

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Shaping Responsible Digital Citizens: Digital Navigator leads online safety presentation to students

"Is it safer to play single-player games online than multi-player games?"

"What is the purpose of parental controls on devices? Are they keeping us safer?"

"So, is social media *only* bad for us?"

These were some of the questions Abi Amstutz-Spencer, [ACC AmeriCorps](#) member and Digital Navigator fellow with University of Illinois Extension, fielded during two presentations to all of the students at [Illini Central Grade, Middle and High Schools](#) in Mason City. The presentations about online safety covered topics ranging from password management to cyberbullying.

The digital age is full of online spaces in which children increasingly interact. And, as technology continues to develop rapidly, there's a huge learning curve for staying safe and navigating privacy and security concerns. There are some life lessons we must hear many times before they stick. Online safety is one of them.

Abi hopes this presentation and supplementary resources provided to the school, the 300 students, and their guardians help spark ongoing conversations about being online in responsible ways. Some basic information covered is helpful for everyone- regardless of age:

Keep different passwords for each website and account. Online password managers are considered an extremely safe option for keeping track of all these passwords. Another great option? Go "old-school," have an index card or small notebook to keep written copies of passwords, and store them in a safe place.

Be mindful of who and what is in your photos. Minors and young children should only be in photos online with parental permission or from non-identifiable angles and distance. Likewise, be aware of house numbers or other specifics that could compromise safety.

Cyberbullying is legally punishable in Illinois. Even if it's not our intention, a snarky comment, or hurtful post can severely damage chances of getting a job interview, college admission, or other opportunities. We should always be kind, but especially online, keep inflammatory opinions to yourself.

"The goal isn't to ignore technology and be a hermit cut off from the modern world," Abi remarks, "it's about learning our options to keep ourselves connected safely so that we can use technology in ways that make our lives better." Abi presented a similar presentation to the Havana TANF group in March and plans to expand this presentation to other partner organizations.



Students and staff at Illini Central engaged with Abi Amstutz-Spencer in a school assembly focused on online safety. She taught best practices for password management, cyberbullying, photo security, and more.

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