

So Where Do We Go From Here? Ideas Into Action

Moderator: Stephen Balkam, CEO, Family Online Safety Institute

Panelists:

Hemu Nigam, Chief Security Officer, News Corporation

Adam Thierer, President, The Progress & Freedom Foundation

Larry Magid, Director & Author, SafeKids.com

Will Gardner, CEO, Childnet International

Professor Tanya Byron, Clinical Psychologist

The panelists agreed that it was clear from the conference that the Internet safety discussion has matured from a discussion about law enforcement and filtering to a discussion about parenting, ethics, and digital citizenship. Several of the panelists expressed their amazement that members from all areas of the community were able to engage respectfully in a discussion about online safety. The panelists expressed a frustration with the culture of fear that has been built around the Internet. They struggled to find a way to take the message of the conference and share it with the outside community, so that children continue to retain their right to innovate and connect with others on the Internet.

Balkam began by asking the panelists if they had been struck by anything they observed at the conference. Thierer commented that he had heard a lot about the need for a balance between sophistication and safety when designing Internet safety tools. He suggested that the real challenge is that these tools must be easier to use so that parents actually use them. Byron was impressed by how representatives from all parts of the community were able to come together and think about the issues. She stated that she was frustrated by how difficult it was to translate these ideas to the outside world. She suggested involving a pop culture icon like Oprah may bring greater public awareness and encourage the larger community to enter the discussion.

Gardner was similarly impressed by the wide range of discussion and enjoyed the opportunity to hear what young people liked and did not like about technology and how they valued being able to access everything in a safe way. Nigam commented that only industry and law enforcement used to be involved in a discussion about online safety and that he was glad to see every facet of physical society was now being engaged. He echoed Byron's hope that the outside world would be able to share in the discussion. Magid claimed he noticed that the discussion has matured from filtering to encouraging honest discussion and promoting online ethics. He commented on the recognition that the online world and physical world cannot be separated and that children should not be required to shut down technology when they get to school. He claimed that the central issue was not the Internet or safety, but how we live our lives.

Balkam then asked what was meant by technology liberation. Thierer replied that technology has caught a lot of us off guard and that the discussion is in a better place than before when the focus was on child protection acts that led to the banning of content. Gardner added that children need to be taught how to search online so that they can safely engage with the Internet. Byron emphasized the rights of children and the need to liberate children so that their childhood is not narrowed by denying Internet access. Magid agreed, cautioning that in the name of protecting children, society can actually oppress children and instead should be including children in the conversation.

Audience members suggested improving the conference by having children join the conference remotely and bringing in teachers who work with the kids day-to-day. Balkam questioned how to bring these issues to scale and Gardner said there has to be a way to make digital ethics safe and sexy instead of making it a fear issue. Nigam suggested having a conference where the focus is on making a list of what needs to be done and how to do it. Thierer commented that there needs to be people who will go on the air and call out those who perpetuate the culture of fear. A pediatrician in the audience also suggested getting Hollywood involved and inviting writers to include online safety issues in their scripts.

Finally, Balkam asked each panelist for one wish in the coming year. Magid said he wished that older generations would respect the younger generations and move forward instead of backward. Nigam reiterated his wish for a conference that skipped discussion and went right to ideas on how to take action. Gardner asked for a more vigorous challenge of people who advocate taking away children's media rights and that schools find more innovative ways to give all children an equal chance. Thierer requested that there be a greater focus on talking to children, reminding the audience that children are better off today than ever before and that they are incredibly resilient and will overcome challenges presented by the Internet. Finally, Balkam closed by wishing that adults would not overreact when children approach them with their Internet concerns.