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www.teachingK-8.com

The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Online Risks at Home

Larger than at the school

According to a recent Harris online poll that measured the attitudes and behaviors of 1,556 students between the ages of 8 and 18, students are safer working online at school than at home. More than half (51%) of the students said their school rules for computer usage were more stringent than rules set down by their parents at home. Also, 35% of the kids reported that they were more likely to use a home computer to chat with a stranger.

Who is watching the kids?

The main reason that school computer usage is safer than home use is that the children are much more likely to be working with adult supervision at school. At home, they are often working alone and have more time to experiment and surf the web.

Field Trips at Home

- Watch with the kids to see how crayons are made by going to www.crayola.com
See the Easton, PA, factory in operation.
- Go on a tour of revolutionary war treasures put together by the Library of Congress by visiting www.loc.gov/families
- Stop off at the National Gallery of Art to see 35 images of Winslow Homer's paintings. Zoom in for close-ups of the brush strokes and see video clips about his life (1836-1910).
www.nga.gov/feature/homer

The Business Software Alliance sponsored the study and offers some free resources for parents and teachers. Their website, www.playitcybersafe.com also features activities for students in grades 3-8 dealing with copyright, cyber ethics and responsible cyber behavior. Maybe parents should reconsider putting computers in kids' bedrooms and instead put them in a more high-traffic area of the house, where everybody can keep an eye on what is happening in cyberspace.

Emotional Roadblocks

Depression on the rise

The National Institute of Mental Health reports that approximately four percent of adolescents get seriously depressed each year. While available evidence suggests that positive mental health leads to higher academic achievement, many schools are not able to adequately cope with emotional concerns at this time.

"No Child Left Behind has had some unfortunate consequences," says Robert Burke, assistant professor of education at Miami University in Oxford, OH. "Many feel that so much attention is now being paid to test scores that matters related to social-emotional development have largely been marginalized to the point where they are not even being discussed."

Critical roles are played by parents in helping children deal with depression. The first step is recognition of the problem. Dawn

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Books to Share

Here are some wonderful books to share under the blanket this chilly month.

The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson (Putnam Juvenile, 2001), tells the story of two little girls of different races who play on a backyard fence because neither is allowed to cross it.

Snowballs by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt, 1995) shows what imaginative things can be done with snowballs or construction paper and lots of household doodads.

The Stars Will Still Shine by Cynthia Rylant (HarperCollins, 2005) is a gentle rhyme that tells about new beginnings. It is comforting to read after a hard day.

Bella Baxter and the Itchy Disaster by Jane B. Mason and Sarah Hines Stephens (Aladdin, 2005) is a funny, short chapter book about a girl's adventures working in her family's bed and breakfast.

Lunch Money by Andrew Clements (Simon & Schuster, 2005) is a longer chapter book to read aloud. It tells of a boy who wants to become rich and his many funny, yet practical, ways of doing so.

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Anderson-Butcher, associate professor of psychology at Ohio State University, warns that many parents are afraid of having their children labeled because of the stigma that still surrounds mental illness. However, looking the other way will not help your child. Learn the warning signs and be watchful. For students between 10 and 14 years of age, the number of suicides increased 100 percent between 1980 and 1996. If your child changes drastically over a number of weeks or months, don't wait to find out if things will iron out.

Stay alert, stay involved

Keep a running conversation about what your child is doing at school, after school and with friends. Make your house the "cool" one where everybody likes to gather and hang out because you are interested and have time to listen. Make your car pool the one that is available to take the kids to a basketball game or movie. Stay in tune with the kids to keep them safe and healthy.

"Mental health is linked with general health and success in the classroom, and the more we can keep kids healthy, the more productive they will be," says Ted Feinberg, assistant executive director for the National Association of School Psychologists in Bethesda, MD.

Everyday Choices

They determine our future

If we could only pass on one point of wisdom to our children, perhaps it would be to make careful everyday choices. What fourth grader realizes that choosing to not learn times tables can ultimately affect his tracking all the way through high school? What seventh grader realizes that just by getting on the school bus grouchy and combative, he or she can change the day for everyone else on that bus? Somehow we, as parents, need to let our children see the

Helpful Parent Sites

For information about childhood and adolescent depression, diagnosis and treatment, go to:

- 1) www.pediatrics.about.com/od/depression
- 2) www.keepkidshealthy.com/welcome/conditions/depression.html Features a chart of symptoms as they differ in childhood, adolescence and adulthood
- 3) www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- 4) www.aap.org/healthtopics/depression.cfm The American Academy of Pediatrics
- 5) www.massgeneral.org/madiresourcecenter/schoolpsychiatry/info_depression.asp Massachusetts General Hospital's School Psychiatry Program

importance of the everyday choices that we make, be it for ourselves or for them. Let them see your choices to go to work with a positive attitude every morning, to spend within your means and even put away a few dollars each week. Let them see the real-world choices of driving within the speed limit, going to bed at a certain time, taking vitamins and helping others. When Henry David Thoreau wrote *Walden*, he began by saying that he'd moved to Walden Pond to "live deliberately." Isn't that a wonderful goal for life, in general?

Life doesn't just happen; it is a series of causes and effects. We do not control everything that happens to us, but we have power over more aspects of our lives than many realize. Encourage your children early in their lives that dreams can come true – if we work for them. Dreams come true when you can read and when you can do math. Dreams come true through education, but not because someone hands you a diploma one evening in June. It is the education that you choose to receive every day by picking up that backpack and heading out the door to do your best. Don't wait until high school to tell them school is important. Do it now, every day. ♣

Skill-Building at Home

Nuts and bolts. These hardware components can be used to help children distinguish appropriate sizes and develop fine motor coordination. Fill a box with various sizes, along with some washers, and have the kids put the correct sets together.

Coupon savers. Kids can help categorize coupons by the dates on which the coupons expire, alphabetically or by food/product group.

My own critic. Ask the kids to read the times for various TV programs as well as the descriptions. Then have them reword the descriptions and explain why the shows might or might not be a good choice for family viewing.

Junior secretary. Have your children take turns listening to and writing down the main idea of the message on the answering machine/voice mail, as well as who the call was from and at what time it arrived.

Scrapbook keeper. Provide some pictures your kids can mount in a family scrapbook. Ask them to write captions that name everyone in the photos and that explain and date the pictures.

Judging junk mail. Read junk mail with your child. What makes it "junk"? What does your child think is the "catch"? Can he or she understand the meaning of the small print?