



It seems like every few months we see new news articles published detailing the newest attempt to desensitize children to fear and violence. At Grace River Academy, we want to make you aware of the dangers that exist on the internet.

A quick internet search for terms such as “Huggy Wuggy,” “Poppy Playtime,” or “Choo Choo Charlie” provide startling content that is intended for children but filled with inappropriate and violent themes. While some of this content has been discovered and removed from children’s sites such as YouTubeKids, much is still available and new videos are bound to be published.

As partners in your child’s education, we wanted to take the time to let you know about the efforts we are taking to teach your child how to stay safe on the internet. We would also like to offer some suggestions of steps you and your family can take to protect your child as well.

First, at the beginning of 2023, Grace River Academy was proud to introduce our new STEM Initiative that teaches our students the fundamentals of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. As a part of this curriculum designed for kindergarten, first, and second-grade students, there are lessons about staying safe on the internet. Your child has engaged in the following learning objectives:

- **When it is appropriate to use technology,**
- **What to do when you have bad feelings while online,**
- **What information is safe to share online,**
- **What information is not safe to share online,**
- **The importance of only sharing passwords with parents,**
- **What is appropriate and kind to say to others online,**
- **Identifying behaviors that are appropriate and safe online.**

One of our goals associated with our STEM Initiative is to graduate students who are responsible digital citizens. However, we also recognize the importance of parent help in reaching this goal. Our ability to train students ends after they leave our campus. As such, we’d like to offer a few suggestions in order to keep your child safe from inappropriate internet content.

Consider whether your child is mature enough for their own device. It is never appropriate for children to have unfettered access to the internet. The internet is a

dangerous place that is often not intended for children. Even sites such as YouTubeKids and Roblox contain content that is either unregulated or not well regulated. Unfortunately, sending your child to what is thought to be kid-friendly sites is no longer safe. While personal devices such as cell phones and tablets can often serve as positive motivation when their use is revoked as discipline, it may not be worth the danger.

Install a content blocker on your child's device or your home internet. There are many helpful products available to parents to help monitor and block what content your child is able to access. Some easy starts are putting passwords on streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, and Peacock. While some of these services offer platforms for children that are generally much more regulated and thus safer, remember that your values and opinions on what is appropriate for children may not match up with Netflix's. A next step would be to download a free or purchased content blocker on devices that your child has access to. We recommend Qustodio (qustodio.com). This product has a free version that protects a single device. If your child only has access to one device, this may be perfect for your family. You can also upgrade to a paid plan that can protect multiple devices across the family. This product also protects a range of devices including Windows PCs, Macs, Chromebooks, iPhones, iPads, Android phones and tablets, and Kindle tablets. Circle (meetcircle.com) is an amazing physical product that connects to your home internet to block content. It also comes with an app for parents to set time-limits and pause your home internet.

Monitor your child's phone usage on a daily to weekly basis. This may sound like over-kill, but we'd rather you be safe than sorry. If your child has access to a device, we suggest you monitor the following:

- Apps
 - o Popular apps that are available to children may not be safe for them to use and have easy access to pornography, violence, and inappropriate content. Some apps to look out for due to their aforementioned access include:
 - TikTok
 - Twitter
 - YikYak
 - Kik
 - Omegle
 - Chatroulette
 - 4Chan
 - Ask.fm
 - Roblox
 - Snapchat
 - o There are features on most devices to block certain apps or to block adult content. We strongly recommend that adult content is blocked on your child's device. Devices also monitor usage by time. It may be worth looking into the apps that your child is spending the most time on and making sure they are safe.

- Search and browser history
 - o Research indicates that children become curious about human anatomy as early as three-years-old and are often exposed to pornography by age 10-12. While your child may not be looking for pornography in particular, they may likely be curious about human anatomy and take to the internet to learn more. If you believe your child may be curious about human anatomy, take time to have responsible and appropriate conversations with them instead of leaving them to their own devices, literally.
 - o While popular search engines such as Google offer SafeSearch functions, they are not perfect. Be sure that these functions are enabled, but also check the searches and websites that your child is visiting.

- Messaging
 - o Even if your child's device does not include a texting plan, apps exist that allow them to connect with friends and strangers alike via messaging. Monitor your child's messages on apps such as Messenger, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Kik, GroupMe, Discord, JusTalk, and Telegram.
 - o Some messaging apps, though designed for children, make it easy for predators to contact your child. Make sure your child is aware of these dangers and not at undue risk.

Have conversations with your child about technology and internet safety. Even the best products and protective behaviors don't beat good, healthy conversations with your child. We encourage you to sit down with your child and have conversations about technology, how to safely use it, and the dangers that exist on the internet. More often than not, the internet is a dangerous place for those who don't yet understand how to use it safely. Teach your child to use it in a way that not only protects them against dangers but honors God in the process.

If you are interested in learning more about how to protect your child from the dangers of technology, allow me to recommend some resources:

- [The Tech Wise Family](#) by Andy Crouch is a book that challenges parents to go beyond the practical steps discussed above and to do the work of instilling wisdom, character, and courage in the lives of our children who are growing up in an increasingly tech-filled world.
- [Pluggedin.com](#) is a website designed for parents to help them stay "plugged in" to the media their children are consuming. They provide reviews of movies, TV

shows, books, music, games, and YouTube channels to alert parents to inappropriate themes, questionable morals, and dangerous content. Before you see the next blockbuster, check it out on pluggedin.com so you know what you're taking your family to. If there is a game, TV show, or YouTube channel you know your child is into, check it out on pluggedin.com just to make sure it's safe and appropriate.

- Rightnowmedia.org is a content library that I call "the Netflix of Bible studies." Adults and teens can find a plethora of Bible study content to add to their spiritual routines. Your children, however, can search through the large library of TV shows that are trustworthy and God honoring. Grace River Church can provide families of Grace River Academy with free access to this resource. Simply email me at nickc@graceriveracademy.org for access.
- Focusonthefamily.com is a website with articles and resources that support parents who are seeking to strengthen their families and raise children who honor God and others. This is a great place to start looking if you have other questions regarding parenting or internet safety. We have also included Focus on the Family's Parent's Guide to Technology and Entertainment for further reading and study with this letter.

We hope that, with this information and encouragement, you will be empowered to support your child and protect them as they continue to grow and develop in the Lord. Our prayer at Grace River Academy as always been to graduate students who know their God, know His Word, and know His purposes for their lives.

If you have any questions or additional concerns, know that my door is always open for you. My office hours are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. You may also reach me via phone at (757) 410-9389 x1002 or email at nickc@graceriveracademy.org.

Blessings for you and your family,

Rev. Nicholas Clay
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