

# Child Safety on the Internet

## Is the Internet safe?

The Internet is filled with opportunities for learning, communicating, and sharing information. It is a valuable resource for children and adults alike. Like any large community, however, the online world presents some risks, especially for children.

Parents need to be aware of some of the potential problems their children could encounter:

- pornographic and sexually explicit material;
- hate messages and radical activities;
- violent and destructive materials;
- information on cults and other organizations that families may not find acceptable;
- anonymous senders who may target your child with hate mail or threatening messages; and
- fraudulent activities, scams, and hidden sales.

Additional areas of concern include online shopping and questionnaires. Marketing on the Internet has become very elaborate. Even the most harmless-looking contest or game may actually be a sophisticated marketing effort to get more information about your family.

## How do I help ensure my child's safety?

The best way to ensure your children are “surfing” safely is for you to surf with them every time they are online. Of course, this may be impractical. Read further for tips about how to make the Internet a safe, enjoyable, and friendly place.

**Create online guidelines** — Just as you teach your children to brush their teeth, eat healthy foods, and be wary of strangers, teach your child online guidelines. Post these guidelines next to the computer so that the guidelines are visible when your children are surfing.

**Keep the computer visible** — Place the computer in a living room or family room where it's highly visible. If the computer is in a child's room it's easier to hide the screen and go to inappropriate Web sites.

### *Quick safety tips*

- Parents must be aware of where their children go online.
- Children should never disclose personal information to anyone in cyberspace.
- Young children should be accompanied when exploring the Web.
- Older children need to know their parents' rules before surfing.
- Children should be taught that not everything they read online is true or dependable.
- Parents should regularly discuss the Internet with their kids and spend time with them while they're online.
- Never allow your child to get together with someone they “meet” online unless you go to the meeting with them.

*Though children need a certain amount of privacy, they also need parental involvement.*

Contact Information: Jeanne Wiebke, system support specialist and Barbara Kelley, former system support specialist, ISU Extension Information Technology Unit. Visit extension on the Web at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu>.

**Don't share private information** — Even adults must be careful about divulging personal information online. Children should never be allowed to give out identifying information — home address, school name, telephone number, or e-mail address — without parental permission. These rules should be applied when playing an online game, entering a chat room, filling out an online questionnaire, registering for a free gift, or entering a contest. In addition, children should never be allowed to give out a credit card number or password.

**Limit their time online** — Just as you would limit the number of hours children spend watching television per week, discuss and make rules about the length of time they can be on the Internet. Specify also the time of day they can be online.

**Encourage dialogue** — Talk to your children about the places they visit or messages they receive. Encourage them to alert you or another trusted adult if they see something online or receive a message that is questionable or makes them feel uncomfortable. If this happens, forward a copy of the message to your service provider and ask for their assistance. Should you become aware of the transmission of child pornography while online, immediately report this to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, [www.missingkids.org](http://www.missingkids.org) (800-843-5678).

**Be aware** — People online may not be who they seem. It is easy for someone to misrepresent himself or herself. Someone claiming to be a “12-year old girl” could in reality be a 40-year-old man. Information also may not be true. The old adage, “Don't believe everything you read” applies here. An offer that's “too good to be true” probably is.

**Sending messages** — Children should never respond to suggestive, obscene, or belligerent messages. If they receive such a message, encourage them to let you know. (See “Encourage dialogue” above.)

**Get to know their online friends** — If your child is communicating with someone online, you should communicate with the individual as well. Never allow children to meet in person someone they've met online unless you discuss it with the children first and accompany them to the meeting.

**Be visible** — Be in the same room when your young child uses the computer. This will discourage wandering. Get to know the places they like to visit. This will promote interaction and exchange between your child and others in the home while on the computer.

## *For more information...*

Websites noted to contain excellent resource material for parents and educators:

### **ParentWeb's WebSafe**

[www.parentweb.com/websafe/index.htm](http://www.parentweb.com/websafe/index.htm)

### **America Links Up**

[www.americalinksup.com](http://www.americalinksup.com)

### **Get Cybersavvy!**

[www.cybersavvy.org](http://www.cybersavvy.org)

### **Kid Safety on the Web**

[www.kidsdomain.com/grown/nanny.html](http://www.kidsdomain.com/grown/nanny.html)

### **Federal Trade Commission**

[www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/online/sitesee/index.html](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/online/sitesee/index.html)

### **Kids Safety on the Internet**

(Police Notebook)  
[www.ou.edu/oupd/inetmenu.htm](http://www.ou.edu/oupd/inetmenu.htm)

## *Search engines especially for youth*

### **Yahooligans**

([www.yahooligans.com](http://www.yahooligans.com))

### **Searchopolis**

([www.searchopolis.com](http://www.searchopolis.com))

*With a few precautions and a little guidance from you, your children can benefit from a wealth of resources on the Internet.*

**Participate** — Though you may not always be able to be with your children when they are online, occasionally surf the Internet with your child. Participate in games and searches. Spend some time familiarizing yourself and your child with what is available.

**Purchase Internet filtering software** — For added security, software is available to help screen out unsuitable material. This software may help provide protection from inappropriate Web sites or restrict access to undesirable forums, discussions, and bulletin boards. Many of the commercial online services also have systems in place to block out parts of the service they feel are inappropriate for children. Be aware that such software is not foolproof. It may also censor material you deem important. Even if these filters were 100 percent effective, they are no substitute for parental guidance.

### **Software companies for child safety on the Internet**

*(This is only a partial listing.)*

**SafeSurf** ([www.safesurf.com](http://www.safesurf.com)) uses a rating system to identify good sites for kids. Only the sites identified with the code can be accessed by kids.

**CYBERSitter** ([www.solidoak.com](http://www.solidoak.com)) allows parents to “block,” “block and alert,” or simply “alert” when access is attempted to an objectionable site.

**Cyber Patrol Home Edition** ([www.cyberpatrol.com](http://www.cyberpatrol.com)) provides time management with parental control and application blocking including the ability to filter pornographic material. There is a free download for home users.

**SurfWatch** ([www.surfwatch.com](http://www.surfwatch.com)) gives parents and educators the ability to limit unwanted material without restricting access rights of other users. It screens newsgroups, Web pages, file transfer (FTP) sites, Gopher servers, chat rooms, and other commercial services.

**Net Nanny** ([www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com)) is parental control software for Windows. You can filter for both “Can Go” and “Can’t Go” screening. It also monitors e-mail and blocks the transmission of personal information such as names, addresses, and telephone numbers.

### ***Software for child safety on the Internet***

**SafeSurf**

[www.safesurf.com](http://www.safesurf.com)

**CYBERSitter**

[www.solidoak.com](http://www.solidoak.com)

**Cyber Patrol Home Edition**

[www.cyberpatrol.com](http://www.cyberpatrol.com)

**SurfWatch**

[www.surfwatch.com](http://www.surfwatch.com)

**Net Nanny**

[www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com)

**Cyber Snoop**

[www.cyber-snoop.com](http://www.cyber-snoop.com)

**GuardiaNet**

[www.guardianet.net](http://www.guardianet.net)

**Internet Filter**

[www.turnercom.com](http://www.turnercom.com)

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Commercial or private sites listed in this publication are intended only to supply information. No endorsement of products or firms is intended, nor is criticism implied of those not included.

The following is an example of an agreement that may be made between a child and his or her parent(s) for Internet cruising rules.



### Cyberspace Passport

*These rules are for my safety. I will honor them when I go online.*

I can go online \_\_\_\_\_ (Time of day) for \_\_\_\_\_ (How long).

It's \_\_\_ OK \_\_\_ not OK for me to go online without a parent.

I understand which sites I can visit and which ones are off limits.

I won't give out information about myself or my family without permission from my parents.

My password is my secret. I won't give it to anyone.

I will never agree to meet an online pal or send my picture, without permission from my parents.

I know an advertisement when I see one. I also know that animated or cartoon characters aren't real and may be trying to sell me something or to get information from me.

I will follow these same rules when I am at home, in school, or at the library or a friend's.

Source: *Federal Trade Commission and the National Association of Attorneys General.*

### *Teen safety on the information highway*

If you're a parent of a teenager you might feel that you don't need the same restrictions and controls as parents of younger kids. You may be right, but just because your child is older doesn't mean that she or he is out of danger. Teenagers are actually more likely to get into trouble online than younger kids. Teens are more likely to

- explore out-of-the-way nooks and crannies of cyberspace,
- reach out to people outside of their immediate peer groups and, sadly,
- be preyed upon as victims by pedophiles and other exploiters.

*Computers steadily redefine the ways we interact with others and gain knowledge about the world around us, and the Internet is becoming increasingly important in our daily lives. By taking responsibility for children's computer use, families and early childhood professionals can greatly reduce the potential risks, while at the same time allow children access to a multitude of positive learning experiences.*

—National Association of the Education of Young Children

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