

Looking beyond Facebook: Program highlights keys to kids' Internet safety

By Jen Cowart
March 5, 2014



Herald photos by Jen Cowart
DEEPLY INFORMED: Brian Lamoureux, Esq., gave an in-depth presentation on Internet safety to the parents at ICCR last week.

As part of a series of parent forums, Immaculate Conception Catholic Regional School held an Internet safety presentation on Feb. 26 in the auditorium. Brian Lamoureux, Esq., was the presenter for the evening, and ICCR Principal Brian Cordeiro was also on hand for questions and answers.

“In response to parent requests, Mr. Lamoureux is here tonight to speak on the topic of Internet safety, technology and how it impacts our kids in their educational experiences,” said Cordeiro. “It’s import to remember that you are the number one advocate for your children and I am the number one advocate here for all of our children, but our kids need to know that by having an Internet presence, they can be making life-changing, dangerous decisions without even knowing it.”

Cordeiro described Lamoureux in his introductory remarks as being “deeply informed” in the areas of technology and Internet safety. He speaks to audiences at the high school and college levels.

“Get a lot of information while you are here tonight, ask a lot of questions,” Cordeiro encouraged the audience.

Lamoureux introduced himself to the group and explained that as a lawyer and a parent, he understands the issues that are faced by parents and students. As an attorney, he also sees the ramifications of poor decision-making by students when it comes to technology.

“I teach at the college level, and I will tell you, these problems do not go away in college. My students have grown up in a very different, very technological age,” Lamoureux said.

He posted a quote from Pope Francis’ speech given for the 48th World Communications Day, in which the pontiff stated: “The speed with which information is communicated exceeds our capacity for reflection and judgment, and this does not make for more balanced and proper forms of self-expression.”

Lamoureux noted that even the pope recognized the technological age in which this generation lives, and the problems that such technology can present if not handled properly.

“If, as parents, your strategy is ‘no,’ or ‘don’t,’ or ‘I’m going to take your phone away,’ that’s not enough,” said Lamoureux. “Our kids live in a ripple-effect society and the things they do, the choices they make are inescapable and permanent. They are growing up in an age of no filters, no pause moments and with no shame gene, no privacy gene, no dignity gene. It’s very concerning.”

In relation to that ripple effect and the workplace, Lamoureux shared real-life examples of adults who lost job opportunities strictly because of Internet behaviors.

Drawing from his experience as a lawyer, Lamoureux said many laws currently in place are out of date, such as those treating “sexting” as child pornography. He said enacting new laws takes a long time.

“By the time the new laws are in effect, they’re already out of date,” he said. “There is a lag time behind the technology, and in many cases there is no law that addresses the issues. If a student is convicted of sexting, it carries with it a sex offender registration requirement. This is permanent, and no one is forgetting this later on. This is everyone remembering.”

Lamoureux introduced parents to a variety of new sites and social media platforms that students today are utilizing with or without their parents’ knowledge or understanding of the sites.

“If you’re on Facebook looking for your kids, you’re looking in the wrong place. Ask.fm is an anonymous way for kids to have accounts and ask each other questions. Vine is where they can post short videos of themselves. Tumblr is where they share photos and Kik is a chat service where people they don’t know can instant message them, or ‘kik’ them, to connect with them. Snapchat is a place where kids can post pictures, videos and messages that supposedly ‘self destruct’ within a short amount of time and supposedly can’t be copied into a screen shot, but kids don’t think about someone taking out a second device and taking a photo of their photo. Now it’s saved forever,” he said. “Scientists have determined that brain formation stops at age 25, which means our kids are making decisions with underdeveloped brains that have permanent ramifications.”

Lamoureux warned parents about some of the issues students aren’t thinking of when they are on the various Internet sites.

“Ask.fm is seemingly innocuous, but the questions that are on there can get pretty bad. Kik is like 45,000 classified ads for people looking to connect. But the one that is the scariest one of all, the one that I say, ‘If your child has this app on their phone, take it and smash it,’ is Tinder. Tinder integrates with Facebook through an app that allows you to get profile pictures of people in rapid succession by swiping from left to right. You swipe one way that means you want to meet that person. You swipe the other way it means you don’t. Then, when that person you swiped yes to, who also happened to swipe yes to you, is nearby in the same area, Tinder asks if you’d like to meet up,” he said. “It’s the worst app ever for kids.”

In addition to discussing the dangers of various online applications, Lamoureux also discussed the dangers of bullying through the Internet, called cyberbullying, and the legal ramifications that come along with those types of behaviors.

As he wrapped up his presentation, Lamoureux left the parents with some words of wisdom for themselves and for their children.

“I’ve put together an acronym to help kids. I call it WAIT. Would I say this to Mr. Cordeiro? Am I feeling safe and loved right now? Would I like this if it was said or done to me or about me? And, would I still do this if I waited until tomorrow?”

“And for parents, when speaking with your kids, I call it WWWH and W,” he continued. “What is this app? Who are you using it with? When are you using it? How are you using it? And why are you using it?”

Lamoureux also reminded parents of the reason for his presentation.

“I’m not here to tell you how to parent. I’m just here to give you the dictionary. It’s up to you to go home and put the sentences together,” he said.