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**PRESS RELEASE**  
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### **Keeping your child safe, despite the digital generation gap**

*By Dr Pieter Streicher, MD at BulkSMS.com*

When we were children the standing joke was that the kids, had to set the video machine for their non-technical parents. We'd grown up with video machines, while for our parents they were still new-fangled devices.

Fast forward to today and consider cell phones, the Internet, Skype, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, Mxit, PVRs, Xboxes, e-books and the endless list of new communication technologies. These are all things that our children have grown up with, and take to like fish to water - while we probably only got our first cell phone when we started our first job, and then only used it for emergencies.

Every generation's children complain bitterly that their parents just don't understand them, with their parents muttering about how they did things better in their day. But never has a generation gap been as wide as it is today, with parents having very little understanding of the opportunities and the risks involved with the digital environments their children are growing up in.

A lack of understanding of the risks and dangers involved often results in two extremes in response from parents, neither of which is ideal. On the one hand parents might bury their heads in the sand because of the apparent technical complexity and leave their children to fend for themselves in the face of some very real dangers, and navigate important rites of passage unsupported and unassisted.

Or, alternatively, a parent might over react because they don't understand the dangers involved and simply ban all things digital. Which not only leads to unnecessary conflict with the child and cuts them off from their social circle, but also disadvantages them in their adult life and careers, due to lack of experience communicating in a digital environment.

Parents have to educate themselves to understand both the opportunities and the dangers associated with digital communication technology in order to better guide their children and protect them from harm. Some of the vital things parents and children need to learn include:

1. People aren't always who they say they are. Just as adults fall for email phishing scams, children can get taken in by people misrepresenting themselves online with harmful intent.
2. Think before you post. In our day, playground conversations with our friends, complaining about teachers perhaps, ended as soon as the bell rang for the end of break. Today however, these conversations take place on Facebook, for anyone to read or forward even years later, and are almost impossible to delete.
3. Likewise, children need to think before they respond to things that other people have posted. A casual jokey comment about someone can very quickly escalate into an orchestrated cyber-bullying attack, with bystanders becoming accomplices at the click of mouse.

4. It's not just about computers. Many parents don't understand that the Internet their children can access via their cell phones is the same Internet, warts and all, accessed via a computer. Not only that, it is so much easier to make purchases on the Internet via cell phone as it just takes the click on a link, rather than entering credit card details.

Unfortunately though, too many technology companies simply release their products into the world, and don't take responsibility for educating customers on how to use them safely. One of the places parents can go to educate themselves is [www.parentscorner.org.za](http://www.parentscorner.org.za), a BulkSMS.com initiative aimed at informing parents about children and mobile phones. The blog contains advice from a family therapist; discussions around difficult topics such as whether you should monitor your children's online activities; and useful links to other resources. The blog is complemented by a lecture series for schools and other interested organisations.

At the end of the day, it is worth remembering that the technology itself is neither good nor bad, but how it is used can have positive or negative consequences. Think of some of the benefits technology gives parents, for instance, thanks to cell phones children can easily call their parents in an emergency. But to benefit from these positives, parents have a responsibility to educate themselves about the technology, and protect their children from the dangers.