

Questions about Ethical Computer & Network Usage for Parents to Discuss With Their Children

M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP
Associate Professor of Information Assurance
School of Business & Management
Norwich University

Introduction

As computing technology becomes part of daily life, parents must communicate their values to their children if we are to avoid a lost generation of kids who have no moral guidance in their use of computers and networking. The following questions are deliberately offered *without* answers so that parents can think about them and discuss them constructively with their children. Rather than trying to force rigid rules devoid of reason on young people, perhaps parents can think about the issue and engage in constructive dialog with their own children to build a shared moral framework. These questions may also be useful in classroom discussion. Parents, teachers, and students should feel free to use and adapt them to their own purposes.

Respect for intellectual property rights

1. Are all the programs, games, music, and videos on your computers, game consoles, music players, and mobile phones either paid for or legally free? If not, how did you get involved in copying such materials without paying for them?
2. Where did the contents of your report / project / homework come from – does any of it belong to someone else, such as another student, a paper you downloaded from the Web, or something you found on a Web page?
3. If you copied text and images from another source, did you have permission to use them? If you didn't need permission from the "owners" of the information you're using, did you credit them for the material?
4. Have you or your friends ever considered buying term papers from a store on the Web? Tell us about that.

Respect for other people's property rights

5. Do you ever use other people's computer, disk-space or processing capability, or look at or copy their files or information, without their knowledge or permission? How? Why?
6. Have you or friends of yours ever signed on to (i.e., hacked into) computers that belong to companies or government agencies without permission? When did you start? How many times have you done that?
7. Have you ever changed anything on someone else's computer – for instance, left a funny picture or a joke, or removed content such as homework or some other file? Tell us about that. Where did you learn to do that kind of thing?
8. Do you have any prank programs, computer viruses, worms, Trojan horse programs, bombs, or other malicious software on your computer? What do you do with this material? Why?

Questions for Parents to Discuss with their Children

Respect for social values

9. Do you have any computer graphics files, clips, movies, animations or drawings that you would be embarrassed about? Why do you have them? Did you get them legitimately?
10. Are all your files things you would be comfortable showing me? Showing your grandparents / friends / teachers? Why or why not?
11. Do you have any pictures, video clips, sound clips, articles, text, or other software or files which contain pornography, violence, dangerous instructions other distasteful material? Do you access or view any of these kinds of things when using the Internet?
12. Are you aware that making, owning and distributing child pornography – images of kids engaged in sexual acts – are federal crimes? Has anyone ever showed you child pornography? How did you respond?
13. Do you have any newsletters, plans, guidelines, or “how-to” documents or files about violence or criminality that you would not be comfortable showing to your parents? For instance, making bombs, breaking into systems, stealing telephone access, stealing computer access, stealing passwords, violent text, guides, or descriptions? Do any of your friends create, contribute to or receive anything like this? Do you? Why?

Questions related to network use

Do you ever connect your computer to a telephone, use a modem, or otherwise use a network? If so, consider the following questions:

14. With whom do you associate when you use the Internet? Tell me about your contacts.
15. Do you ever use an assumed name, a handle, or an alias instead of your real name? Where and why?
16. Do you supply false information about yourself when using a bulletin board, a news group, a message group or forum, a social-networking site, instant messaging, Twitter or any other aspect of the Internet? Why?
17. Do you give your real age, sex, and address to strangers you have met online using your computer? Has anyone ever talked to you about Internet safety when meeting strangers online? What do you know?
18. Do you use any false information such as a fake addresses or phone numbers or use someone else’s credit card number when using your computer? Do you ever send messages or e-mail in such a way that the recipient cannot tell that you sent it? Have you ever modified data, text, messages, or other computer information so that it looks like someone other than you created it or made the changes? Who told you about doing such things? How long have you been doing them? Have you stolen money?
19. Do you use telephone, video, cable-TV, computer network, bulletin board, or other chargeable network services without paying for them?

