Thinking About Internet Safety

Read these scenarios and answer the questions that follow.

**Scenario #1**

Nancy Newbie is 10 years old and just moved to town. She doesn’t know anyone and it is mid-school year. She has enrolled in your program, and you notice that she is having a difficult time making new friends. You think that is to be expected when someone moves to a new city. When she first arrived, she was always on the computer and looked excited to be checking her email. But now she rarely takes computer time. When she does, her demeanor changes and she seems nervous and frightened. Every time a text message on her phone comes, she seems jumpy and scared to look at it. At pick-up time, she appears to be hesitant about leaving.

1. What is going on in this scenario?

   - Although many things could be going on with Nancy, she could be experiencing cyber bullying. While not always the case, being new in town and having a difficult time making friends could make her a target for bullying.

   - She could also be scared about the transitions in her life. Perhaps a family member is ill or has deployed, and she is anticipating bad news.

   - It is also possible that she is experiencing some form of emotional abuse.

2. What warning signs is she exhibiting that you should be aware of?

   - Nancy’s change in mood related to the Internet and email. She was originally excited, but now she seems scared.

   - Looking at text messages makes her uncomfortable.

   - When it is time to leave, she looks like she is frightened to go.
3. What are some things that you could do for Nancy?

- Reach out to Nancy. Talk to her about her interests, ideas, and problems. Build a relationship with her and help her feel safe. Find out whether she has friends at school or neighbors who come to your program. Learn about her family situation.

- You could plan opportunities for Nancy to interact with her peers. Find out what she likes and what she is good at. Plan activities that let her use those interests and abilities and meet other children with similar interests.

- Try to determine whether cyberbullying is occurring. Ask Nancy to share the content that is frightening her. Document and respond to all instances of bullying.

- If stressful events are occurring for Nancy’s family, help her connect with the Family Advocacy Program or mental health support.

- If you suspect abuse, write down the evidence and make a report.

Scenario #2

Sally Simmons has been in your program for four years. She just turned 11. She often takes her computer time, and she just got a smartphone for her birthday. You notice that she seems to be giggly and happy over text messages and emails for the past couple of weeks. When you question her about this she gets quiet. You hear her talking about gifts and emails that she is receiving from “a boyfriend.” Her wardrobe begins to change and she is becoming more interested in sex. You hear rumors from other girls that she is going to meet someone that she has been talking to online.

1. What might be going on in this scenario?

- Although many things could be going on with Sally, she could be experiencing interactions with an Internet predator.

2. What are the warning signs?

- Some of the warning signs that you should notice in Sally are: She is starting to act differently.

- When you ask her questions, she will not answer you.

- Other children are talking about how Sally is going to meet someone she met online.
3. What do you do?

- Even though Sally won’t answer you when you ask her what is going on, be persistent. Sally could be engaging in risky behavior.
- Be direct and talk to Sally about the rumors you heard. Also be sure to alert Sally’s parents to the issue. Be sensitive and work with them to get to the bottom of Sally’s behavior.
- Develop or refresh your program’s Internet rules. Teach the children about the rules. Consider an Internet contract that helps children know what to do if they encounter someone online.

4. Who should you talk to?

- Talk to Sally. Talk to your supervisor and Sally’s parents.

Scenario #3

Peter Popper is 7 years old. He loves to go on the Internet. He has signed your Program Internet Policy Agreement. The agreement is placed above the computer station. Every day when he comes in the room, he is first to sign up and go on the Internet. Most of the time when you see Peter playing games on the Internet, they seem to be appropriate, for example Poptropica or sites like PBS, Lego or Disney. But lately, when you look over in the direction of the computer station, you notice that he is changing to another Web page and is getting agitated or anxious when you question him about his online activities. You eventually find out that he has begun to play war and violent computer games. This is against your policy and agreement.

1. What is going on in this scenario?

- Although Peter may be doing many things, he may be viewing inappropriate content.

2. What signs was Peter showing that there is something going on?

- Peter is anxious when you question him about the Internet.
- Peter is changing to other websites that he usually does not visit. He suddenly changes sites when you approach him.
3. What do you do?

- After noticing these warning signs with Peter, you should show him and remind him of your Program Internet Policy Agreement. You can also make sure that you have a computer monitoring or blocking systems installed on your computers or that it is working. Additionally, you can post a consistently updated list of appropriate and inappropriate Internet sites and go over it frequently.

- Be sure that an administrator checks the “history” on each computer on a regular basis to review web sites visited. Computer lab sign in sheets should reveal names of computer users on the computer at the time each site was visited.

4. What have you done correctly so far?

- You have an Internet policy agreement. You monitor and supervise children’s Internet usage. You notice and respond to changes in behavior.