

Internet Smarts

Music Downloading – Paying the Piper

Parents Guide

Illegal music downloading became a hot topic for parents and kids when the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) began to file suits against teens (or even younger children) as well as adults who swapped music online. The RIAA sent out repeated warnings that it was going to file such suits, but no one seemed to take them very seriously until the first batch of letters informing people they were being sued went out in September 2003. And the RIAA isn't finished.. Additional suits are being filed every week and the movie industry is considering their own legal moves against those who pirate movies online. These groups have money, political clout, and are very serious about their pursuit of alleged wrongdoers, no matter what their age.

On the surface, the issue of music downloading is a very simple one. Downloading music (with very few special exceptions) that you didn't pay for is illegal. It's that simple and that's the message that you need to get across to your children. No matter if "everyone is doing it" or the "record companies and artists are so rich they won't miss just the few songs I took", the bottom line is that it violates copyright law. If your child gets caught doing it, he or she, and you as the responsible adult, can face large fines and even a criminal record.

But just telling your children not to do it may not work. A survey conducted in mid-2004 concluded that of the 1,100 students, ages 8-18 that were polled, 88 percent knew that music was protected by copyright law and yet more than half (53%) admitted to downloading music files (eSchool News, Vol. 7, No. 7, July 2004). There is an "ethics gap" that needs to be addressed. They may have some sympathy for the people whose jobs are at stake, and if you have time you might brainstorm a list with them. They might also empathize with young people who are trying to break into the music business or up-and-coming bands that will never record another album if they do not sell the first time around.

This issue is quite complicated both legally and emotionally. To understand it, we urge you to sit down with your child or children and review and discuss this interactive activity on music downloading at http://www.powertolearn.com/internet_smarts/interactive_case_studies/music_downloading/index.shtml

Using Power to Learn's Interactive Activity

Because you want your children to focus on the issue of music downloading, the best place to go is right where it happens- the Internet. Before you and your children sit down to use the online interactive activity you might want to print this guide so you can read through it and follow it step-by-step. If you don't want to print it, make sure you read

through all the steps before starting. Either way you should look at the activity and read through it before you start it with your children.

The activity itself is a cautionary tale about a girl who downloads music off the Internet thinking she has paid a one-time fee to do it and then discovers she is being sued by the RIAA. It explains why she thinks she isn't doing anything wrong and discusses the kinds of penalties for getting caught sharing music online. It also features an interactive timeline of how the phenomenon of music downloading developed, explains how P2P (peer-to-peer) networks work, and looks at why the recording industry has decided to bring these lawsuits to focus attention on the issue.

The idea is to help your children understand the issue and whom it affects besides the large record companies and famous musical groups. At the end of the lesson, what rights individuals do have in respect to the CDs they buy in stores and the albums and songs they buy on legal music sites are discussed. Make sure you and your children take note of those. Knowing what digital rights you do have is as important as knowing the ones you don't have.

Follow These Steps:

First—

Have your children take the online poll, and compare their ideas and opinions with those of other users. If you are taking the time to do this activity with your children it probably means that they (and their friends) are already downloading music or getting to an age where they are very interested in music and the possibility of downloading it. This is a good chance to talk about whether they have tried it yet or know of someone who has. The whole purpose of this activity is to explore the issue and look at why the recording industry is coming down on illegal downloading.

Second—

Before reading the case study make sure you and your children understand what **copyright** means. In terms of music it means the exclusive right of an individual or individuals (or a company they assign it to such as a record company) to control, distribute and profit from the original music they produce. Explain to your children that even they can put a copyright on something original they have done. It is not as formal as filing a patent.

Third—

Go through the case study with your child. As you read you may want to ask questions like:

- How would you feel if you had been Christine?
- Do you understand how P2P networks work and what they allow people to do?
- Do you understand why the music industry objects to P2P networks?
- Did you know that illegal downloading affected so many different people?

- How does it affect you directly? If you don't think it does, could it in the future? How?

Fourth—

Next visit some of the Research Links. Children who love the technical side of technology will enjoy the How Napster Worked site. But the two most important links to look at the

Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) sites. That's because the issue of music downloading is still ongoing even though it isn't in the media everyday. On these sites you and your children can see the latest developments and will also see that the RIAA continues to pursue people of all ages for downloading music illegally.

Fifth—

As a parent just saying don't download music illegally because we might get sued isn't going to cut it with some children because this issue has an emotional side to it. Kids may have some sympathy for the people whose jobs are at stake and might also empathize with young people who are trying to break into the music business and for whom there will be less support if the recording industry's resources are diverted elsewhere. But they also hear about how some popular musicians are making millions of dollars and even after reviewing this material may have trouble seeing how the songs they download are going to rob those people. They may also feel some defiance as many teens, as well as adults, think that everything on the Internet should be free.

The approach you need to take is to use examples of stealing or injury they are familiar with. Perhaps they have had an art project or school project they worked on vandalized while it was on display. Maybe something they (or someone they know well) made, or worked hard to get the money to buy, was stolen. Or how you would feel if you were not paid for the job you do. That's what it feels like to many of these musicians who have waited long and hard years to get paid for their music and who are now finding it, without their consent, distributed free.

Sixth—

Personalizing the issue of illegal music downloading should help to make your children stop and think before they do it themselves. But let's face it, getting music free is very seductive, so what kind of plan of action can you and your children put into place so they don't feel tempted to do it? Here are some suggestions:

- Add not downloading music from illegal sites or P2P networks to the rules for Internet use at your house. (Link to the rule maker/home version)
- Visit a legal music downloading site like iTunes (<http://www.itunes.com>) so that you and your children can see what kind of music is available online, how downloading is done, what the costs are, and perhaps try it out. You need to do this so that you can

talk intelligently, sensibly and reasonably about music online. The best example for not pirating things off of the Internet is you!

- Help set up an "Allowance" account on a site like iTunes (<http://www.itunes.com>) so that kids can download tunes using the money in the account. Maybe there are some special tasks they can do in addition to their usual chores to earn money for this account or maybe you just deposit something out of their regular allowance for them. To do this you have to have a credit card, but if kids have a monthly music budget they can learn to live within it. Remember on the music sites you can download individual songs so even five dollars a month can help kids get their favorite top five songs on a CD or music player and stay up with the latest in popular music.
- Stay on the lookout for ways to get free music on the legal downloading sites. There is free music everywhere online. Encourage your kids to find it and make use of it.
- These days there are fantastic bargains on used CDs online and even in music stores across the country. If your child has an interest in a particular group and wants to get all the past recordings have them try the second hand route instead of downloading. Sites like Second Spin.com at <http://www.secondspin.com/> and even eBay and Amazon are good places to start and find great bargains.
- There is no question that the issues surrounding music downloading cause some emotional reactions especially with teens. That's because music has been available "free" online for most of their lives and they don't see any reason for that to stop. One way to help them approach the issue in a more rationale manner is to help them write a letter of protest to the RIAA or their local Congressperson or sign the petition on the EEP site. Besides helping them vent, this is a good way to teach them about how to call attention to issues they feel strongly about.

Seventh -

Finally, help your child to print out the downloadable iron-on (you can buy iron-on paper at any computer supply store) and help them iron it onto a t-shirt. The "Support the Arts – Buy Music" is a cool way for your kids to get behind the legal, and ethical approach to music downloading. And have them submit their feelings about the issue in the Answer the Question section.