ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - Issue 15

Later this month, the Office of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner will be hosting a conference titled “Watch this Space: Children, young people and privacy”. This will be an excellent opportunity to identify those issues which affect young people’s privacy and develop strategies to protect them online. This issue of the ThinkUKnow e-newsletter will examine a few of these issues and provide some advice on helping young people protect their privacy.

The Issues

Sharing Personal Information
Web 2.0, and the rise of social networking services, allows for any internet user to share information, ideas and opinions with a global audience. It can also provide opportunities for people to share personal information which they would normally keep private, including their full name, phone number, date of birth and address. This information might be posted on a profile or website, or exchanged over instant messaging and chat. It could also be revealed in a photo or video which is uploaded.

Identity Theft
The information which young people share online today could be gathered by criminals and used to steal their identity. This may not seem as an important concern for teenagers as they currently don’t have any assets or credit cards which could be compromised. However, the information which they post online today could be collected and when that young person turns 18, these identity thieves could take out loans or credit cards in that young person’s name. This could lead to a ruined credit rating and limited opportunities in the future.

How to Protect Young People’s Privacy

Activate Privacy Settings
Services such as Facebook provide users with the ability to control their privacy and the information they share with others. It is recommended that young people use the “Only Friends” setting on Facebook which restricts the access to their profile to only those on their friend list. Every time they post a comment, update their status or upload a photo onto Facebook, they can choose who they share it with which allows them greater control over their privacy.

For more information on how to use these privacy settings it is best to visit the safety or privacy section of the website or service which you or your child are using. Facebook has recently launched its new Safety Centre which is an excellent resource for learning about safety on Facebook.

Think Before You Post
Even though young people might think they are communicating in a private space online, such as a private profile or an instant messaging conversation, but that doesn’t mean the information they are sharing is secure. Once something is created in a digital format and then shared, you lose control over who sees it and what they then do with it.

Time2Talk
This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology.

What sort of personal information do you think needs to be kept private?
What should you do if a website, or person, asks you to share this information?
Do you know how to turn on the privacy settings in the accounts you use online?
How can we as a family/school balance your right to privacy with our need to make sure you are safe online and with your mobile phone?
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Before sharing any form of personal information online or via mobile phone, young people need to consider:

- Does this person need to know this information?
- Can I be sure who I am communicating with?
- Will they share this information with others?

Be a Positive Role Model

As parents, carers, teachers and members of society in general, we need to be modelling positive behaviour so that young people can see what protecting your privacy looks like. We need to be cautious of the information we share with others so that we not only protect ourselves, but present a positive example to the young people we influence.

We can show these positive behaviours by:

- Using a strong password, keeping it secret and changing it regularly
- Using the privacy settings in online accounts
- Only using secure and trusted website for online shopping
- Discussing privacy and safety with young people

Respecting Young People’s Privacy

In order not to give young people conflicting messages on privacy, we must be sure to respect their right to privacy. We do not tap young people’s phones or open their letters so we must be careful to respect their privacy in the digital environment also. Rather than covertly accessing young people’s online accounts or communications, we need to bring them into discussions on how to keep them safe online, their rights and responsibilities, and the actions their parents, carers and teachers will take to protect them online and with mobile phones.

The issue of privacy is one that concerns many young people and their parents, carers and teachers. The discussions and outcomes of the upcoming conference will hopefully inform how we work with young people to protect their privacy.