Cyber Safety during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Washtenaw Area Council for Children’s Cyber Safety Program is committed to continue providing cyber safety education during this epic global pandemic. With school closures, kids, tweens and teens will spend more time using technology and social media than normal. While social distancing, technology and social media has become a very important and useful tool for reaching out and connecting with others. These connections, if used appropriately, can help people manage the stress and anxiety of being socially isolated. Unfortunately, with the increased connectivity among children, there is also the potential for increases in cyberbullying, sexting and online predator situations. Moreover, this is also a great time to promote good digital citizenship among our youth, teach them empathy and ways to be safe online. Here are a few tips and reminders:

- Set house whole rules for using technology and social media. Discuss the rules often with your family and explain why the rules are important.
- Allow your children time to connect with family members and their peers electronically and monitor those connections.
- Talk to your children often about connecting with others in a healthy, safe and fun way. Discuss what healthy and unhealthy connections look like and model the healthy behavior.
- Promote being kind and respectful toward others online.
- Limit screen time by promoting activities that do not require the use of technology.
- Talk to your children about online risks such as cyberbullying, sexting and online predator situations and help them understand the possible consequences.
- Give your children guidance on what to do if they encounter risky situations. Teach them to block and report digital abuse and encourage them to talk with you or another trusted adult about anything that scares or makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Set parental controls and content filters and randomly check your children’s social media, computer and cell phone history.
- Talk to them about using social media privacy settings, protecting their private and personal information and accepting friend requests only from people they know in real life.
- Teach them to watch out for emails and other online scams and what the main things are to look for with scams.
- Teach them to look for “https:” or the padlock symbol in the web browser when using various websites and online platforms.

COVID-19 has taken the world by storm and affected our lives in unexpected ways. However, this is a temporary situation and we can come out more resilient on the other side. Talk to your children about the pandemic with facts and in age appropriate ways, and to the best of your ability, address their concerns. Try to calm their fears as much as possible. Address any misinformation about the Coronavirus they may encounter online. Help them to understand the facts and ways to protect themselves and others. Stay home, relax, stay informed, take care of your health, take deep breaths and control what you can. You’ve got this!

Robin Batten, Program Manager: robin@washtenawchildren.org
https://cyberbullying.org/coronavirus-online-learning-social-isolation-cyberbullying