

Larry Magid is Yahoo And A True Responsible CyberCitizen - An Internet Safety Advocate

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Summary:

Today's guest, Larry Magid, is a Yahoo! Kids Blogger, an active technology journalist with papers such as the New York Times, works with CBS News Technology, and also is an advocate for internet safety.

Larry's advocacy work includes three websites that are geared towards a variety of audience types to help promote internet safety. The first site, safeteens.com, is geared towards both parents and teens with a focus on the fact that the majority of crimes people fall prey to on the internet are the result of misbehavior from individuals not pedophiles tracking down children. Such misbehavior may be cyber bullying, for example.

The second site, safekids.com, is a site where parents can go to learn how to protect their young children online. One area of the site allows parents to print off an internet safety contract, which helps the family to set and agree on guidelines for the internet. A second popular area is a pre-filtered web search tool for kids. Kids can go to the site, search the web, and get results that are filtered with the strongest filters possible and the parents don't have to worry themselves over setting up their own filters or if their kids will get inappropriate sites.

The last site, connectsafety.org, is not-for-profit funded by a variety of businesses and provides the public (kids, teens, and parents) with a myriad of resources that can help them in their goal of internet safety. The site also offers a forum where parents can come and get answers to specific questions that they have regarding the topic.

Yahoo! Kids Blogger is another active part of Larry's life. It was started in 1994 when the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children asked him to write a booklet about child safety online. Fourteen years later Larry has learned a variety of things from his dealings with the site. The most important thing he has learned that he wants to share with others is that internet safety needs vary by family. Some families have no need to delve into the subject because their kids take care of it on their own. Other families have to really work together to deal with dangerous issues and behaviors online. When setting out on the journey towards internet safety, this "each case is different" mentality is important to remember, as it will help families focus on their own needs and not what other people tell them they need.

A second thing that Larry has learned over the years is the need for people to determine what it is they are protecting themselves from. Often times they try to protect themselves from everything all at once, and this really isn't affective. If they would just focus on one threat at a time, then they would have a better chance at adequately protecting themselves and their children.

One such threat is cyber bullying. The problem with this type of bullying compared to the previously more common type of bullying at school, is that cyber bullying doesn't end when the kid comes home. Previously kids had to deal with bullies at school but the bullies wouldn't be able to bring it at home. Now, bullies can e-mail and text their messages to the victims at any given time, not to mention that with digital cameras people can take photos of other people at all times. These photos can be posted online and can create a lot of havoc in people's lives, depending on the photo.

The problem with cyber bullying isn't the fact that it happens alone. As it was in the past, a large amount of kids will get teased or bullied at some point in time or the other. For the most part these small examples are acceptable and will not cause a child to need therapy in the future. The problem with cyber bullying comes when it happens constantly, and unrelentingly. The point to take home is that parents need to be aware of their kids online and take precautions with them, but they also need to remember not to over react if something small and isolated does happen.

This type of overreaction isn't found only in individual households. It also has happened in the media and even with the attorney generals of the various U.S. States. People need to take this into account and to consider their individual cases before they too overreact in fear of predators and other cyber criminals.

So what *can* people do to help control this fear of cyber criminals, protect themselves from potential dangers online, and be more civil to each other in the process? The answer to that is a multi-step process that will by no means accomplish those goals immediately, but with time could change the way we use the internet.

According to Larry the first step is for people to learn to think critically, which is applicable in every aspect of people's lives, not just the internet. If a person is thinking critically, it means that they do not take everything at face value, but rather carefully consider what they are hearing, reading, seeing, and posting both online and off. The key to internet safety isn't just to "never give out personal information, ever," but rather to think critically about when and to whom it is given. By carefully considering other people's actions online as well as their own, people will be protecting themselves in a way that computers and software can't.

Part of critical thinking involves checking into any program, website, or person online before taking part in it or sharing any information with them. How does a person go about this? The answer to that is very simple: go to search engines online (such as Google) and type in the website, name, or program. Read what other people have said about it, and really look into the topic. This type of search can bring up a myriad of information that will be very helpful in the journey of critical thinking.

The next steps are all very similar to each other. First, don't talk about sex or other intimate topics with strangers, especially if you are a child. Second, protect your passwords and don't give them to anyone, period. Third, avoid in person meetings with people you've met online. These rules are common sense items, however are important to mention. It is also important to mention that these rules don't always apply to every situation. Again, think critically when it comes to all of these types of things!

The most important thing that Larry thinks parents can do to keep their kids safe online is to be a family. Larry suggests having dinner with your kids, going for walks with them, talking with them as much as possible and really just being a part of their lives on a regular basis.

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