

## Real Ethics in a Virtual World

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Have you recently had trouble logging on to the Internet? Step back for a moment and ask yourself, "Who is "tech support" in my home?" For the vast majority of parents who honestly answered this question the answer would be – your child. Surprisingly, children often serve as mentor to their parents on everything from uploading family photos, syncing Mom's iPod, helping Dad download a work file to troubleshooting the family computer and printer. In fact, it would be a challenge in today's electronic age to find a young person who is not digitally connected in some fashion to the world around them.



As an investigator for the FBI, I have seen the FBI transition from gumshoe to gigabyte detective. Along the way, I have also seen how tweens and teens have evolved into both vulnerable victim and, on occasion, cunning criminal. Because of this rapid growth in technology, adults have been posed with a difficult dilemma: how do parents teach their children the ethical and proper use of computers when they themselves know little of computers or the Internet?

Because the Internet is so personal and intimate, it is very easy for our youth (and adults) to share too much information about their activities, their whereabouts and themselves while online. Because we often use the computer in the personal spaces of our homes, we tend to lower our inhibitions and engage in risky online behaviors. Children, teens, and adults can greatly reduce this risk if they simply remember three rules about the Internet:

- The Internet is a public place.
- What you transmit online can be seen and saved by others.
- The Internet is not necessarily "reality."

First, the Internet is "public". I speak to thousands of students each year and the first lesson that I share is "the Internet is not 'myspace' its 'our-space". Every day, over 2,000,000,000 people access the global forum we call the Internet. Teens must realize that information is moved on public networks, often on wireless routers. There are many opportunities for data to leak and find its way to more than its original or intended destinations. Because the Internet is a public forum, students should go online with little to no expectation of privacy – especially if they share and communicate on social networking sites.



Second, parents and students should know that the Internet is an archive and that digital data can last "forever". Information is constantly saved, reposted, re-blogged and shared with countless Internet users each day. Because information is so easily and rapidly shared, it is possible to find vast amounts of personal data online. If you delete information from your computer – is it gone? If you delete information or an embarrassing picture from your social networking page – is it gone? If you delete a text message from your cell phone – is it gone?

Surprisingly - the answer to each of these questions is no. [Information is merely cached and saved elsewhere to make room for new information and data.]

Students must be aware that one of the fastest growing job occupations in the U.S. today is "open source data miners". These are individuals who scour the Internet for free, publicly accessible data. Every major university and every major human resource department hires these individuals to do background checks on prospective students and employees. Students must be made aware that postings and images of an offensive or inappropriate nature will surface in the course of their college interviews and future job applications.

Third, parents and students should know that a lot of what transpires on the Internet is not necessarily "reality". Tweens and teens should remember that in a virtual environment, it is very easy to fool online surfers. Creating fake avatars and identities are very easy to do on the Internet. Copying a school logo, adopting a school mascot, and copying another student's profile is easy to do in a digital environment and can be used to fool our younger citizens.

How can you minimize your child's risks online? First, talk to your children. Discuss with them their online behavior, the websites they go to and set parameters about appropriate and inappropriate conduct online. Second, if your child does use a social networking site, set their privacy settings to the maximum level. Lastly, advocate the rule "think twice before you click twice." Teens should be asking themselves, "Would I be embarrassed if my parents, grandparents or school saw what I was posting online?"

If you would like more information on internet safety, visit the following websites: <http://www.ikeepsafe.org/> and <http://www.netsmartz.org/index.aspx>



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## HUI HO'OMALU STATEWIDE RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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The concept for the Statewide Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) was created by the Department of Human Services (DHS) as a means to support the resource family community. Hui Ho'omalū facilitates this committee comprised of adoptive parents, resource caregivers and various community agencies, all dedicated to providing services and support to Hawai'i's keiki and the resource families who care for them. The purpose of the RAC is to identify ongoing needs, facilitate communication, share resources, provide information through a statewide calendar of events and a quarterly newsletter and report on local projects and other topics of interest to benefit Hawai'i's resource families.

***This committee, the newsletter and many of the represented agencies are supported and funded by Department of Human Services contracts.***

### RAC Committee Members:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i—Hui Ho'omalū  
Department of Health  
Department of Human Services  
EPIC, Inc. 'Ohana Conferencing  
Family Court  
Family Programs Hawai'i—Hui Ho'omalū & It Takes An 'Ohana  
Resource Caregivers  
Adoptive Parents  
Hawai'i Foster Youth Coalition  
Heart Gallery Hawai'i  
HOPE INC, Inc.  
Partners in Development Foundation—Hui Ho'omalū  
University of Hawai'i, School of Social Work