Be Safe and Nice Online

The Internet can be lots of fun. Just be sure to use it right. By Valerie Van Kooten

Remember that you can’t trust everyone online — just because you have played games with someone or friended them on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, it does not mean they are really your friend. If they have access to what you post, it is very easy for them to use the sharing options on social media sites to send it to others. Do not share your personal information. Avoid giving your last name, address, phone number, email address or your school information. Be suspicious of strange questions and conversations. If someone you don’t know well asks for your personal information or asks questions that make you uncomfortable, stop the conversation and tell a parent.

Don’t be afraid to tell an adult what is going on. “The No. 1 fear of kids is that Mom and Dad will go ballistic and take away their computer,” Michael Perjak, a criminal investigator, says. “You’re not doing anything wrong by being on these sites, and you need to let a trusted adult know if something weird is happening.”

If You Are Being Bullied:
Talk to a trusted adult. Tell your parent, a Scout leader or a teacher at school. You haven’t done anything wrong, and you need help to stop it.
Don’t respond. Usually the bully is trying to get a reaction from you. If you don’t respond, he or she will move on. It’s hard not to want to get back at the bully, but this will just make it worse.
Stay offline for a while. Don’t go to websites where people are talking about you. Turn off your cellphone for a while. Let adults do their job in taking care of it.

If You Are the Bully:
Look at your friends. Sometimes people do things in a group that they would not do alone. Look at your group of friends. Are your friends bullying someone? Are you part of it? Can you help stop it?
Don’t think you can get away with it. What you say and do online can be tracked and can be traced back to you.
Put yourself in the other person’s shoes. How would you feel if this were being said about you or done to you? Just stop doing it.
If someone you know is being bullied, be a good friend. Do not forward mean messages about them or embarrassing pictures of them. Tell the bully to stop. Sometimes someone who is being bullied cannot think clearly enough to report it. Help the person who is being bullied report it to a trusted adult.

For lots of cybersecurity tips, visit boyslife.org/netsmartz