

Key points in a March 2013 talk at the 6th World Congress on Family Law & Children's Rights in Sydney, Australia:

Safety and Citizenship

Research milestones toward helping our children grow up, navigate and thrive in a networked world that doesn't have maps yet

By Anne Collier, co-director, ConnectSafely.org

- ❖ **Lack of evidence.** After over a decade, spending millions of dollars on developing and marketing hundreds of Internet safety programs in the US, researchers who reviewed the top programs concluded that, "right now, we have no information that Internet safety programs work. Or which ones are most likely to work." [See http://unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/fosi_whitepaper_increasingyouthsafety_d9.pdf and my post: <http://www.netfamilynews.org/challenging-internet-safety-as-a-subject-to-be-taught.>]



- ❖ **Fear's limited use in changing behavior.** Fear appeals rarely work, and fear has held sway in Internet safety messaging. A University of Toronto study found they only work when **relevant to the listener** and **actionable** on the listener's part. And even when relevant, if listeners feel unable to address the threat, their tendency is to: ignore or mock the message, become angry at its source, deny they're at risk, or even increase the risky behavior in question [http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/publications/fear%20appeals%20-%20web%20version.pdf] **What does work**, David Finkelhor at the Crimes Against Children Research Center said in a 2011 talk (http://www.netfamilynews.org/whats-wrong-with-net-safety-ed-and-what-we-can-do-about-it – video version at 23:20: <http://www.youtube.com/user/FOSI#p/u/1/43Ki3uxVNo0>) is: 1) use clear, actionable messages (e.g., "fasten your seatbelts"), 2) incorporate e-safety "into broader education programs about personal safety, sex education and decisionmaking ... where there are evidence-based models, and 3) "focus on generic skills that improve online *and offline* health and safety" – e.g., "refusal skills and bystander skills."



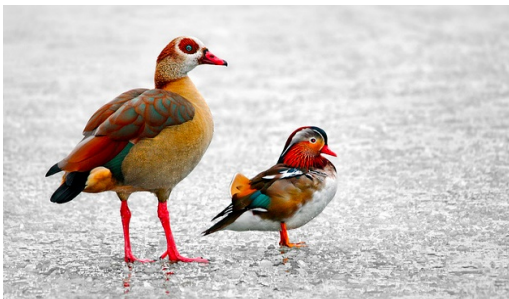
- ❖ **"Juvenioia"** In 2010, Dr. Finkelhor who had seen his research misrepresented in the news media for a decade, coined the term "juvenioia." In his talk and paper about this (linked to here <http://www.netfamilynews.org/juvenioia-part-1-why-internet-fear-is-overrated>), he pointed to more than a dozen *youth* social problem indicators in the US, with national data showing notable *decreases* between 1992 and 2010, the very period in which the Web was born and grew up. [See <http://www.netfamilynews.org/net-safetys-3-alarmist-assumptions-researcher> about a related 2014 commentary by Finkelhor.]

- ❖ **What goes around, comes around online too.** Research evidence that observance of the worldwide ethic of reciprocity, known to Christians as the Golden Rule, can be protective online as well. A 2007 article published in *Archives of Pediatrics* (<http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=569592>) showed that "aggressive behavior online can more than double the aggressor's risk online. We could see that – in spite of the predator panic – young users were not just potential victims online. *Their own behaviors* have much to do with their safety and that of their peers and communities.

- ❖ **Consequential media, competent users.** About representing youth always as potential victims: Researchers at Harvard University turned up evidence of the impact of this on youth. In a 2010 talk about a digital ethics study of 15-to-25-year-old Net users (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/why-digital-citizenships-a-hot-topic-globally>), research director Carrie James said that "two sentiments we heard from a lot of young people" were: 1) "the Internet is simply for fun," inconsequential (Net safety messaging characterizing YP's use as a waste of time, just entertainment), and 2) "they feel a lack of efficacy online – if they see something unsettling they tend to ignore it because they don't feel they can change anything online" (ISE has been more about avoidance than skill-building). USC media professor Henry Jenkins reported to the Online Safety & Technology Working Group (OSTWG) in 2009 that we have left our children largely on their own in new media, instead of working with them to leverage its powers for good (http://www.ntia.doc.gov/legacy/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf).



- ❖ **Not one-size-fits-all.** One of the key takeaways from the 2008 Internet Safety Technical Task Force lit review at Harvard's Berkman Center (<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/pubrelease/isttf/>): not all youth are equally at risk online (the youth most at risk online are those most at risk offline). Another important



takeaway: *A child's psychosocial makeup and home and school environments are better predictors of online risk than any technology a child uses* (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/key-crossroads-for-net-safety-isttf-report-released>) [More recent (2013), confirmation of this in *Pediatrics*; see <http://www.netfamilynews.org/important-granularity-on-net-risk-for-teens-study>.]

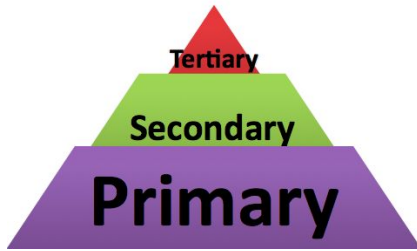
- ❖ **Levels of prevention.** Because not all youth are equally at risk, risk prevention experts recommended that the Internet safety field adopt the public health field's

Levels of Prevention. In 2009, prominent risk prevention expert & psychologist, Dr. Patricia Agatston proposed this to the OSTWG (details at

<http://www.netfamilynews.org/ostwg-report-why-a-living-internet>, linking to the report):

Primary/universal online risk prevention, secondary/targeted/situational prevention, and tertiary/targeted prevention and intervention for youth with established patterns of risk behaviors. For primary/universal risk: instruction in digital, media and social literacy in all appropriate subjects, pre-K through 12 (see OSTWG report

http://www.ntia.doc.gov/legacy/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf and 2014 Aspen Task Force for Learning & the Internet report <http://aspentaskforce.org>).



- ❖ **Bullying prevention.** Public concerns about cyberbullying have, importantly, impelled society to revisit the age-old problem of bullying as well as address cyberbullying. So recent research has brought helpful clarification, including better definition (from the CCRC - see <http://www.netfamilynews.org/bullying-peer-victimization-clearer-terms-better-communication>) and understanding of what terms youth use [see this about "drama" from boyd and Marwick: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1926349 and <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/opinion/why-cyberbullying-rhetoric-misses-the-mark.html/>]. **As for the numbers,** Dr. Michele Ybarra told the American Psychological Association conference that only 15-17% of young people are affected by cyberbullying each year; in Europe, that figure is 6% (EU Kids Online final report 2011 <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/39351/>). And in the US, physical bullying is still more prevalent but decreased 7% between 2003 and 2008, to 15% of US 2-to-17-year-olds. [For more links see my post (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22727077> and <http://www.netfamilynews.org/kids-deserve-the-truth-about-cyberbullying>) and the Cyberbullying Research Center (<http://www.cyberbullying.us>).] Photo to the right by Daniel Nicholls, Melbourne.



- ❖ **How "social norming" can help.** A three-year study of bullying conducted in New Jersey middle schools by Hobart U. Profs. Wesley Perkins and David Craig tested out the social norms approach used successfully in other areas such as substance abuse, driving under the influence and seat-belt use. They found that changed perception changes behavior in the case of bullying too – when middle school students found out that most kids in their school *don't* bully or treat other people other meanly, social aggression went down in direct proportion to that corrected perception. [<http://www.socialnorms.org/CaseStudies/casestudies.php> and <http://www.ou.edu/judicial/pae/pdf/iv/b/IVBiiSocialNormingTheory.pdf> and <http://www.youthhealthsafety.org/bullying.htm>]
- ❖ **Risk & harm not the same thing.** We've learned from EU Kids Online that it's important to understand that Internet risk does not equal harm and does not necessarily lead to harm (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/from-europe-top-10-online->

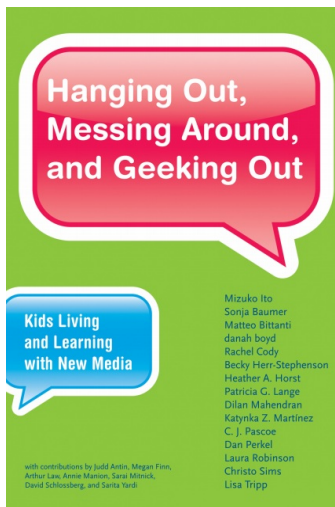
risk-myths), and online risk is a different calculation from offline risk (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/timely-for-safer-internet-day-game-changing-insight-into-internet-risk>). In fact, EU Kids Online said in its 2nd final report based on surveying 25,000+ 9-to-16-year-olds in 25 countries, that, when risk is reduced, so is opportunity – including opportunities to develop....

- ❖ **Resilience.** Again, EU Kids Online: "Children must explore and encounter some risk to learn and gain resilience," the authors said in an earlier EU Kids Online report. The report that only "12% of 9-to-16-year-olds (and 8% of their parents) say they themselves have been upset by something online in the past year," indicating the presence of resilience. [See "Study on long-neglected factor in Net safety" (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/study-on-long-neglected-factor-in-net-safety-resilience>) and "Balancing external with internal Internet-safety 'tools'" (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/balancing-external-with-internal-internet-safety-tools>).]



- ❖ **In their own words.** How much have adults' own fears influenced not only children's online experiences but also our research and public policy agendas? In the important EU Kids Online's report "In Their Own Words" (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/online-risk-in-kids-own-words-a-research-milestone>), the authors wrote, "Most research has sought standardised descriptions of risk as measured in survey questionnaires; and most has asked children about risks that worry adults rather than discovering what concerns children themselves."

- ❖ **Friendship-driven and interest-driven:** The researchers of the US's Digital Youth Project discovered two kinds of youth social networking – the friendship-driven kind we were all familiar with and the interest-driven kind, where young people were pursuing their interests and passions in and with digital media in creative and professional ways well before leaving school. They also noticed a kind of progression of social media use that was reflected in the title of the MIT Press book that documented their work: *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living & Learning with New Media*.



- ❖ **Serious learning from games.** And we have wisdom on what motivates any kind of behavior change (the opposite of the effects of fear appeals) from scholars of **game design** as well. At the 2012 Games+Learning+Society conference at University of WI, I heard Prof. Scott Nicholson of Syracuse U. describe what motivates people: agency (or autonomy), relevancy, and competency (resonates with the Harvard GoodPlay

findings). In Internet safety, I would add another element: participation, which allows for the *practice* that brings competency. [See "What Net safety can learn from digital game design" (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/what-net-safety-can-learn-from-digital-game-design>) and, for the participation part:

rightful-framework-internet-safety]. Also game design and environment influences social norms and safety (see <http://www.netfamilynews.org/sxsw-part-2-rheingold-salen-on-how-to-play-with-social-media> and this on what I call "the guild effect" and game designer Erin Hoffman's comment below it: <http://www.netfamilynews.org/net-safety-how-social-networks-can-be-protective>>).

❖ **Kids generally smart.** A 2012 report from Canada's MediaSmarts

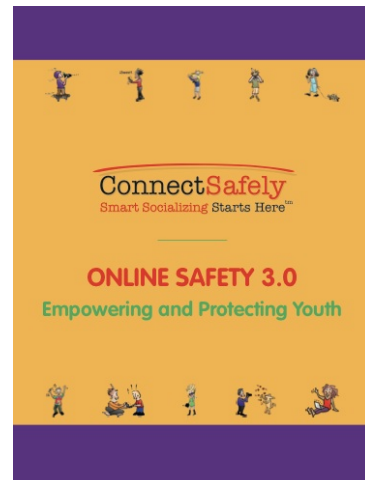


(<http://www.netfamilynews.org/kids-teens-not-only-ok-but-smart-study>) based on national quant. and qual. research show significant resilience in dealing with "creepy adults" and "almost universally limit online interactions with them; they know chatrooms can be dangerous; recognize the need to unplug at times; view the Internet as a "fully monitored space" now, but parental monitoring as "the price of admission"; good anti-cyberbullying strategies but disdainful of school anti-bullying programs. As for parents, MediaSmarts

co-dir. Jane Tallim said: "The parents we spoke with were beleaguered by fear of danger and exhausted from the burden of constant vigilance. Although the exact nature of that danger is poorly defined, many parents told us that surveillance is now equated with good parenting, and that the days of trusting their children and providing them with space to explore the world and make mistakes are long gone."

❖ **Three literacies for a digital age.** For competency in today's very social digital media environment, Internet users need a new, more blended literacy that develops technical, media and social skills (for the last one, see the 5 social-emotional core competencies (<http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies>). [On blended literacy, see <http://www.netfamilynews.org/literacy-for-a-digital-age-transliteracy-or-what> and the report of the Aspen Task Force for Learning & the Internet (<http://aspentaskforce.org>).

❖ **"Online Safety 3.0":** In a milestone ConnectSafely published in 2009, we argued that, to be relevant to young people, its intended beneficiaries, Net safety needs to respect youth agency; embrace the media they love; teach safety, literacy and citizenship in digital environments; and treat safety as a *means* to learning literate, successful participation in this networked world (safety *for* not just *from*).



❖ **Safety in a rights framework.** My proposal (<http://www.netfamilynews.org/proposed-rightful-framework-internet-safety>) that Net safety be placed conceptually in the "3 Ps" framework of rights/principles – Protection, Provision, Participation

(http://www.bemidjistate.edu/academics/publications/social_work_journal/issue07/articles/Tension.htm) – in the UNCRC (discussed by Livingstone & O'Neill here <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/ParticipatingCountries/UK-publications.aspx>).