

Internet Safety and Your Child

Children are learning earlier and earlier how to navigate the information highway. Everywhere you turn from Nickelodeon, to LEGO and Barbie commercials, to your local public library, kids are encouraged to log on.

The internet not only provides entertainment in the form of coloring pages, games, and clubs, but also educational information for current events and classroom assignments.

They know how to access these resources, but do they understand the internet safety rules they should follow?



Unfortunately, the internet can be a very dangerous place. It's prime hunting ground for hackers looking to entertain themselves by reeking havoc on your system, identity thieves, and child predators.

The answer is not to ban your child from the computer. As society becomes increasingly technology dependent, children will benefit from becoming computer literate at an early age.

Computer skills will come in handy throughout their educational and future professional careers. Parents need to do their own homework and teach their children internet safety rules to ensure positive internet experiences.

RULES....to staying safe on the net!

- Parents should always monitor children's email, chat room conversations, and the websites they visit. Consider investing in software that can monitor children's web surfing and block objectionable words, images, and/or sites. Encourage use of "kid-friendly" search engines.
- Children should never give out identifying information, such as name, address, phone number, school, etc over the internet.
- Younger children will be tempted to "sign-up" to join clubs. Many of these sites are legitimate and can be educational and/or entertaining, but will likely ask for personal information. Children should only join clubs, list servs, etc with parental approval and oversight.
- Do not open emails from unknown senders; delete them immediately. Such emails may be spam. Even worse, they could be "viruses" which can be very harmful to your computer.
- Never respond to surveys, contests, or special offers.
- Children should share their passwords with parents, but **NO ONE** else.
- Older kids will be interested in chat rooms, message board, and networking/personal blogging sites (i.e. myspace, bebo, xanga, etc). If you allow your children to utilize these sites, they should keep their profiles "private," only approve "friends" and/or chat with people they know in the real world, and be extremely careful with the kind of information they post. Children need to understand that seemingly harmless information can often be dangerous when in the wrong hands. In addition to the above listed identifying information, children should not post information about where they are, where they are going, when they are at certain places, etc. Be careful of posting information to "friend's" sites as well. Parents should routinely review their children's sites and their children's "friend's" sites to ensure information of this type is not inadvertently posted.
- If a child does not follow the above internet safety rules, and does begin communicating with someone they do not personally know, **NEVER** respond to requests for personal information, **NEVER** respond to obscene, suggestive, or threatening messages, and **NEVER** agree to a request to meet in person. Tell a parent or trusted adult immediately if any of these requests or messages is made.
- If your child receives requests to meet someone off line, save the communications as evidence, and report these incidents to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's CyberTipline.
- Parents should report any incidents that could place their child at risk of harm to the authorities.