

Pirates of the 21st Century
by Melanie G. Snyder

Could your child be a pirate? No, not a one-eyed swashbuckler stealing gold and jewels, but one who copies or downloads copyrighted materials, including software, music and games, without paying for them.

A new poll from Harris Interactive found that a majority of youth are aware that digital media files are copyrighted, yet many of them admit to downloading files anyway. More than half of all 8-18 year olds have downloaded music, a third have downloaded games and nearly a quarter have downloaded software illegally from the Internet. When asked about the ethics of downloading software, music or games that are available for sale in a store or online without paying for them, less than half of the youth surveyed thought it was wrong. These are the pirates of the 21st century.

Piracy is stealing

“Parents need to help children understand that it’s not okay to take someone else’s creative work product without paying for it or having their permission,” says Bob Kruger, who leads anti-piracy programs for the Business Software Alliance, the foremost organization dedicated to promoting a safe and legal digital world.

Copying or downloading copyrighted works without paying for them or without explicit permission from the creator is stealing – no different than going into a store and shoplifting a software program, CD or electronic game from the shelf.

Understand the rules

Part of the problem may be that many parents lack knowledge of copyright and intellectual property laws for electronic and online copyrighted works. “Most parents probably

didn't get much of an education on this topic as they were growing up," says Kruger. "Their knowledge about copying probably came in the context of not plagiarizing." Most of today's parents didn't have to address the need to respect copyrighted works online the way their children do today. Some explanation of a few terms may help. (see sidebar: **Terminology**)

Educate kids

Once you understand the rules, help your children to understand them too. Though terms like "copyright" and "intellectual property" may be difficult to convey to children, Kruger suggests connecting with kids by tying it to their own inherent creativity. Kids create things all the time, from finger-painting and Play-Doh® sculptures to poems and stories. "Parents can show kids how copyright and intellectual property laws relate to them by explaining that, just as they wouldn't want someone taking or using their creative work without their permission, neither do software programmers, musicians and game developers," he says.

Explain the economic impact

"Children can also benefit from an explanation of the economics involved in creating and selling creative works and how piracy impacts those economics," says Dr. Diane DeMott Painter, a Centreville, Va., technology resource teacher and recipient of the BSA's first *Cyber Education Champion Award* for her commitment to teaching students about cyber ethics.

"Most children understand that in the work world, people get paid for their hard work and creative ideas," says Painter. "Parents should explain to children that the money we pay in a store for a video game or music CD or software package goes to all of the people who helped to create and distribute it – the graphic artist or musician or computer programmer, the manufacturer, the retailer. Then explain that when someone copies these things without paying for them, all of those people who helped to create them don't get the money they have earned."

This approach can also help to overcome the misconception that piracy doesn't hurt anyone – a belief expressed by more than 25 percent of the youth surveyed by Harris Interactive. Ironically, piracy may hurt the pirates. When software developers and video game creators don't

make money on the works they've already created due to piracy, they may scale back on creating anything new, thereby reducing the number of available software packages and games – “a bleak prospect for most 21st century kids,” says Kruger.

Overcome the “Everybody does it” mentality

One of the challenges in conveying a clear message to children that illegal downloading is wrong is the perception that “everybody does it.” Three quarters of the youth surveyed by Harris Interactive say they know other family members and friends who have downloaded illegally. One third responded that they think it's okay to download without paying because lots of people do it. “When ‘everybody does it,’ or imagines that everybody does it, a cheating culture has emerged,” says David Callahan in *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* (Harcourt, 2004). “Possibly the most pervasive form of cheating, electronic piracy has lost its taboo.”

Parents can help overcome the “everybody does it” mentality by being a good role model and by establishing firm family rules against copying or downloading copyrighted materials.

Beware of legal and practical consequences

Children need to understand that there are very real consequences of violating copyright laws, including potential legal action against pirates by the creators or organizations that represent them (witness the recent lawsuits by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) against people who illegally uploaded and shared music files over the Internet). Piracy can also have practical consequences including infecting your home computer with a virus or inadvertently downloading spyware onto your computer from a file-sharing network.

The right thing to do

By educating yourself and then educating your children, you can protect your own family from these consequences and make a significant positive impact in curbing the growth of electronic piracy.

Says Kruger, “Ultimately, parents need to instill in children a respect for others’ creative work for the best reason of all: simply because it’s the right thing to do.”

For information, educational games and other resources to help ensure your child doesn’t become a pirate of the 21st century, see <http://www.playitcybersafe.com/>

Sidebar: Terminology - in language kids can understand

(Approx 80 words)

Intellectual property – work that is the result of your own creativity; your intellectual property can be protected by copyright

Copyright – the law that says that someone who created something owns his or her creative work; the symbol for copyright looks like this: ©

Licensing agreement – the agreement that comes with a software program that permits you to install that program on your own computer

Piracy – copying or downloading software, music or games that are protected by copyright; piracy is stealing

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