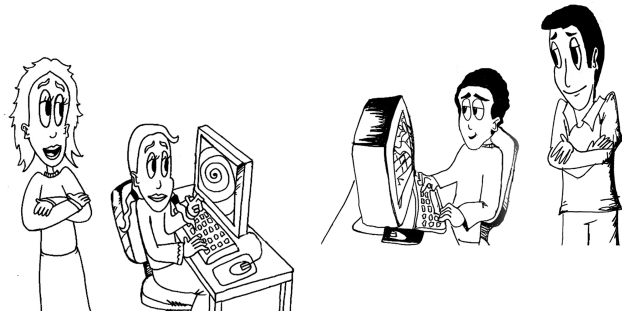


Cyber Safe Kids

A Guide for Parents



Introduction

The Internet is a great place for children to spend part of their time. As long as their time online is balanced with other important activities - playing outside, reading, creative activities, spending time with friends and family - the Internet can be fun and beneficial.

This brief guide will provide suggestions for parents of elementary students on the important steps you can take to ensure your children's time spent online is safe and fun.

Online Risks Faced by Children

- ✦ Spending too much time online.
- ✦ Posting or sending personal contact information or material that could damage their reputation or place them at risk.
- ✦ Communicating with strangers in personal communication environments.
- ✦ Receiving or sending hurtful messages.
- ✦ Accidentally accessing pornography or other damaging material.
- ✦ Being profiled and targeted with advertising.

A Fenced Online Play Yard

When children are young, it is a parent's responsibility to make sure their Internet use is in a safe online environment ~ a "fenced online play yard." These are steps you can take:

- ✓ Remain actively and positively involved. Help your child learn to make good choices based on your family's values.
- ✓ Create a "fenced play yard" for your child online.
 - Limit your child's access to sites you have selected as appropriate, unless you are present to closely supervise more expansive explorations. Jointly approve additions to this "play yard."
- ✓ Keep the computer in a public place in your house so you can remain engaged in what your child is doing.
- ✓ Make sure you have implemented appropriate security against malware, use a spam blocker, block pop-up ads, and use safe search features. Never allow peer-to-peer software ~ a significant source of malware.
- ✓ Do not allow your child to register on sites for users over the age of 13. If your child's friends are on these sites, talk with their parents. Find a safer place where the friends can communicate and share.
- ✓ Make sure you personally know everyone your child is able to communicate with through email and instant messaging. Limit communication with strangers to moderated children's sites.
- ✓ Look into using the newer family safety features of your operating system, browser, or provided as a service by sites, and on interactive gaming consoles.
 - These new family safety features allow parents to limit their child's access to selected sites, control who has the ability to communicate privately, manage time spent online, and review the history file. Your child should know that everything he or she does online is open to your review.
- ✓ Watch out for market profilers and advertisers.
 - Commercial children's sites provided for free are making money through advertising or are themselves an ongoing advertisement. To allow for more effectively targeted advertising, some sites seek to determine your child's age, gender, location, and interests. Some sites use surveys, quizzes, or contests to obtain more information.
 - Read the privacy policy on sites carefully.
 - Watch for "advergaming" ~ ads integrated into games ~ and sites that ask your child to sign up to receive ads or send ads to their friends.
 - Sites by non-profit organizations and sites that charge a modest fee do not present these concerns.
 - Advertising to children is associated with consumption of junk foods, obesity, harm to self image, excessive consumption, and parent-child conflict.
 - Make your selections carefully - based on your own degree of comfort with these practices. Help your child create a safe and fun username that does not disclose personal details and a safe password. Make sure your child knows to never disclose a password to anyone other than you. Use your email address for any site registrations.
- ✓ Never overreact if your child reports an online concern to you. You want your child to feel comfortable reporting online concerns - especially when your child becomes a teen.
- ✓ If your child engages in inappropriate or harmful behavior, impose a consequence that will focus your child's attention on the harmful consequences of his or her actions. Require that your child remedy any harm.

Key Safety Issues for Children

Addictive Access

- ✓ Help your child learn to balance time spent online with other important activities. Use time monitoring features, set time limits, or simply say “Enough screen time. The sun is out, go out and play.”

Interacting Safely with Others Online

- ✓ Don't allow your child to communicate with anyone not known in person through email and instant messaging.
- ✓ Make sure your child knows not to get into online arguments. If someone is rude or hurtful on a public site, your child should say “stop,” leave the site, file a complaint, and/or ask for your assistance. Teach your child how to file a complaint or abuse report on any public communication site.
- ✓ If a friend who can communicate personally has been hurtful, share your concerns with the parent of this child.
- ✓ Make sure your child knows not to engage in hurtful online behavior.

Posting or Sending Information

- ✓ Your child must understand that anything posted or sent online has the potential to become public and will be used to judge his or her character and decision-making.
- ✓ Make sure your child knows to never provide his or her full name, address, or phone number in an online form or send a picture to someone else without your permission.
- ✓ As your child gets older make sure your child knows to never post material that could damage his or her reputation or place him or her at risk of harm.

Accidental Access to Pornography

- ✓ If you follow the guidance in selecting safe sites, it is unlikely your child will stumble into inappropriate material. But any computer can get infected. Or your child could use a less protected computer.
- ✓ Make sure your child knows that if anything “yucky” appears on the screen, he or she should quickly turn off the screen and tell an adult. Applauding your child's reaction will help eliminate a negative impact.

Guidelines for Your Child

Be Safe Online

Have Fun Online in Safe Places

- ✓ Use the fun sites that you and your parents have selected.
- ✓ Ask permission if you want to go to a new fun site.

Keep Your Life in Balance

- ✓ Have fun online ~ but make sure you also get together with your friends and go outside to play.

Think Before You Post

- ✓ Be the best you can be online.
- ✓ Remember anything you post or send online can be sent to others. Other people will judge you by what you post.
- ✓ Never type your name, address, or phone number online, send a picture, or complete an online form or survey without first checking with your parent.
- ✓ Never share your password.

Connect Safely

- ✓ If someone sends you a mean or nasty message on a public site, you can say “stop,” leave the site, file a complaint, or ask a parent for help.
- ✓ If a friend sends you a mean or nasty message, tell your friend to stop or tell your parent.
- ✓ Never send mean or nasty messages.

Turn It Off & Tell

- ✓ If anything yucky ever appears when you are online ~ quickly turn off the screen and tell an adult.

Spot the Ads

- ✓ Many web sites have ads for things kids like. Other sites are ads. Some have games that are really ads. Some want you to sign up to receive more ads. Some want you to send ads to friends.
- ✓ See if you can spot the ads. Remember, you do not need to buy everything you see in ads.

To the person reviewing this document for possible reproduction:

The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use is pleased to provide two documents for schools and other non-profit organizations - with permission granted to reproduce and provide to parents. One document is appropriate for parents of children. The second is appropriate for parents of tweens and teens. I would like to provide the person considering this document with some additional insight into my background, the contents, and approach taken.

I have degrees in special education and law. I taught "at risk" students, practiced in the area of technology law, and was an educational technology consultant prior to turning my attention to Internet use management in schools and youth risk online in 1995. It has always been my perspective that scare tactics and fear-based messages are not effective in preventing risk or encouraging effective parenting. It is also essential to ground guidance on youth risk online in the research insight, which fortunately is now emerging.

It is of significant concern to me that many of the current Internet safety messages are not grounded in fact, especially in the area of sexual predation. The research of the Crimes Against Children Research Center has demonstrated that these incidents are rare - constituting only 1% of all arrests for sexual abuse of minors. Predators are not targeting children. They form relationships with teens who are willing to talk about sex with strangers. There is no known incident where a predator tracked down and abducted a teen based on personal contact information posted online. Teens meet willingly knowing they have been communicating with an adult and intending to engage in sex. These predators are taking advantage of "at risk" teens.

Cyberbullying and other forms of electronic aggression are a significant concern. The relationship altercations that have traditionally been faced by teens are now also occurring online or through use of cell phones. This appears to be increasing the harm because these altercations are ongoing, frequently involve groups, and sometimes involve anonymous communications. A concern that has not yet reached public awareness is that "at risk" youth are becoming involved in online communities with other "at risk" youth, which is leading to contagion of risky behaviors.

The young people who are at the greatest risk online are the ones who are already at greater risk in the Real World. We have to address these issues in the context of school and community youth risk prevention programs.

The majority of young people are generally making good choices online and effectively handling the negative incidents that occur. This means that we can effectively address concerns using the social norms risk prevention approach - encouraging young people to follow the lead of their savvy peers and making sure that all young people understand the risks and effective protective strategies. Social norms risk prevention is highly effective.

Research has also demonstrated that many parents are "clueless" when it comes to what their teens are doing online. But teens whose parents are actively and positively involved in their online activities engage in less online risk taking. My approach to parenting is ages old. When children are young, parents must ensure they are in safe places and understand the simple guidelines they need to keep themselves safe in these places. But as they become teens, they need a comprehensive understanding of the risks, harmful consequences, and how they can independently protect themselves, engage in ethical behavior, and take responsibility for the well-being of others.

The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use is pleased to announce that other materials will soon be available. Narrated slides presentations are available for parent workshops - one for parents of children and the other for parents of tweens and teens - and a 45 minute presentation for tweens and teens - narrated by my two teens. More extensive handouts for parents and teens are also provided. The teen material can support a wide range of instructional activities. Additional materials are under development to address consuming and creating in Web 2.0.

The Center will also provide material for professional development for educators and others professionals who work with youth. This includes narrated slides presentations and comprehensive handouts that set forth important information in an easy-to-read outline format. The Center has made arrangements with the University of Oregon Continuing Education Center for professionals to receive Continuing Education Units for viewing these materials. Material that will soon be available includes: Cyber Safe and Savvy Youth: A Guide for Educators (important insight for all educators); Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Electronic Aggression (safe school professionals); Web 2.0 in Schools: Effective Internet Use Management and Legal Issues (educational technology professionals and administrators); Youth Risk Online (Insight for Health and Mental Health Professionals). Additional titles and online classes for graduate credit will soon be available.

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