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What BlogSafety.com is Doing to Protect Children Online

BlogSafety.com and its public online forum are resources for parents, teens, educators, and children's advocates - everyone engaged in Version 2.0 of the Web. The user-driven, all-media, multi-platform phase of the Net has begun, and parents suddenly find themselves very much a part of it. Launched in June 2006, BlogSafety is the online-safety field's first interactive resource. It....

- Educates and interacts with bloggers, social-networkers, media uploaders and caregivers.
- Gives parents a voice in the growing public discussion about teen blogging.
- Promotes individual and corporate responsibility concerning social-networking and other innovative Web services that appeal to young Net users.
- Supports all public- and private sector educational work in this area.

The forum is supported by a consortium of social-networking services working toward making young people's blogging and socializing online a safe, positive experience. Since mid-'05, BlogSafety has been receiving emails from parents concerned about their children's profiles, pictures, and posts in social-networking sites.

The burden on parents to protect their kids' reputations and well-being is growing. The online-safety field has said from the beginning that parents are their kids' best and first line of defense and – though we have worked hard at educating parents - other supports such as laws and technology are not keeping up with the Web's evolution.

The two significant developments outpacing all forms of child protection are:

Media convergence: a multimedia Internet on multiple platforms in the home, everywhere, wired or wireless, 24/7.

Kid-published media: The potential cognitive, social and creative development involved in young people being able to create and share their own content is beginning to be documented, but the news that shapes public awareness is all about the risks. Everyone can be a film producer, photographer, publisher, advertiser, and influencer not just with words but also with pictures, audio and video on proliferating media hosting sites. Parents are beginning to understand these downsides, if not the technologies that enable them, and needing to talk through implications and solutions.

Why community

At a time when children's advocates, the Internet industry, policymakers and parents have more questions than solutions that protect both free speech and children, there is a greater than ever need to think together. One way to support parents and ease the pressure on all parties is to create a "central" online forum that...

- Allows parents to share experiences, ask questions, vent, be each others' experts in tech-parenting
- Gives parents a voice in the growing national discourse about protecting online kids – they have for too long been the "silent majority" in this debate
- Encourages all parties to join the discussion, in advocacy, policymaking, business to think about the implications for youth of amazing tech developments
- Promotes and celebrates corporate responsibility where kid- published content is concerned
- Connects parents key customer-service people when a real need arises
- Links parents to the CyberTipline when kids are in a threatening situation
- Links users to the excellent education materials available in online-safety sites such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's NetSmartz.org
- Provides the online-parenting community with its own community "newspaper" and keeps parents informed about tech developments concerning children, helping them develop their own kid-tech vocabulary and expertise, with and without their children's help.