Teen Cybersafety Guide

I know. You're sick and tired of being lectured to. You know how to keep yourself safe online. You're not a baby! You use privacy settings on Facebook. You aren't meeting strangers offline. You are careful. You aren't sharing too much info and you think the media has blown the risks out of proportion. Great. You can stop reading now and go have fun doing something else.

For the rest of you, just in case there is something you hadn't thought about, or you have a friend who isn't as careful and smart as you are...

Don't Be Stupid!

Most teens understand enough about cybersafety to write a book. They don't want to be hurt or get into trouble. The problems that WiredSafety are seeing when teens are connected through cell phones, game devices or the Internet itself are either because the teen didn't know enough about the technology, or because they were just being stupid.

Stupid is when you decide to pose nude for a cell phone photo or webcam video for any reason. Stupid is when you believe your boyfriend when he tells you he would never share the photo with anyone and no one else will see it. (Even if he is trustworthy, he might have a little brother who isn't, or a parent who checks his cell phones once in awhile.) Stupid is when you think no one can figure out that the anonymous email, IM or MySpace post you made came from you. (They collect the electronic footprint when you interact online that can be traced back to your computer.) Stupid is when you do things online that you would never do offline just because you can. Stupid is when you think that cute sixteen year old boy or girl you met online is always a cute sixteen year old boy or girl. Stupid is when you think someone will send you an iPod just for playing a game and giving them some "harmless" personal information (like your dad's credit card number). Stupid is when you know better, but do it anyway.

There is something about the technology that makes you think that the people who are reading your posts or blogs are only the ones you want to read them. You talk to them. You post pics and videos for them. You are funny for them. But sometimes "they" include others who would love to harass you, get you back for something or are just plain old creeps.

And when you are typing as fast as you do, you leave out words or letters, think something is clear when it's not or even send it to the wrong person. When you make these mistakes, the person who receives it may not know that you weren't trying to freak them out. And they may react as though they were harassed or threatened. That's when you get reported to Facebook or the police, or the target of an "Oh, yeah? Well you started it," campaign.