

An Invitation to Internet Safety and Ethics: School and family collaboration

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Abstract

More than ever, schools and families are embracing technology as positive aspects of creativity and collaboration. In a recent study, 78% of parents perceived technology as a constructive learning tool that has the potential to propel children toward highly successful lives and careers (Family Online Safety Institute, 2015). The increase in one-to-one device programs and recent government initiatives calling for upgraded connectivity, access to learning devices, increased support for teachers, and greater digital learning resources are evidence of a growing acceptance of technology in schools. While digital technology use continues to increase, what remains unclear is if students actually know how to use these tools safely, responsibly, and ethically. Similarly, many adults are not up-to-date with changing technological developments, nor are they prepared to have Internet safety and ethics discussions with young technology users. With the growing presence of Internet dangers, such as cyber victimization and sexting, it becomes evident that adults need to be aware of and understand Internet safety, as well as accept joint responsibility to keep youngsters safe. Using a qualitative, conversation analysis, the authors focused on the ways in which parents and teachers were invited to an Internet safety and digital citizenship professional development workshop, which included investigation of the structures of interactions between these two. The results provided insight into how adults view their role in providing safe online and offline learning environments for children, as well as beliefs for increasing their self-awareness of Internet safety and knowledge.

Introduction

Schools are moving away from fearing the misuse of Internet technologies to embracing the positive aspects of digital creativity and collaboration. An increased acceptance of technology in schools followed the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), the rise of one-to-one device initiatives, and recent government programs such as ConnectEd¹, which requires upgraded connectivity, increased access to learning devices, and more teacher support and digital learning resources. In addition to this widespread adoption of technology in schools, families have also become more accepting of technology in their homes. A recent study showed 78% of parents

¹ See <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/technology/connected/>

perceived technology as a positive learning tool that could direct children toward highly successful lives and careers in the future (Family Online Safety Institute, 2015).

The rapid development of technology has created a plethora of positive changes in our society (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009). However, the rise of technology has not come without its share of roadblocks. Oftentimes, these seemingly innocuous tools have inadvertently created new ways for people to harm others. Irresponsible and unethical uses of technology have led to injustices such as cyberbullying (Mark & Ratliffe, 2011) and cyber-related suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). As documented in *From Fear to Facebook*, misuse of the Internet has the potential to run rampant among today's youth (Levinson, 2010). Jones, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2013) found trends where youth online harassment increased from 6% ($n = 1,501$) in 2000 to 11% ($n = 1,560$) in 2010, prompting the researchers to recommend implementation of school-based prevention programs focusing upon improving peer relationships and reducing bullying. In a recent national poll, adults ranked Internet safety as fourth (51%) and sexting as sixth (45%) in the top 10 growing health concerns among U.S. children (Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit, 2015).

To address this problem, schools must continuously seek ways by which Internet use during school and within the home can provide safer learning experiences (Young & Triphamer, 2009; O'Neill, 2014). Around the world, Internet safety and digital citizenship are growing areas of focus in schools. A recent Google web search (July 13, 2014) returned 154,000,000 results for Internet safety programs. In his analysis of related policies in 25 countries, O'Neill (2014) advocated for a broad spectrum of Internet safety activities that involve multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, O'Neill stated people need to acknowledge that all countries and even schools have different starting points when it comes to Internet safety policy implementation and resulting activity execution. While Internet safety messages and warnings have become prevalent in the media, and serve as reminders of the online dangers that exist, not as much attention has been paid to the actual steps people should be taking to protect themselves and others in an online world (Shillair, Cotten, Tsai, Alhabash, LaRose, & Rifon, 2015).

Schools have recognized that children need direct instruction for appropriate online behaviors, including clear and open discussions about online communications. Several researchers urged better understanding of the problems from a youth perspective: How do children feel when using the Internet? What online media do they prefer? What are their motivations for using the Internet? How are online actions filling certain needs in their personal lives? Answers to these questions based on a youth perspective increases the recognition of the need for children to develop coping techniques, practice responsible decision-making, and be cautious to avoid risky situations (Berson, Berson, Desai, & Falls, 2008; LaRose, Rifon, & Enbody, 2008; Nguyen, 2008; Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2007).

However, school attention toward Internet safety alone will not be enough. There also needs to be partnership between parents and community members. While it is important to identify whether youth are knowledgeable of ethical technology use, it is of great importance to understand the specific roles and responsibilities of all adults who place these technological tools in the hands of young children (Mueller & Wood, 2012). In fact, the Pew American Life Project reported that most technology use occurs outside of the classroom (Lenhart, 2012). Risky online behavior (e.g., cyberbullying) has been associated with poor family dynamics, as well as either too much or too

little parental restrictions on technology use (Chng, Li, Liao, & Khoo, 2015; Sasson & Mesch, 2014).

Parent and family involvement in schools continue to have a positive influence on students' achievement (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009). Correlation exists between children's interests, aspirations, and learning with how their parents feel about school involvement. Involved parents tend to exhibit high expectations for their children, which positively impacts both the children and their teachers. "These positive outcomes are associated with parents and teachers forming partnerships that are respectful of one another's perspectives" (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009, p.444). Through this research study, the authors hoped to extend this notion to Internet safety. Therefore, in an effort to increase parents and community members' involvement in safeguarding children, Mark and Nguyen designed and delivered a professional development workshop for parents and educators to increase Internet safety education and begin forming partnerships to keep technology users safe.

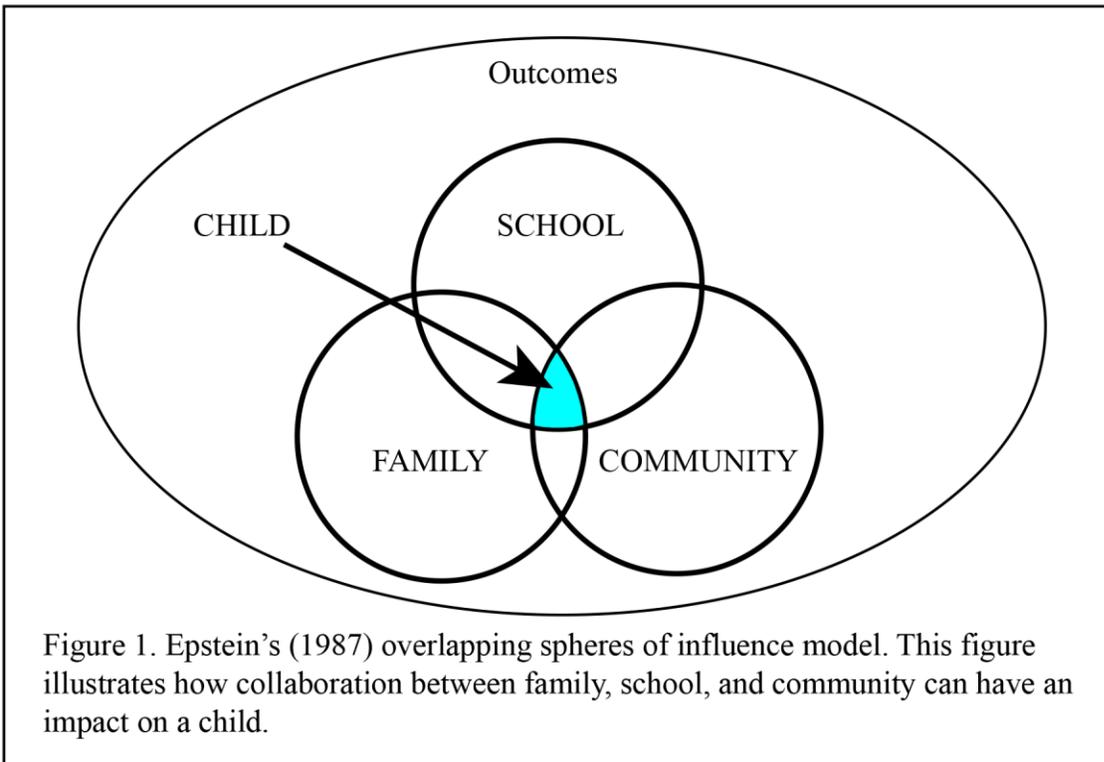
Perspectives and Theoretical Framework

In this intervention, elements of Invitational Education were embedded within the workshop designed to educate relevant school stakeholders in the areas of Internet safety and digital citizenship. Invitational Education theory and practice can create and maintain safe and successful schools by addressing the total culture of the educational environment (Stanley, Juhnke, & Purkey, 2004). Key concepts considered in developing the training included transforming how people communicate with each other and assessing five critical Domains of a school: People, places, programs, policies, and processes. A group process exercise allowed the establishment of goals and an action plan for meeting the goals. The following foundational beliefs were developed for the intervention and executed during the workshop:

- All school stakeholders were intentionally invited to be *equal contributors* to the professional development workshop.
- The workshop's group discussions and activities were guided by the Invitational Education elements: Intentionality, care, optimism, respect and *trust [I-CORT]* (Purkey & Novak, 2016).
- Internet safety education incorporates a personal sense of accountability when it comes to keeping children safe in online and offline environments, therefore, a level of professionalism and collaboration must be expected and demonstrated by all stakeholders during the intervention training.
- Given the Five Assumptions of Invitational Education, parents and educators were asked to form professional learning communities (PLCs) prior to attending the workshop, whereby the workshop facilitators encouraged all stakeholders to be "intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally" (Purkey & Novak, 2016, p. 11).

The workshop itself was designed using Epstein's (1987, 1995) family-school-community partnerships theory and Bandura's (1977) concepts of modeling and self-efficacy. Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, Epstein posited that school-family-community partnerships are successful when people from different groups recognize shared common interests, goals, and responsibilities to create better opportunities for children (See Figure 1). This study's workshop intervention assumed Internet safety and digital citizenship education requires a shared

responsibility between parents and educators so the Internet safety workshop would offer a proactive solution to help bridge any gaps between the home and school.



Objectives and Purposes

The objective of this study was to take the Five Assumptions of Invitational Education (IE), and examine the efficacy of an Internet safety workshop for parents and educators in relation to the Five Domains of IE: People, places, programs, policies, and processes (Purkey & Novak, 2016). The major research question was: How do the Five Assumptions of Invitational Education manifest within the attempts to intentionally invite parents and educators to encourage human potential during the Internet safety education efforts? Paxton's proposition of providing "trust, respect, and a belief in cooperation, empathic understanding and genuineness" (2003, p.144) also provided a guide.

Methods

Participants

Internet safety workshops occurred twice, once in May 2012 and another in September 2013. Thirty-two participants attended the first workshop and nineteen participants attended the second. In total, participants represented nine private schools, four public schools, two charter schools, and one community youth organization in the state of Hawai'i ($n = 16$ teams). Workshop invitations were sent to school principals and technology cadre via email, interested participants were intentionally invited to attend the workshop through professional learning communities (PLC)—collaborative groups of stakeholders with common, vested interests in education (DuFour,

2004)—with at least one parent and one school administrator per PLC. Eight school teams (50%) included a parent representative. However, three of those teams had a member serve both a parent and school personnel role. For data analysis purposes, participants serving dual-roles were identified only by their school personnel role. Nine schools (56.3%) included at least one school administrator (See Table 1).

Table 1
Workshop participants by school and parent roles

Role	Workshop I	Workshop II
Classroom teacher	4 (12.5%)	4 (21.1%)
Tech coordinator/ Library media specialist	10 (31.3%)	2 (6.3%)
Principal/Administrator	2 (6.3%)	7 (36.8%)
School counselor	5 (15.6%)	1 (5.3%)
*Parent representative	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)
Other (e.g., health aide, community member, youth mentor)	8 (25.0%)	3 (15.8%)
Total ($n = 51$)	$n = 32$ (9 school teams)	$n = 19$ (7 school teams)

*Note. A total of eight schools included a parent representative. However, three school teams included one member who acted in both parent and school personnel roles. Dual-role participants were only identified by their school roles.

Instruments

Parent and educator versions of a 5-point Likert-type survey on Internet safety knowledge, self-efficacy, and perspectives on collaboration were created based on Bandura's (2006) *Guide for Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales* and existing Internet safety and digital citizenship literature (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Ribble & Bailey, 2007). The reliability of all survey versions met acceptable Cronbach's alphas over .70. For the purpose of this study, Mark and Nguyen only reflected on the open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire, as well as the qualitative data collected from the discussions that took place during and after the workshop.

The Internet Safety Workshop

The workshop focused on the 5-Ps: People, places, programs, policies, and processes, within a school organization. These IE Domains guided the workshop development and execution. As the workshop developers and facilitators, Mark and Nguyen:

- (a) Identified the stakeholders ideal for participation, e.g., parents, teachers, and school administrators;
- (b) Focused upon schools and homes as the environments where Internet safety discussions should originate;

(c) Targeted which programs and policies to discuss during the workshop, e.g., Internet safety and ethics education programs, and school rules and policies; and

(d) Developed workshop activities intended to help school teams generate their team's own individualized goals and action plans.

The intervention was a 3-1/2 hour workshop. Due to the rarity of empirically evaluated Internet safety and ethics programs that exist in the U.S. and internationally, Mark & Nguyen could not model the workshop based on a specific curriculum. Instead, workshop concepts were generated from the highly cited, research-based, *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* (Limber, Kowalski, & Agatston, 2008). Although this program focuses primarily on traditional, face-to-face bullying, it also incorporates ideas of setting limits on appropriate student behavior and emphasizing a non-violent school atmosphere. Digital citizenship concepts (Ribble & Bailey, 2007) were also included in the workshop development to teach adults about cultivating respectful and responsible digital citizens who are capable of making wise decisions. During the workshop, school teams were asked to devise specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART)) goals, school action plans, future Internet safety school programs, and school-wide policy proposals that could help them in their team's short- and long-term technology endeavors. Overall, the intervention workshop purposefully sought to:

- a) Highlight how stakeholders can successfully work together to prevent and manage cyber problems,
- b) Encourage adults to keep up with modern technology trends,
- c) Keep adults informed on the current federal and state laws impacting how schools can legally deal with specific cyber issues, and
- d) Empower adult stakeholders to influence school-wide policies and practice regarding Internet safety and ethics.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data sources included emails from the research team to participants, response emails, flyers, and conversations during and after the workshop. Additionally, the researchers decided to include open-ended responses from the questionnaire in the analysis, although these were not initially intended as a data source. A qualitative, conversation analysis was applied that focused upon the ways in which parents and teachers were invited to the workshop and how the structures of interactions during the workshop influenced perception of achievement as a result of workshop interactions (Silverman, 2010; Creswell, 2014). Codes and categories compared the four invitational education assumptions and analyzed emerging patterns that described the participants' overall experiences and perspectives.

Results

The workshop discussions and activities were analyzed in relation to four of the five Invitational Education elements: Trust, respect, optimism, and intentionality (Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Novak, 2016). These elements became the four codes used to categorize participants' documented feedback. Table 2 below exhibits the coding scheme, participant quotes, and researcher interpretations.

Table 2
 Invitational Education in Internet Safety

Elements of Invitational Education	Internet Safety Feedback from Data Sources	Researcher Interpretations
<p>Trust* - Human existence is a cooperative activity where process is just as important as product.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher 1: <i>Parents are an important part of schooling. Your voice in how we address Internet safety is important.</i> • Parent 1: <i>Thank you for allowing us the time to talk to each other. This is important to hear what teachers have to say about the Internet.</i> • Teacher 2: <i>When students think it's okay to behave a certain way online because it's a social norm, parents need to step in and take equal responsibility for ethically [training] their kids before sending them to school. I think we [at school] also need to do a better job of helping parents [in these efforts].</i> • Teacher 3: <i>We (adults) need to be educated on cyber issues, so we can teach, train, model, and accept personal responsibility for online actions.</i> 	<p>In an inviting learning environment, parents and educators were collectively involved in the process of developing Internet safety education plans for their schools.</p> <p>We asked schools to form their own professional learning community (PLC)—teams of parents, teachers, and administrators so that an existing level of trust and communication were already in place within these teams prior to the workshop.</p> <p>The workshop was intended to reinforce these relationships between stakeholders, as well as between the participants and the research team.</p>
<p>Respect* - People are able, valuable, and responsible, and should be treated accordingly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher 4: <i>As parents, you have a unique understanding of your child. We value that perspective, but hope you can listen to the teacher's concerns too that might be different from yours.</i> • Parent 2: <i>We need to figure out how to get peers more involved somehow. They can bring a lot to the table too.</i> • Teacher 5: <i>The experts had so much to share and it was all very</i> 	<p>Parents and educators were treated as equal partners in their action planning. In the development of the workshop, it was a goal from the start to include the voices of parents, educators, school administrators, and other stakeholders in these critical conversations.</p> <p>The facilitators of the workshop were available as guides to assist teams in</p>

<p>Optimism* - People possess untapped potential in all areas of human endeavor.</p>	<p><i>useful.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent 3: <i>I wish we had more time and events to share with each other like this; everyone's perspective is so valuable.</i> • Teacher 2: <i>Though we may not know the Internet [as well as kids], I have a lifetime of experience I can share with my students and with your children. You have that too! Just because it didn't happen online doesn't mean it's invalid.</i> • Teacher 6: <i>I want to have continuous conversations [with my students' parents] and have a regular dialogue with my students in class. This workshop has given me some great ideas.</i> 	<p>their action planning processes. This allowed participants to take greater ownership of their school goals, policies, and action plans.</p> <p>Participants expressed a genuine interest and eagerness to learn the content in the workshop, and in general shared a positive sense of hope for change within their school communities.</p>
<p>Intentionality* - Human potential can best be realized by places, policies, processes, and programs specifically designed to invite development and by people who are personally and professionally inviting with themselves and others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers: <i>We invite you to attend the workshop with a team of parents, teachers, and school administrators.</i> • Teacher 7: <i>I think we need to make it a priority to go to more trainings like this and share this information with other faculty and staff, and parents and family members.</i> • Teacher 4: <i>I hope we can continue to be this open in our conversations after this workshop. I think we, as the schools and parents, need to put effort into inviting each other to continue talking. We all get busy, but this is ultimately for the children.</i> 	<p>The workshop was intended to provide specific education and awareness to an audience of parents and educators, who all have unique and valuable insights, experiences, and contributions to the cause.</p> <p>Through this purposeful effort to bring parents and educators together, we were able to observe what could be the beginning of effective family, school, and community partnerships.</p>

Note: *Adapted from "An Introduction To Invitational Theory" by William W. Purkey (1992).

Emergent Themes

In two open-ended survey questions, participants were asked to share their perceptions for decreasing Internet-related problems in their schools. Four themes emerged from the data:

- a) Awareness of Internet safety through education is important for all ages.
- b) Triangulated communication between students, the home, and school, should be open, honest, and on a regular basis. This includes communication between students and parents; students and teachers; teachers and school administration; as well as schools and families.
- c) Consistent technology rules must be implemented in both the school and home whereby parents and educators actively involve students in the rule-making process to encourage student ownership and accountability.
- d) Sustained efforts to provide inclusive collaboration between parent and educators around Internet and school safety practices should be systemically planned and encouraged.

These emergent themes reflect the basic tenets of Invitational Education by highlighting the inclusive, collaborative, and empowering, nature of education. This study's participants' perceived the importance of the individuals who are necessary to make Internet safety education happen in schools. Furthermore, they expressed this type of education is relatable and relevant to technology users of any age and setting rather than just children or for a school setting. Participants recognized creating changes within their schools such as increasing open communication between homes and schools and revising outdated school rules and policies requires people and a process that would take time, effort, multiple resources, willingness, and dedication to institutionalize the change effort. Overall, these emergent themes reflected participants' desire for a shared commitment to being effective and ethical users of technology.

Additional Results

Overall, parents and teachers expressed feeling welcomed to the workshop and were pleased to be intentionally invited to the Internet safety discussions within their school PLC teams. Often parents are left out of school policy development, school-wide goal setting, and action planning, or are not included until the very end of the change process. This workshop allowed parents and teachers to collaborate on Internet safety school goals and strategies as a team from the very beginning. Through personal observations, all stakeholders voiced this as a positive outcome.

Participants also shared that they were thankful for the time and space to have Internet safety conversations with other parents and educators who were equally interested in creating safer online and offline learning environments for children. A common observation following the workshop intervention was that parents and teachers recognized that schools cannot walk the Internet safety path alone. The workshop participants exhibited increased awareness that parents and community members share equal responsibility for guiding youth through their online and offline technology explorations and discoveries.

Implications for Parents and Educators

School PLC teams initially expressed a deep concern for their students' well-being. Through the workshop intervention, concern gave way to an increased awareness that educating both students and adults about the appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology was a proactive way to address Internet misconduct. Regarding Bandura's (1977) concept of modeling,

many workshop participants believed adults need to pay more attention to modifying their own technology values, ethical decision-making skills, and behavior. Perhaps parents and educators could ask the following question of themselves: *Am I a good model of an ethical decision-maker online as well as offline?*

When it comes to enforcing essentially unenforceable online behavior, in which existing rules and regulations often do not yet exist, it is important for adults to explicitly discuss with children appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Cross, 2009; Ribble & Bailey, 2007; Villano, 2008). Rules, consistency, and structure are important, especially for younger children. Too often children are not included in policy- or rule-making processes (Marzano, 2011). Therefore, adults should intentionally invite children to help in the creation of Internet rules to provide them with ownership of the limitations and empower them accountable for related actions.

Limitations

Of the 16 school PLC teams that took part in the workshops, only three teams actually followed-through to the end of the study, which included three follow-up communications not discussed above. It is difficult to know whether the schools in which researchers could not maintain ongoing contact took action beyond the Internet safety workshop intervention. Subsequent lack of communication results in only assumptions or speculation. Perhaps these-non-responsive schools to follow-up requests did not have sufficient time to apply what they had learned during the workshop. Perhaps they lacked strong PLC leadership to sustain the work begun during the intervention workshop. Another explanation could be that these school PLCs were in the process of working on implementation of their action plans, but were simply not as ready as other schools to make school-wide changes regarding Internet safety.

There was a concern about the generalizability of the study's results to different populations and settings because random selection and assignment of participants were not possible and overall participation in the study was voluntary. It is known that individuals who seek out or are willing to take part in research studies may have personal traits that set them apart from those who do not volunteer to participate, such as motivation, accessibility, ability, age, gender, race, or ethnicity (Parker, 1993).

Simply telling people something in a training session or workshop does not mean that the concept was taught or that the recipients of that information will necessarily take action (Heimlich & Ardoin, 2008). Studies on behavior and motivation are challenging because these concepts are difficult to observe and measure. Multiple factors can affect the decisions individuals make beyond professional development experiences. Yet, because no two individuals are alike, it was important for these researchers to be aware of the variability in motivation and capabilities when it comes to thoughts and actions.

Future Directions

- Further empirical evaluation needs to assess the effects of a collaborative parent and educator Internet safety workshop.
- Continuous follow-up communications could assess long-term behavior changes.
- Strong leadership within a professional learning community team is crucial.
- Stakeholders that include school administrators and school board members should be encouraged to attend future Internet safety workshops since school rules and policy changes typically require their authorization.

Conclusions

Invitational Education theory believes “human potential can best be realized by places, policies, programs, and processes that are specifically designed to encourage human potential, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally” (Purkey & Novak, 2016, p. 11). The Internet safety and ethics workshop study demonstrates when people feel intentionally invited into situations, optimal achievement can occur. Implementation of Invitational Education theory and practices creates and sustains holistic success in a school environment. While the Internet safety and ethics workshop study focused more on the process of helping Internet safety teams build their own capacity for creating safer online environments for students, parents, and educators, sustained success requires interdependency between people, places, programs, policies.

Ultimately, when dealing with Internet safety, it is important for awareness and education to be the top priorities of all members of a professional learning community. Schools alone cannot develop and sustain best practices. It is important for schools to involve parents and the community in the creation of Internet safety rules, policies, and action plans. Adults have the responsibility to be consistent models of appropriate behavior, both on and offline (Baum, 2005). Although many parents and educators vary in their own knowledge and understanding of technology, there is agreement in the need to use it safely and responsibly. This study could generate critical dialogue between parents and educators around the ideas of assessing school communities’ values and priorities, as well as for setting goals and objectives based on the creation of inclusive, intentionally inviting, and collaborative Internet safety action teams. Action teams rooted in effective family-school-community partnerships, and the collaborative efforts stemming from these partnerships could help protect children from the growing list of Internet safety issues that ultimately affect the overall culture and climate of a school community.

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