

Overall Tips for Internet Safety

What Can You Do?: Action Steps for Families



Tips for Safe World Wide Web Usage

The points below are suggestions you can follow to reduce the chances that your kids will fall victim to online predators or Internet crime.

Hiding Material

- Talk to someone that is computer-savvy and learn how to keep track of what your children download to the computer.
- Keep track of the disks around your computer: big, unorganized piles of disks can make it seem like one or two missing won't be noticed.
- Learn more about computers: the more you know, the harder it is to hide things from you. Talk to a computer-savvy friend, a technician at a computer store, your children, or explore some Web sites if you feel you need to learn more about the Internet.
- Don't use disks at all: instead, set up a space on your hard drive that your kids can store material in.
- Ask to see what is on a blocked screen. Explain that you are interested in your kid's safety, not punishing them.

Late Night Surfing

- Restrict the number of hours your kids can spend online.
- Impose a computer "curfew," at which time the computer has to be shut off.

Providing Personal Information Online

- Explain to your kids what personal information is, including names, pictures, e-mail addresses, street addresses, phone numbers, credit card numbers, school names, and even hobbies.
- Teach your kids to never give out personal information when using e-mail, chat rooms or instant messaging, filling out registration forms and personal profiles, or entering online contests.
- Encourage your kids to use gender neutral tags when in chat rooms (BigCheese, Gumby).
- Teach your children that they cannot be certain who they are talking to online.
- Talk to your kids about the people they are meeting online.

Unusual Charges on Bills

- Monitor your phone and credit card bills or statements.
- Take note of phone bill charges to Web sites or strange numbers.
- Create solid guidelines for you and your kids about shopping online.
- Require your kids to check that any site they use has provisions in place to ensure that transactions are safe and secure.

Computers in Private Spaces

- Move the computer into a public space (living room, kitchen, open area).

Gifts from Strangers

- Talk to someone who is computer-savvy to learn how to check your computer for pornographic files or any type of sexual communication.
- Identify strange names on packages that arrive in the mail or by courier.
- Inquire how the stranger knew where to send the gift (did your child give them personal information).
- Be present when your kids open gifts from someone you don't know.

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ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Talk to a computer-savvy friend to learn how to easily monitor what your children are doing online.
- Know as much as you can about your computer. The more you know, the more able you will be to protect your child from online predators. You can learn more from friends, exploring the Internet yourself (www.getnetwise.com), or asking your children to show you what they know.
- Talk to your kids about sexual predators and online dangers.
- If your kids receive sexually explicit images from an online correspondent, or if they are solicited sexually, contact your local police.
- When your kids are young, they should share the family e-mail address rather than have their own e-mail accounts. As they get older, you can ask your Internet Service Provider (ISP) to set up a separate e-mail address, but your children's mail can still reside in your account.
- Check to make sure that if your kids are using file-sharing software they are only downloading music files (MP3s). Many people use file-sharing networks to post pornographic images and videos.
- Tell your kids, "When in doubt, doubt." Explain that they need to develop a healthy skepticism about any information they receive from an online source—if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- If all your precautions fail and your kids do meet an online predator, do not blame your kids. The offender is always at fault.
- Refer to the Resources and Links section to create an Internet Safety Parent Contract.