



Keeping Your Children Safe On The Internet*

Protecting your children on the Internet is a responsibility that must be taken seriously. Children are like sponges soaking up new technologies. With the click of a mouse, they are hurled into an adult world filled with images that can never be erased from their minds. Care must be given to avoid placing unnecessary restrictions on them, and at the same time protect them from danger. Set up good but reasonable boundaries and guidelines they must follow in using the computer. You would never allow a stranger to enter your house and give your child material, books, and information you know nothing about. Without guidance from you, this is what is happening when they use the computer.

1. ***BE AWARE and Become more computer literate.*** Your child may know more about the computer than you do. Let them teach you, and take advantage of this golden opportunity to communicate with them in a new way. Brush up on online definitions.
 - (a) *Screen Names* – Your identity on the Internet. To ensure your children's online safety, their screen names and passwords should not include their actual names. If your Internet Service Provider (ISP) provides member profiles, this information, along with children's names, can be very helpful to online predators. A predator can enter criteria in a member-profiles search - names, hobbies, sports, etc. and obtain a list of member screen names. The predator can then send an instant message and start a dialogue with the child, using his or her own name. Children are inclined to respond to messages from people who use their names and act familiar by using personal information.
 - (b) *Chat rooms* – Remember the old telephone party lines? The chat room works the same way. Several people can enter into a conversation at the same time with their comments posted simultaneously on the screen. The danger here is secrecy. Your child may be talking online with an adult pretending to be a child. Due to the risk of abduction, chats should never be unsupervised.
 - (c) *Instant Messaging (IM)* -- Technology similar to that of chat rooms, which notifies a user when a friend is online, allowing them to converse by exchanging text messages.
 - (d) *What is surfing the net?* Surfing refers to the way people use their computers to search the Internet for any topic of interest. It is like flipping from one channel to another with your remote control—"channel surfing."
 - (e) *Newsgroups* – Areas that organize postings on specific subjects such as dog owners, etc. Newsgroups that begin with ".alt" are unmoderated and are often dedicated to trading sexual comments and images.
 - (f) *Pop-Up Windows* -- Once you accidentally enter a pornographic site and try to close it, you may be bombarded with picture after picture making it seem impossible to exit. Immediately terminate the dial-up connection and closing out the windows will be easy.
2. ***BE KNOWLEDGEABLE. Learn About Online Safety.*** Learn how to monitor the "history" and temp files of your computer and check them often. This will allow you to see sites your child has visited recently. Learn how to set the content level of your Internet material. Investigate blocks that set up restrictive boundaries or filtering services that still provide access to the web while *making an effort* to block offensive material. Not all filters are the same. Look for these filters: kid content, customization, chat filtering, e-mail filtering, text filtering, and time management when selecting a filter service. *Filters are not a substitute for good judgment.*

3. **BE SPECIFIC.** Define "inappropriate material" for your children so there will be no mistake about what it is. Rude or offensive e-mail, messages, or postings should be reported to you immediately. Reassure them that you will not be upset if they stumble across these inappropriate sites. *Trust is essential.*
4. **BE THERE when your child is online.** Never place the computer in your child's room. Put it in the kitchen or den where you are seen frequently, preferably with the screen visible from a doorway or an outside window. Allowing children to use the Internet unattended, particularly talking in chat rooms or instant messaging areas is the equivalent of dropping them off in Central Park and saying, "Go make some new friends."
5. **BE WELL INFORMED and shop around before deciding on an Internet service provider (ISP).** There are providers available that filter at the server level. Check out the parental controls available by your online service.
6. **BE CONSISTENT.** Set limits for your child. Decide together the amount of time they will spend on the computer and what time of day. Never allow them to be "online" late at night, especially after you have gone to bed.
7. **BE FIRM.** Instruct your child to NEVER give out personal information about themselves or to set up an online profile that would be listed in directories making them vulnerable to pedophiles searching for prey in children's chat rooms. This includes name, address, school they attend or teachers' names, parents' names, etc.
8. **BE WATCHFUL!!! INSTRUCT YOUR CHILD TO NEVER TELL ANYONE WHERE THEY WILL BE OR WHAT THEY WILL BE DOING AND NEVER TO MEET SOMEONE FROM ONLINE WITHOUT YOU PRESENT.**
9. **BE ALERT;** Look for changes in your child's behavior. Mention of adults you don't know, secretiveness, inappropriate sexual knowledge, sleeping problems, etc. may indicate a problem.
10. **BE A ROLE MODEL and teach responsibility by acting responsibly and setting a good example.** This should speak for itself! Children learn more from their parent's actions than their words. There are people just waiting to take advantage of children and you may not know until it is too late. Chat Rooms can be extremely dangerous.

Helping your children to enjoy the expanding world of the Internet can be a positive adventure for both of you. Building strong and trusting relationships can go a long way towards reducing the chance that children will fall victim to the dangers of online relationships.

- **This information was gathered through research. For expert advice, learn about online safety by going to websites such as: www.Get.NetWise.org; www.ProtectKids.com; www.family.org; www.SafeKids.com, www.Kidshield.com, www.fbi.gov/kids/k5th/safety2.htm. These are just a few of many that will help you protect your child. Write to your elected officials and ask them to support legislation that will protect children from online pornography and predators.*