking control of the situation.

This may be done by:

- Advising children not to reply to any messages from strangers. Often if strangers do not receive a response they will give up.
- Learning how to block strangers they meet online, so they cannot make contact.
- Keeping a record of the harassing messages and any replies. This may help parents, or the authorities, if necessary, to find out who is sending them
- Keeping usernames and passwords secret. If someone misuses a username and password to post damaging information about a child it can be difficult to remove
- Reporting to the police if the cyberbullying is threatening and of criminal nature

Invasion of Privacy

Without considering the consequences, children can innocently post private information about themselves online. This can include their name or address, photographs, a mobile phone number, their school name and details of their friends or families. Providing personal information online can also result in being targeted for spam, advertising material and/or viruses. In some cases, websites prompt users to reveal private information on forms or through pop-ups. However, not all these requests are legitimate.

Advice for parents

To help in guarding privacy, children should be encouraged to ask their parents before giving their personal details on the Internet. Once information is posted online it is very difficult to remove.

Parents can:

- Explain to the kids about the dangers of posting personal information on the Internet. For example, a stranger can blackmail the kid if he obtains personal details or write nasty things about the kid.
- Create strong passwords by using alphanumeric and special characters (contains letters, numbers and symbols for e.g. Halloworld1#\$) and do not share the password(s).



Social Networking

The Internet is a great place to meet people, stay in touch with family and forge a community of friends. Social networking occurs on a variety of services like YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and Twitter. Even though these social networking sites have an age restriction, kids lie about their age to get access to the sites. They are attracted to social networking websites since they allow users to create profiles, communicate with others and form networks of friends. Users can participate in a range of activities including chatting, sharing information and photos and posting comments in forums, blogs or discussion groups. Social networking can have several benefits, but it can be a threat at the same time. Most people you will meet online can appear to be genuine, but they can misuse your personal information, harass you or steal your identity.

Advice for parents

Parents can:

- Explain children about the dangers of social networking
- Advise children how to set profiles to private so that it can only viewed by authorized people
- Encourage children to think before they put anything online.
- Encourage children to be careful when making new friends online as they can be fraudsters
- Report abuse or inappropriate content to the social networking site
- Report the incident to CERT-MU if needed on incident@cert-mu.gov.mu or call on the **hotline 800 23 78**

Online Gaming and Addiction

These days many interesting online games are available on the Internet. Children play online games because it is enjoyable, stimulating and provides entertainment. Games are powerful with their stories, action, graphical features, sound effects and originality. They allow kids to escape from the stress, do things beyond their imagination and give a new level of excitement when people compete with each other. Online games has become very popular because it is a major source of entertainment and introduce new uses of the human imagination to millions of people. There are several types of online games such as online role-playing games (MMOGs) which include "World of Craft", "Age of Conan", "Eve Online" and

"Darkfall". Other types of games are online shooters, gambling, racing, strategy and online browser-based games. However, it is important to know and guard against the risks associated with the Internet gaming world to keep it safe and enjoyable for all.

The risks of online gaming are addiction, information Security implications, health, education, Online Predators, bullies and cut off with social activities (Virtual Life). These can affect the children psychologically and physically.

Advice to parents

Good parenting goes a long way in preventing online gaming addiction.

Parents should:

- Engage themselves with the kids while they play online
- Be aware how their kids are using the Internet
- Place the computer in an easily accessible location within the house
- Know which games are installed in the computer
- Check the browser history
- Set limits and boundaries such as technical prevention
- Not condemn the kids from online gaming, but with restrictions
- Limit computer use if addiction is detected
- Address the matter immediately if major changes are detected in the kid's behaviour



Internet Access through Mobile Devices and Smartphones

Smartphones or mobile devices are becoming increasingly prevalent in today's society. These devices are no longer simple devices that enable people to communicate but they now serve as portable media players and camera phones with high resolution touchscreens and web browsers. Children get attracted to mobile phone because they are personal and private. They do not need to ask for permission from their parents to use it. The personal nature of the device means that it is not like the PC in terms of possibilities of parental involvement and supervision. Mobile phones also enhance their image and it is a way of following the fashion. Parents usually provide their children with a mobile phone to get in touch with them, especially after school hours and when they go to tuitions. Nevertheless, many parents are unaware of the potential risks that can result from mobile devices and smartphones. Nowadays, the Internet can be easily accessible from mobile phones and therefore children are more exposed to the dangers of the Internet.

Advice for Parents

The Internet connects you to the world and brings with it a wealth of possibilities for children. It is like bringing the world into the classroom or to the home. Parents must take the necessary precautions when giving a mobile phone to their children.

Parents must:

- Avoid giving kids smartphones having sophisticated applications such as Internet, and Bluetooth
- Teach the kids to act responsibly and keep their personal information private such as phone number
- Stay involved with how the kid is using his or her mobile phone and what he/she is doing on the phone
- Check to whom the kid is talking regularly and what functions or applications he or she is using while talking or messaging with people.
- Include mobile phone use in your discussions with your kid
- Establish limits on the use of mobile phone, for example, make sure that the kid turns the phone off during school hours.
- Review and implement parental controls - talk with the mobile phone provider about how you can filter content, disable or limit functions on your kid's mobile phone.
- Monitor monthly bills if the mobile phone is on a postpaid to see how and when the mobile phone is being used.
- Encourage your kid to speak up with a trusted adult if presented with an uncomfortable situation.



Internet Addiction

The Internet has many positive benefits and for many of us, it is an indispensable tool for work, education and communication. The advent of broadband and mobile access to the Internet is giving young people the opportunity to access the Internet at any place and any time. However, there is a real risk that children can become so immersed in their online world that they tend to neglect other things such as homework, school activities, parents and friends. Often children and adolescents spend several hours pursuing their interests, playing games, finding information and communicating with friends online. Nevertheless, when the use of Internet becomes obsessive and at the expense of other aspects of the child's life, this could become problematic and could even classify as Internet Addiction.

Parents should know whether their child is spending too much time on the Internet. The following is a list of indicators that can help parents to determine if their children are using the Internet excessively:

- Does the child feel preoccupied with the Internet?
- Does the kid feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time to achieve satisfaction?
- Does he/she feel restless, moody, depressed or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?
- Does the child stay online longer than intended?
- Lack of sleep and fatigue.
- Declining school results.
- Withdrawal from school social activities and events.

Advice for parents

Parents can follow the tips below if they found that their child is spending too much time on the Internet and thus want to create a healthier balance between the Internet use and other activities:

- Spend more time with the kid and if possible, play games and chat with him
- Limit the amount of time children can spend online.
- Do not put a computer in the child's room. Instead, computers should be in an area of the home where you can easily monitor what the child is doing online.
- Find out what the child likes to do online. Certain reality-based games like "World of Warcraft" are particularly addictive.
- Certain children are at higher risk for Internet addiction, such as children with attention problems, depression, anxiety and social isolation. Monitor these children more carefully.
- If your child's Internet use is compulsive, interferes with daily activity and restrictions cause mood swings or agitation, seek medical help.

