Parenting Tips for the Digital Age

Parenting continually evolves, requiring new awareness, especially as students increasingly engage online.

Here are some tips for parents that will not only reinforce the cyberbullying prevention curriculum at TFMS, but help set the stage for healthy online activities by students.

- **Begin by modeling positive behavior.** We understand life is busy and some employers require constant connectivity and availability. But like our students, we encourage parents to set a positive example. Take breaks from technology, establish no cell phone or other device time, collect phones or use docking stations at night, and model civility both online and offline.

- **Establish guidelines and ground rules.** Talk to your student about what sites are okay and what sites are off limits. Don't just tell students not to go to inappropriate websites, but instead help them understand why these sites are against your personal values, morals, or ethics.

- **Reinforce the potential dangers lurking online.** Talk to your student in a developmentally appropriate manner about the "grooming" techniques that are used by online predators. Students should know that individuals might hide their true identity online. They should avoid responding to individuals who request personal information or photos. Teens should understand how some photo sharing could lead to exploitation and extortion.

- **Discuss positive behaviours to embrace and negative behaviours to avoid.** Online learning, research, creating, and communicating and sharing ideas and projects are positive behaviors. Yet there are negative behaviors to avoid such as cyberbullying, inappropriate photo or video sharing, plagiarizing, and cheating. Remind your student that anything shared digitally can potentially be public and permanent.

- **Learn about appropriate monitoring techniques.** Encourage conversations and "course corrections" when necessary. Be careful not to overreact, but use this information to ask questions and have teachable moments. Set up agreements on what sites and behaviors are okay, but let your student know you will be monitoring to make sure they follow your family guidelines. View the history or use parental controls that send monitoring reports to you on a regular basis. But recognize that many kids know how to delete the browser history. Explore apps for smartphones that offer safer browsing and monitoring options. Consider setting up filtering at the wireless router level. This will assist you in screening out inappropriate sites regardless of what device is used. But recognize that students may have access at other public Wi-Fi sites.

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www.torontofrenchmontessori.com

Stouffville Campus: 22 Church Street, Stouffville, ON L4A

Willowdale Campus: 38 Ellerslie Ave, North York, ON M2N

Tel: 416.250.9952 Fax: 416.250.9957

Email: info@torontofrenchmontessori.com