

Comprehensive Layered Approach to Address Digital Citizenship and Youth Risk Online

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Layer 1. Comprehensive Desktop Protection

Encourage comprehensive desk-top approaches, like Windows Live Family Protection, which provides the ability for parents to use black lists, create white lists, control who has the ability to communicate, limit time, and prevent deleting of history file. Research shows that children and teens whose parents who are actively and positively engaged in their online activities engage in less risk-taking behavior.

Advantages:

- Requires more active ongoing parental involvement - and can be used to coach parents and young people to learn about protection strategies.
- Puts controls into hands of parents to be guided by family values - not digital identification companies or web sites.
- Does not require universal, global adoption to be successful (COPA decision).
- No risks of loss of security of data about minors.
- No targeted advertising to support costs of program.

Layer 2. Protective Features of Children Sites, Sites that Attract Teens and Adults, and Adult Sites

Encourage responsible sites to continue the creation of best practices to protect children and teens. Establish an industry group, like the Children's Advertising Bureau, that makes recommendations for best practices to protect children on children's sites, dissuades children from participating on general access sites, protects teens on general access sites, and dissuades or prevents teens from participating on adult sites. Accreditation of sites that meet best practices standards could be incorporated into the desktop protections in a white list or advise capacity.

Advantages:

- Leverages the excellent development of protective features of sites.
- Allows for refinement of practices.
- Accreditation would stimulate adoption.

Layer 3. Digital Citizenship

We must ensure that young people gain the knowledge, skills, and values to independently make safe and responsible choices in a highly interactive, mobile technology environment where they are both consumers and creators of content and will interact with a wide range of people. While some refer to this issue as "Internet safety," the issues are more comprehensive and a new term "digital citizenship" is preferable. Given the degree to which interactive technologies are now pervasive in our society - and are now an important platform for business, political, community, and personal life, it is essential that we prepare young people to use these technologies safely and wisely. Schools will play the major role in doing this.

All students must be supported to becoming good digital citizens. Digital citizens:

- Understand the risks
 - Know how to avoid getting into risk, detect if they are at risk, and respond effectively, including asking for help
- Are responsible and ethical
 - Do not harm others
 - Respect the privacy and property of others
- Pay attention to the well-being of others
 - Make sure their friends and others are safe
 - Report concerns to an appropriate adult or site
- Promote online civility and respect

As technology permeates instruction, the opportunities to address digital citizenship will increase. It must be understood that just as it is impossible for an adult to teach a young child how to swim without also getting into the water, schools must embrace these new interactive technologies or their will fail to effectively prepare students for their future.

Advantages:

A focus on digital citizenship will:

- Move beyond the current, ineffective fear-based messages about Internet use and other technologies.
- Support the expanded use of these technologies in schools - which is essential to effectively preparing young people for effective careers, civic involvement, and personal life in the 21st Century.

Layer 4. Comprehensive Education and Intervention Approach to Address Youth Risk Online Through Pre-established Youth Risk Prevention Efforts

Effective comprehensive risk prevention approaches must be implemented to address the concerns of the minority of young people who are at higher risk of being harmed or causing harm with these technologies. The young people who are at the greatest risk online are the ones who are at greater risk in general.

Youth Risk Online Consortium

Under NCLB, Safe Schools and Communities initiatives to address youth risk have been established at the national, state, and school/community level.¹ These initiatives include safe school, mental health, and juvenile justice professionals. These safe school professionals often do not understand technologies ~ but they do understand youth risk and effective risk prevention. Technology services is frequently designated the responsibility for addressing “Internet issues” ~ which generally has no understanding of youth risk. Likewise, in Departments of Justice, juvenile specialists understand youth risk, but may not be associating with Internet crimes specialists.

- Expand the Safe Schools and Communities Committees’ responsibilities to address youth risk online.
- Expand the participation to include educational technology and Internet crimes professionals.

Effectively Ascertain Risks, Risk Factors, and Protective Factors

Every two years, states conduct a Youth Risk Behavior survey.² There is no mechanism to assess youth risk online. Because youth risk online is associated with youth risk, it will be helpful to correlate the data. Develop a companion Youth Risk Behavior Online survey that would enable states to assess incident rates, risk factors, protective factors, and correlate the data with the risk behavior survey.

Implement Education and Intervention Initiatives

Safe schools programs must meet Principles of Effectiveness Requirement and use research-based best practices.³ There are no research-based best practices to address youth risk online. It will be impossible to implement research-proven practices because research about youth risk online is just emerging and the technologies and activities are rapidly changing. But it is possible to implement approaches that are grounded in current research insight and to incorporate the insight from other effective programs to address youth risk. Such initiatives must also incorporate ongoing evaluation and modify their approaches based on this evaluation, as well as new research.

- Provide funding for state and local-based education and community initiatives through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SAMHSA)⁴ and Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities programs. All funded programs should be required to follow the requirements for a waiver of principles of effectiveness, including:
 - A needs assessment based on objective data that describes the problems or concerns currently faced. The Youth Risk Online Behavior Survey could provide this documentation, as well as other local or regional measures.
 - A detailed description of the implementation plan, including: a description of the performance measure or measures the program or activity will address; a description of how the program or activity will be carried out; the personnel to be involved; the intended audience or target population; the time frame for conducting the program or activity; and a detailed description of all costs associated with carrying out the program or activity.
 - The rationale for the program or activity, including: how it is designed and why it is expected to be successful in accomplishing the improvements described in the performance measures; a discussion of the most significant risk and protective factors the program or activity is designed to target; and evidence to support that the program has a “substantial likelihood of success.” This evidence must identify the current youth risk online research insight and effective risk prevention approaches that have been incorporated into the proposed program or activity.
 - An evaluation plan that addresses: the methods used to assess progress toward attaining goals and objectives; the personnel who will conduct evaluation; the way the results of the evaluation and new research insight will be used to refine, improve, and strengthen the comprehensive plan; and the way progress toward attaining objectives will be publicly reported.
- Recognize that the most effective youth risk prevention approaches use a social norms approach.⁵ Because the majority of young people are engaging in safe and responsible Internet use, a social norms approach that focuses primarily on cybercitizenship and youth empowerment would be preferable to the current fear-based instruction.
- Additional activities of the collaborative effort would be to increase effective intervention. This would largely be accomplished through the professional development of the professionals who are most likely to detect youth online risk.

Advantages:

- It is ESSENTIAL to shift to an effective risk-based, best practices-grounded approach to address youth risk online and away from the fear-based messages that research has demonstrated consistently are totally ineffective in changing risk behavior!

Layer 5. National Collaboration

A national collaboration of researchers, risk prevention experts, Internet safety and associated organizations, law enforcement, and industry. The major focus of this collaboration would be

stimulating research to better understand dimensions of problem and the effective (and more rapid) transfer of research into education, intervention, and industry practices.

More funding for interdisciplinary research into youth risk online is imperative. It is also necessary to speed the translation of research into practice. It can take up to 18 months for a completed research study to even be published. This collaboration would:

- Lobby for increased funding for research into youth risk online, with a multidisciplinary oversight of research initiatives.
- Hold regular “Expert’s Conference” to allow presentation of research, with analysis by experts in risk prevention, law enforcement, and industry. Collaboratively create recommendations for Internet risk messaging and safety initiatives based on this analyzed research insight. Recognize, and be comfortable with the fact, that this insight and recommendations may change with updated research insight.

Advantages:

- Brings the necessary players together in a forum that will focus the continuing discussion to proceed in a manner that is research-based and guided by insight into research-grounded effective risk prevention.

About the Author

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D. is the director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use - <http://csriu.org>. She has degrees in special education and law. She taught “at risk” children, practiced computer law, and was an educational technology consultant before focusing her professional attention on issues of youth risk online and effective management of student Internet use. Nancy is author of two books. *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Cruelty, Threats, and Distress* (Research Press) and *Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens, Helping Young People Use the Internet Safety and Responsibly* (Jossey Bass). Nancy’s focus is on applying research insight into youth risk and effective research-based risk prevention approaches to these new concerns of youth risk online.

¹ <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html>.

² <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/>.

³ Section 4115. <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg52.html>.

⁴ <http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/>.

⁵ National Social Norms Institute. <http://www.socialnorm.org/index.php>.