

“If you really want something, and really work hard, and take advantage of opportunities, and never give up, you will find a way.”

Jane Goodall

Grey Matters

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What a Super Bowl! Sure, neither the Pats nor the Bears were there, but it was definitely an outstanding game. Just when it appeared that the Cardinals pulled off the greatest comeback in Super Bowl history, the Steelers stayed focused and pull off a heart stopping victory. What an amazing example of the expression, “Never give up!”

Over the past two years, as part of our safe schools initiative, we have offered parents and guardians opportunities to learn more about our children’s participation in the “digital world”. Some of you have had the opportunity to hear Elizabeth Englander, Director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC), speak on this important topic. We hope to have her back at some point this year.

As I’ve mentioned before, middle school students generally engage in electronic activities such as: messaging each other via computers or cell phones, playing games online, playing CD-based (not online) games, and posting on social networking or blogging websites. If you’re new to the cyberspace world, instant messaging, sending personal photos from cell phones, accessing Facebook, and MySpace are just some of the more popular ways our young adolescents are communicating. Teens are attracted to this kind of Social Networking because part of adolescence is trying on different identities and these sites make it easy and fun. There is also a sense of freedom. In general, it may come as a surprise to know that our children generally think that these websites are a world uninhabited by adults, making them all the more interesting!

While the Internet has many positive aspects, recent stories in the news and on TV are a harsh reminder that the socialization aspect of the Internet carries great risk. I know many of us read about the teenagers in Greensburg, PA and Billerica, MA. Apparently, the teenagers from Greensburg, PA were taking inappropriate photos, often of themselves, on their cell phones, and then sending those photos to friends. As we might have predicted, these personal photos ended up being forwarded to more close friends, who then forwarded them on to more close friends, and so on. In the Billerica, MA case, a middle school girl sent a semi nude photo of herself to a high school friend, which was then forwarded to cell phones across the high school and middle school. While we have not had any issues of this proportion at RJG, we have to anticipate that children and teens will continue to use the Internet for socializing more and more, and teaching safety strategies is now just as important as teaching any other traditional life skill.

While the advice below may be unpopular with our young adolescents, I wanted to take this opportunity to reiterate some important safety messages regarding the use of the internet and keeping our young adolescents safe. These include:

- Monitor computer usage closely.
- If you permit children to play online games with freestyle chat, be sure they understand appropriate internet behavior, as well as internet safety rules.
- Be aware that expecting young teens to appreciate security concerns is premature. As such, it is the responsibility of parents to be vigilant to the potential dangers, to talk with your children directly about those dangers, and to monitor computer access.
- Children under 15 should not be posting on social networking sites with the exception of sites specifically geared for pre-teens.
- Instant messaging and “freestyle” chatting is generally not recommended at this age and stage.
- Use software that permits you to track computer use.
- Investigate privacy and marketing issues with any game website.
- As most incidents occur on home computers outside of the school day, please be aware that the school has limited authority to address these issues.

As parents and guardians, staying current with regard to new technology and being vigilant are two important ways you can support your children. It is truly a “new world” out there. Keeping our teens safe while having fun requires an ability to respond to situations regarding online situations as they come up. It also requires that we talk regularly with our children about appropriate internet behavior and safe decision making. As a parent myself, I understand that these can be awkward and uncomfortable discussions, at the same time, they are some of the most important conversations we can have. Should you be interested in more information, the Bridgewater State College Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) website is a great resource: <http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/downloads%20parents.html>

This Thursday, February 5, is the final day students may bring in box tops so that the money may be obtained this year through the box tops for education program. Students are hoping to buy a digital projector for the auditorium, and thus far they have raised over \$800 toward their goal. If you have any box tops, please send them with your student by Thursday.

Have a good week.

Craig