Common Sense on Evaluating Websites

What's the Issue?

The internet is bursting with information. Some of it's correct, some of it's questionable, and some of it is just plain wrong. The internet is typically the first place young people look when they begin researching a report or are searching for information on their favorite topic. As you know, not everything they find on the web can be trusted. And skills they learn about research in elementary school will provide them a foundation for their future.

Why Does It Matter?

Anyone can publish on the internet, so not all sites are equally trustworthy. Teens have the ability to be skeptical, but younger children tend to believe what they read and accept it as the truth. When children find sources online that aren't of high quality, they may use incorrect information, get only part of the story, and worst of all, miss the opportunity to learn.

When children use a website for their research, they should make sure it's worthy of their trust. Fortunately, there are ways to evaluate the trustworthiness of a site. Along with choosing sites with good design and at the right reading level, kids should evaluate the substance and content of the material.

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Ask questions to evaluate the trustworthiness of sites. You can help your child evaluate the quality of a website with a little detective work.

- *Who wrote this?* Check to make sure the author or organization is credible by looking at their title, expertise, and background.

- *What is the source of the information?* Does the site come from a well-known organization or news source?

- *How does this compare to other information?* When evaluating websites it's important to look at multiple sites so you can compare information.

- *When was this updated?* Has the site been updated recently? If not, move on. What is the site linked to? Was the site linked from another webpage that you trust? If so, that's a good sign.

- *Are advertisers targeting you?* Help your kids notice when advertisers are trying to get their attention as they search. Teach your kids to question what the ads are saying.

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