

# Child Internet Safety

## Steps to Protecting Your Children Online

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The internet is a wonderful place. I can enjoy works of art, great literature, lively chat discussions - all from my sofa. But that convenience always comes with a price. It's also easy for someone I don't know to get in touch with me. This is the two way street of ubiquitous communications. When the internet came along, it changed everything. Gone are the days when stand alone computers occupied a small segment of the population. Networked computers make computers fun and usable. As an experiment, disconnect your internet connection for a day and see how much you use your computer. Get the point? And being networked to a wider audience is good and bad. And this is especially true when we think about our children being online. If you leave your children online and unattended, it is akin to leaving your child alone in a crowded park or mall. If you're a parent, you will want to safe guard your children.

It wasn't that long ago that there were few resources out there to help. Now, you almost have to wade through the information. Let's cut to the chase and give you what you need. We will include links to all the pertinent sites that are valuable for you and your child. So, let's get started.

### *Privacy*

Let's start with some basic issues about your child's privacy online. Here is a list of things to look for, think about, and talk about with your child when they are online. This extends to their online privacy when viewing websites.

- "Never give out your last or family name, your home address or your phone number in chat rooms, on bulletin boards, or to online pen-pals.
- Make sure that any screen names are not their actual names!
  - And as a corollary, make sure that the screen name doesn't include any other identifying features such as birth age, graduation date, state, etc.
- Don't tell other kids your screen name, user ID or password.
- Look at a website's Privacy Policy to see how the site uses the information you give them.
- Surf the Internet with your parents. If they aren't available, talk to them about the sites you're visiting.
- Talk about the site's Privacy Policy with your parents so that you and your parents will know what information the site collects about you and what it does with the information.
- Websites must get your parent's permission before they collect many kinds of information from you.

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- If a website has information about you that you and your parents don't want it to have, your parents can ask to see the information – and they can ask the website to delete or erase the information.
- Sites are not supposed to collect more information than they need about you for the activity you want to participate in. You should be able to participate in many activities online without having to give any information about yourself.
- If a site makes you uncomfortable or asks for more information than you want to share, leave the site."

(Source: [FTC](#))

### *Education*

For the Child:

One of the best things you can do with your child is help them understand what the internet is about. Parents usually talk to their kids about strangers and the dangers of public space. It's an unfortunate issue in our culture today. But parents seem to miss the boat when it comes to the internet. As a parent, you need to understand that the internet is not like TV! TV is a one-way communication device. It serves up content. Some of that content needs to be filtered for kids. But the internet is a two-way communication device. It allows possible interaction with your child - right in your home! And another issue that makes the internet such a dangerous place is anonymity. Unlike a stranger physically approaching your child, the visual cues are not there. This means that it is much easier for a stranger to approach your child and gain their trust. As such, you need to sit down with your child and help them understand "the rules of engagement." In fact, you may want to post these up next to the monitor:

- Never post identifying information on the internet, this can include:
  - Pictures
  - Names
  - Locations
  - Dates
  - School Name
- Never interact with someone you do not know
- Ask them questions about how they know you
- Never offer up leading information, like: "Do I know you from such and such school"
- When in doubt, block that person via the instant messenger program
- People may not be who they say they are. They can lie about their age, sex, name, etc.
- Never, never, never agree to meet with someone you do not know.
- When in doubt, block the person.

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- If you receive a strange or disturbing chat message, tell your parents ASAP.

For the Parent:

You dictate the access your child has to online services. You are going to have to make some hard decisions about:

- The age that you start allowing your child to use the internet
- The types of services you allow your child to use, like:
  - browsing web sites
  - email
  - chat
  - peer to peer downloading services like Kazaa, Morpheus, Limewire
- Access hours
- Access location

Here are my recommendations for you parents. These are recommendations for children. As your kids grow into teenagers, these recommendations change as their responsibility increases.

1. Put the computer in a public space. Do not put it in their room.
2. Incorporate a parental control program. And be up front with your child about it. Let them know that you are watching and want them to be safe. Many online services include some type of parental control:
  1. [AOL's free parental control](#) - it's free with an AOL email address, you don't even need to buy their online service!
  2. [Earthlink's free parental control](#) - this is free to Earthlink members.
  3. [Comcast parental control](#) - Comcast gives a free version of McAfee's security suite, which includes parental controls
  4. [AT&T / SBC / Yahoo parental control](#) - an interesting suite.
  5. [Spector Soft's Spector Pro](#) - a great program that will allow you to keep tabs on almost anything on your computer. It does not, however, allow filtering. Filtering allows you to stop content ever reaching the screen.
  6. [Safe Eyes](#) - another great program that does filter out harmful sites. You can also restrict peer to peer software, instant messenger programs, and other programs. This is really helpful for younger kids who might circumvent other methods or are just curious enough to get themselves into trouble.
3. Walk them through how to use the internet. You will probably want to build a list of sites they are allowed to view like [PBS Kids](#). You could give your child their own login on your computer (this will also help keep your stuff intact!). And then you can simply add their allowed sites on their favorites. Teach them to click on the favorites.
4. Sit with them as they use their sites. Talk to them about what they are learning.

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- Review the rules with them or the contract (i will discuss below) often.
5. Set times when they can be on the computer.
  6. Educate yourself and your kids about the internet. You can learn about peer to peer networks (like [Kazaa](#), [Limewire](#), and [Gnutella](#)), social networking sites (like [Myspace](#) or [Stumbleupon](#)), or sharing sites (like [YouTube](#)).

Part of this could include signing contracts, like the ones you find at [Safe Kids](#).

Here are some sites for further reading:

- [Kidz Privacy](#) - FTC site with some good info.
- [Get Net Wise](#) - A public service brought by Internet industry corporations and public interest organizations to help insure that families have safe, constructive, educational and entertaining online experiences.
- [Safe Kids](#) - Contains information about the dangers of children using the internet. Rules, advice, and tips relating to child security and the web.
- [Stay Safe](#) - Educational site intended to help consumers understand both the positive aspects of the Internet as well as how to manage a variety of safety and security issues that exist online.
- [Net Family News](#) - A weekly electronic news service to inform and educate parents, families and caregivers of children who spend time online.
- [InHope](#) - Providing contact details and resources for reporting online child abuse in many countries around the world.
- [ISafe](#) - Incorporates classroom curriculum with dynamic community outreach to empower students, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and concerned adults to make the Internet a safer place.

I hope this helps get you started down the road to protecting your kids online. It's a great, big, and wonderful internet world out there. Let's do our part to protect our children while they're on it.