

# Navigating Safety for the Next Generation

Fury in the Slaughterhouse said it well in their song "Every Generation Got Its Own Disease." Every generation has significant issues to overcome that are unique to their time and place in history. Navigating the Internet safely is a challenge for our youth who lack interest or don't yet have the ability to consider future consequences.

Student naiveté was most apparent to me while coordinating all 1300 of our middle school students to participate in an interactive, cybersafety training presented by the local prosecutor's office. This was an important opportunity any school could duplicate. The training was not as much about a specific app, action, or post, but more about helping students secure their digital footprints while developing lifetime, thoughtful technology decisions. The students learned how imperative it is to work toward ensuring smart choices in order to reduce the risk of making decisions that they might personally regret or, worse, that might draw them to the prosecutor's office in an official capacity.

The prosecutors used up-to-date, real-life examples from incidents in our county. It was surprising how many "ah-ha moments" our students had. This was especially disconcerting as the majority of students initially told us the training was unnecessary as they knew what they were doing and were already completely safe online.

Unfortunately, the students were mistaken. During the training, they discovered they regularly engaged in hazardous behavior and admitted:

- Some students said they have hundreds of followers; including some with over 1,000 followers of their personal photos.
- Many kids admitted to having "friends" online that they have never met face to face.
- Some kids want a lot of followers for "clout," others want them to feel popular.
- Some students intentionally allow certain social media apps to let their followers see their exact location.
- Nearly all students admitted to watching fights that someone recorded and put online.
- Many students game and "trash talk" strangers they are playing online.

Most students were shocked and agreed they needed to change their online behavior. The Juvenile Prosecutors from the Marion County (Indiana) Prosecutor's Office

- urged students to stay safe by changing privacy settings, blocking strangers from access to personal photos and information, and not engaging with strangers online.
- reiterated that anything posted online **is** retrievable, even if students think they have deleted it. College admissions and employers often search online for an applicants' digital footprint.
- explained the definition of cyberbullying and that many instances of involvement, even when the student thought they were an innocent receiver or bystander, can be charged as a crime. Any student who receives an inappropriate message should tell an adult immediately.

A seventh grade classroom teacher described the presenters' showing how much information a potential stalker could glean from a single student post on social media, "one could learn where she shopped, her exact location when the photo was taken, and where she was going next...[as well as] the likely time she would leave for school in the morning or when she would get home from school based on the school name. He found her soccer team's schedule online so he could track her at her soccer matches. He found her team's roster online, so he knew the names of her likely friends. He saw where she liked to buy coffee, so he could stalk her at that particular store....Students didn't realize how much one casual photo could open themselves to danger." Most students are far too trusting and lack wisdom when engaging online. This session served as a critical component to their life skills education as we help them navigate the digital world more safely. It was a valuable opportunity I would encourage for every school.

## About the Editor

**Leslie B. Preddy**, MS, has been the school librarian at Perry Meridian Middle School in Indianapolis, IN, since 1992 and has served as an adjunct professor for Indiana University, Indiana State University, and IUPUI. She has presented webinars and is a frequent speaker and consultant at local, state, national, and international education conferences and events. She has published many articles in professional journals, co-created online resources for educators, and is the author of *SSR with Intervention: A School Library Action Research Project*, *Social Readers: Promoting Reading in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, and *School Library Makerspaces*. Preddy is a recipient of many awards including AASL's Collaborative School Library Media Award and Perry Township Schools Teacher of the Year. She is Past President of the American Association of School Librarians and the Association of Indiana School Library Educators (AISLE). Preddy is a recent recipient of two grants for her school library makerspace from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, administered by the Indiana State Library.

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