INTERNET SAFETY, SOCIAL NETWORKING AND TECHNOLOGY

Internet Safety and Social Networking

It sometimes seems that our world revolves around the internet. "Google it!" or "I'll 'friend' you later!" or "Tweet me!" are just a few of the popular phrases associated with the internet and online social networking that can be heard almost everywhere we turn.

Individuals with autism are just as interested, if not more interested, in using the internet as a connection to mass amounts of information and millions of people. To ensure the safety and success of internet usage, it is critical that individuals with autism learn how to protect themselves online, and that they understand what is and isn't appropriate on the internet.

Some organizations have specific classes to teach individuals with autism safe and fun ways to use the internet. Parents should closely monitor their young adult's internet use and constantly make sure that his or her internet activity is safe and appropriate.

Social Networking Sites – Safety Tips for Teens and Tweens
from *Federal Trade Commission Facts for Consumers*:

- Think about how different sites work before deciding to join a site. Some sites will allow only a defined community of users to access posted content; others allow anyone and everyone to view postings.
- Think about keeping some control over the information you post. Consider restricting access to your page to a select group of people, for example, your friends from school, your club, your team, your community groups, or your family.
- Keep your information to yourself. Don't post your full name, Social Security number, address, phone number, or bank and credit card account numbers — and don't post other people's information, either. Be cautious about posting information that could be used to identify you or locate you offline. This could include the name of your school, sports team, clubs, and where you work or hang out.
- Make sure your screen name doesn't say too much about you. Don't use your name, your age, or your hometown. Even if you think your screen name makes you anonymous, it doesn't take a genius to combine clues to figure out who you are and where you can be found.
- Post only information that you are comfortable with others seeing — and knowing — about you. Many people can see your page, including your parents, your teachers, the police, the college you might want to apply to next year, or the job you might want to apply for in five years.
- Remember that once you post information online, you can't take it back. Even if you delete the information from a site, older versions exist on other people's computers.
- Consider not posting your photo. It can be altered and broadcast in ways you may not be happy about. If you do post one, ask yourself whether it's one your mom would display in the living room.

- Flirting with strangers online could have serious consequences. Because some people lie about who they really are, you never really know who you're dealing with.
- Be wary if a new online friend wants to meet you in person. Before you decide to meet someone, do your research: Ask whether any of your friends know the person, and see what background you can dig up through online search engines. If you decide to meet them, be smart about it: Meet in a public place, during the day, with friends you trust. Tell an adult or a responsible sibling where you're going, and when you expect to be back.
- Trust your gut if you have suspicions. If you feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online, tell an adult you trust and report it to the police and the social networking site. You could end up preventing someone else from becoming a victim.

Social Networking Sites Specifically for Individuals with Autism

You may want to help your child try to navigate social networking sites. Keep a list of questions that your child may have and use this opportunity to help him or her be proactive. Sit down at the computer with your son or daughter and point out dangers. Keep a list of red flags that might be harmful and dangerous. Once again, partner with your child in creating this list. He or she will become more familiar with the dangers if you talk it through and write down points of reference.

WeAreAutism.org - Share, talk, and communicate in a user-led social network for individuals, family members and those members of the community. Share the wealth of your experience and plan for the future with those like you. Find others with similar interests and goals.

WrongPlanet.net - Wrong Planet is a web community designed for individuals (and parents / professionals of those) with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, PDDs, and other neurological differences. We provide a discussion forum, where members communicate with each other, an article section, with exclusive articles and how-to guides, a blogging feature, and a chat room for real-time communication with other Aspies.

AutismSpeaks.Ning.org - Autism Speaks Social Networking Site
This online community was created as a support forum for those affected by autism.

Technology

The goals and uses of technology are very different for adolescents and young adults. Technological tools can be very empowering for adolescents transitioning into young adulthood, especially individuals with autism.

"Throughout the years, a large variety of strategies and tools, including technology, have been used to enhance both the functional capabilities and the quality of life of people with developmental disabilities. The varied use of these strategies and tools—especially those with the power of technology with individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—continues to receive limited attention in spite of the fact that technology tends to be a high interest area for many of these individuals. Frequently, consideration of assistive technology is limited to augmentative communication purposes; that is, as an alternative way for individuals with limited verbal expression (speech) to communicate. Although the use of augmentative communication can be significant for individuals with ASD, there are many other ways in which assistive technology may be used. This section will discuss how various tools and strategies, including no, low, mid, and high technology methods can be used with individuals with ASD. While our focus is on students, most of this information applies to adults as well. The needs of students from early childhood through high school and transition into postsecondary life are also addressed."

- *Assistive Technology Supports for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder*
Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative
February, 2009
www.wati.org/content/supports/free/pdf/ASDManual-1.pdf

Assistive Technology: According to the *Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988* (Public Law 100-407), assistive technology device means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, off-the-shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. In IDEA 1997 and 2004 this definition remained unchanged. IDEA 2004 added an exception that states: "The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of such device" (Public Law 108-446, 602 (1) (B)).

Assistive technology service is any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. These definitions were incorporated into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and remains today. In addition IDEA 2004 continued the requirement that "…each public agency shall ensure that assistive technology devices and assistive technology services are made available to a child with a disability if required…" (300.105 (a)).

Using Technology to Promote Independence

Bluetooth Technology
- o Used to fade proximity to instructors
- o Connected to cell phone – used as unseen device on ear to allow instructor to walk individual through certain processes such as purchasing items at stores (locating items, waiting in line, paying for items)
- o Proximity to instructor gradually decreased over time – started off with blue tooth device and instructor physically guiding process if audio cues not helpful right away – continues until individual on their own

Auditory Prompts via MP4 and iPods
- o Walking individual through workout (finding machine, setting up machine, completing the exercise)
- o Participants wore MP4 player watch or iPod attached to earphones
- o Written schedule and portable timer used
- o Verbal directions and favorite music used – again goal was to decrease proximity of instructor and increase independence over time

Video Modeling
- o Used to teach adolescents domestic skills, self care skills, daily living skills, job tasks.
- o Study focused on showering and other hygiene skills
- o Used digital picture frames and portable DVD players
- o Start with additional assistance like gestures or physical prompts along with videos, progress to just use videos

PAAL: The Use of Technology to Promote Independence and Social Acceptance for Adolescents with Autism
http://mecaautism.org/downloads/Technology-Independence-Social-Acceptance.pps

Areas where technology can be used: Visual Representation Strategies, Sensory Input, Motor, Receptive Communication, Expressive Communication, Academics, Organization, Behavior, Social Interaction, and Transition.

Various types of technology can help with communicating in a non-verbal way.

Additional Devices and Programs

- PDA's (personal digital assistants) – schedules, reminders, tips, etc.
- iPods – music and sounds
- Laptops and computers – social networking (see other section), assistive computer programs, fun activities, etc.
- iPhones/iPads– see apps below – lots of tools!
  - o Significantly cheaper than Dynavox and other types of technology
- Computer games and software programs: Some individuals with autism find sensory regulation in various computer software programs.
- Tape Recorder/Recording Device

- Keyboarding and other portable word processors: talking word processing programs such as Word Q and Write: OutLoud, can be used to speak text that is entered or selected by the student
  - Dragon NaturallySpeaking Solutions:
    - Speech recognition tool can turn speech into type
  - Write: Out Loud
    - Simple to use and reads words as they are written, providing real-time auditory feedback.
  - WordQ: suggests words for you to use and provides spoken feedback to help you find mistakes
- Speech Generating Devices- AAC
  - One message and multi-message devices available
  - www.speechgeneratingdevices.com
  - www.dynavoxtech.com
- VoicePod: The VoicePod is a digital recording and playback system ideal for photos, language cards and communication symbols
- Online Learning: The learning and teaching opportunities available through the Internet are amazingly numerous and varied
- Bluetooth
- Digital picture frame
- Websites specifically for young adults/adults with autism
  - Topic-specific such as college, employment
  - Social networking sites

Communication devices, computer programs, apps and other technological resources can be extremely beneficial tools for individuals with autism. It may be helpful to look into these resources, and determine if one or more might be a good option for your young adult. These resources can often improve the communication skills of individuals on the autism spectrum, and as a result, provide them with greater access to the community, and an increased ability to express their opinions and advocate for themselves.

Jennifer is 15-years-old and has moderate autism. Her language is repetitive and she often has difficulty making her needs known. Her mother tries to encourage independence and suggests that Jen order her own drink at Starbucks. At first, Jen's mom carried pictures around with her and had Jen point at the coffee or the chocolate picture, and then the cold or the hot picture. Jennifer's mother realized that this process was a challenge for Jennifer, and wasn't maximizing her potential for independence in making these decisions.

Jennifer's mom decided to use an iPad to help with Jennifer's communication skills. She purchased an app that allows Jen to make menu choices right on the screen. Now, Jen can go into Starbucks with her iPad and place her order using the options she sees on the device. She can use this program to make menu decisions at other shops as well. Jennifer is thrilled that she is now able to get the drink she wants, all on her own.

In speaking with Jennifer's mother about this new process, she explained that there was a time when she would have answered for Jennifer, and may or may not have ordered what Jennifer wanted. In the past, this had been a cause for outbursts. But ever since she purchased her iPad, Jennifer can now use the device to communicate her wants, and outings such as trips to Starbucks are much more successful.