



## Charlotte Regional Office Counseling Peace of Mind

### Got Windows???

#### Talking About the Internet with Children and Teens

by Lori Fox, Counseling Supervisor

As children grow and mature, they demonstrate an increasing desire to assume more and more responsibility for themselves and their activities. It can be extremely confusing for parents when it comes to knowing how much privacy to allow their children in their use of the Internet. When trying to decide on a comfortable level of freedom, parents should consider the following:

- Even in adolescence, the brain is growing and developing into an adult brain. Not only are the "wires" and the "departments" of the brain continuing to come together and become complete, brain chemistry is in flux as well. The most well-behaved and good-intentioned kids are still prone to questionable judgment from time to time.
- Raging hormones...enough said.
- Trusting kids is one thing; trusting the Internet community is another

As tempting as it may be to strictly curtail kids' usage of the Internet, it is unfortunately all too easy for our children to find access to it somewhere. When they use the Internet outside of the house, we are in the dark about where they have been on the Web.

Creating "windows" into our children's Internet use is probably our best bet to maintain healthy parental controls. Making the Internet a family affair can help open up the communication about what is okay and what is not. The following may provide some good guidelines:

- Keep the computer in a central location of the home that gets plenty of traffic.
- There are a number of techniques to control what kids can or cannot access on the computer. Computer programs can be purchased which allow parents to really tailor the access their children have to the internet and even provide reports of web activity.
- Cell phones that access the Internet should be subject to parental review, if allowed at all.
- Talk as a family about Internet pitfalls for children and adults alike...people lie, there are con artists aplenty, predators are real and active in every community.
- Consider a Family Pledge for Online Safety. Post that agreement, or general family rules about Internet use at the computer. A great example of this can be found at [www.yahooligans.com](http://www.yahooligans.com) under Parent's Resources.
- There are a number of resources in the community and on-line that can help:

**NetSmartz.org**: An interactive educational safety resource to teach kids and teens how to stay safer on the Internet.

**www.playitcybersafe.com**: Empowering children, parents and teachers to prevent cybercrime through knowledge of the law, their rights, and how to avoid misuse of the Internet

**Disney.go.com/cybersafety/index.html**: Children learn about proper Internet ethics and the importance of keeping private information private via Mickey, Goofy, and the gang.

**Safekids.com and Safeteens.com**: Tips advice, links, and suggestions to help make your family's online experience fun and productive.

**The counseling team at Catholic Social Services** is available to help parents and families to work together on tough issues. We offer professional counseling in a faith based setting. We are affordable, accept most health insurance, and can provide a sliding scale based on income. Please call 704-370-3238 to schedule an appointment, or visit our website at [www.cssnc.org](http://www.cssnc.org).

Talking about websites and learning new things on the Web needs to be a continuing process. Stay interested, enthusiastic, and plugged in on a regular basis to what kids are experiencing on the Internet. Being a partner rather than an opponent in how children are exploring that enormous world, is a good way to keep the "windows" of trust and communication open.