**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: Linda Blake**

**Linda.Blake@ymcadc.org**

**Thousands of Proactive Parents to Gather at YMCAs**

**Across the Country to Learn How to Keep Their Kids Safe Online**

*YMCA of Metropolitan Washington joins 16-city YMCA/Google collaboration to mark Safer Internet Day*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – YMCA’s across the U.S. will host thousands of parents today looking for advice on how to manage rising social issues such as cyberbullying and online safety. The events are part of a 16-city collaboration coordinated by the YMCA to bring Google’s Be Internet Awesome parent workshops to U.S families. A total of more than 315 workshops will be held at YMCAs throughout the country in observance of global Safer Internet Day. Locally, YMCA of Metropolitan Washington is set to host 25 workshops at its centers to help parents instill healthy and responsible Internet habits in their children.

“As technology use among children continues to rise, parents often tell us that they feel they should be doing more to monitor their children’s screen time activity and give guidance on responsible digital citizenship. We are proud to partner with Google to respond to the changing needs of families and to get Google’s Be Internet Awesome resources in front of parents,” said Janice Williams, Senior Vice President of Program Development of the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington.

The one-hour workshops are free and focus on Google’s Internet Code of Awesome: Be SMART, ALERT, STRONG, KIND and BRAVE. Families learn how to communicate responsibly online, understand real from fake in the face of phishing and scams, build strong passwords, be positive and kind online, talk about questionable content with their family, and explore why building healthy tech habits is important. Parents get access to free bilingual resources and answers to questions about online safety and digital citizenship to help facilitate discussions at home.

The 16-city collaboration marks the third time that the YMCA has partnered with Google to host Be Internet Awesome workshops. Following a successful pilot program in Chicago in April 2019, the partnership was expanded to include an additional five cities convening 100 parent workshops last June. Parents described the workshop as “informative” and “helpful” and left feeling comfortable with initiating a discussion about digital safety with their children. As a result, the YMCA coordinated the latest round of workshops to coincide with today’s Safer Internet Day to reach even more families.

“The Be Internet Awesome workshops provide a forum for parents to learn, discuss, and access tips on creating a safer online environment and empowers parents to continue the conversation at home,” said Jessica Covarrubias, Google’s Be Internet Awesome lead. “Teaming up with YMCAs across the country helps us reach parents directly. Together we can instill healthy and responsible online habits in our children without denying them access to all the wonderful benefits that the Internet has to offer.”

The Google partnership exemplifies the YMCA’s longstanding commitment to youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. A crucial part of that pledge is to ensure children have safe places to learn, grow and thrive, including while online.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 86.8 percent of U.S. households in 2015 had access to a computer or smart phone. As educators increasingly incorporate technology into their teaching practices and social media use among youth continues to rise, it becomes all the more important that we teach children positive online habits and responsible social networking etiquette. The Internet opens up a whole new world of accessible content and communication channels for students that can make learning interesting, engaging and interactive.

Media are invited to attend the following workshop:

WHEN:        Tuesday, February 11, 2020 – SAFER INTERNET DAY

WHERE: 6:00pm - YMCA Arylawn, 5650 Oakmont Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland 20817

6:00pm – YMCA Calomiris, 1906 Allison Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20018

# # #

**The YMCA of Metropolitan Washington fosters the spiritual, mental and physical development of individuals, families and communities according to the ideals of inclusiveness, equality and mutual respect for all. For more information about the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington, go to www.ymcadc.org**