



PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM INTERNET RISKS

According to a recent survey, 93% of youth and 94% of their parents are accessing the Internet. The Internet has so much to offer, so how can parents help children enjoy the benefits of new technology while minimizing the risks? Here are a few suggestions:

- ✦ **Avoid Online Fights and Provocation.** When we teach teenagers to drive, we often discuss aggressive and/or erratic drivers they may see on the road. Other Internet users often have behaviors that children will want to avoid becoming involved with in similar ways. Unlike traffic situations, online communications can be dropped as soon as a line is crossed, and no one should be expected to continue an abusive or uncomfortable exchange.
- ✦ **Keep Social Networking in Perspective.** Youth may have over 150 to 300 “friends” on a social networking site. As adolescents decide who they want to be, what their friends think is very important to them. However, they may need help keeping it in perspective. Children also need to be careful of their impact on other users. Encourage children to stop and think more before posting a hurtful comment. Ask, “Would you still do the behavior if your mother knew? If it was on the front page of the paper? What if you were face-to-face with them?”
- ✦ **Stop and Think Before Downloading Files.** Think beyond “predators” when discussing online dangers with your child. Illegal activities like downloading copyrighted files and plagiarism are very real possibilities as children consume information and create content online.
- ✦ **Talk About Relationships and Rights.** At the age that most teens are accessing the Internet, they are also exploring relationships and dating. Understand their desire for romantic connections, while preparing them for the unique dangers of the digital age. Engage children in deliberate conversations about how they should expect to be treated and how they should treat others in relationships.
- ✦ **Ensure Accountability by Remaining “Hands-On.”** Empathy should be a consistent component in any discussion of how to interact online. As children grow older, they will be more capable of imagining themselves in another’s place. However, this is a learned skill. The more they are given guidance from adults and shown examples of empathy, the better children will be able to practice empathy. Your physical presence while they are online is the best way to know they are acting appropriately.
- ✦ **Avoid Diminishing the Importance of Communication via Technology.** Most teens and most of the people they know are online. It is the new gathering place. Recognize the role and importance of technology to youth. It is where they interact with friends and make social connections.
- ✦ **Balance Computer Time with Other Activities.** Remember that actions speak louder than words. As an adult in a child’s life, you are a role model. By balancing your time with technology well and making safe choices online, you give the best lessons on Internet safety.
- ✦ **Be Open About Online Activities.** Many families have rules about Internet use. These rules are often about what a child can view. Think about your own activities online and the example you set. Can your behavior stand the same scrutiny as your child’s? Rules that can be applied to everyone often have the most weight.
- ✦ **Hold Yourself and Other Adults Accountable.** When you know or suspect that an adult is being inappropriate online, let them know that you are concerned about potential harm to a child. Prevent Child Abuse Georgia’s 1-800-CHILDREN Helpline is a great resource for preparing for a difficult conversation with others about your concerns. You can also e-mail the Helpline at helpline@preventchildabusega.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more ideas about how to help youth stay safer while online, call our Helpline at 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373). You may also send an email to: helpline@preventchildabusega.org. Focusing on Internet safety and healthy online relationships is just one way communities are working to prevent child abuse. *Preventing child abuse is the work of everyone, every day.* Join our efforts.

*Join our mission to prevent child abuse
and neglect in all its forms*

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