

Children, Safety & The Internet

When used properly, the Internet can be a wonderful learning and entertainment tool for you and your family. In many ways, the virtual world of the Internet is like that of the real world. Similar safety rules apply: Don't go anywhere with a stranger because people are not always what they appear or claim to be. Before allowing your children online, discuss safety issues with them. Talk to them about your concerns and together set up family guidelines for computer use.



Help your children to understand why it is important that they do not give out personal information, even if their new e-mail pal seems to be real friendly or a fun website offers them a free gift for the information.

Find out if your Internet Service Provider (e.g., AOL, Yahoo, Comcast, etc) has built in parental controls. Become familiar with what Internet features you can and cannot control while your child is online.

Let your children know that they can come to you if they are receiving messages that make them feel uncomfortable. Tell them that in such an event, they should save the messages for you to read and handle in an appropriate manner.

Set up guidelines that deal specifically with meeting people on the Internet. Talk to your children about what to do if their new Internet friend asks to see them in person or wants them to send pictures of themselves.

Teach your children good "netiquette" (etiquette on the Internet) so that they feel more comfortable and won't accidentally offend someone. For example, USING ALL CAPS is the equivalent of yelling or screaming; underscoring before and after a word indicates emphasis in the same way as bold or italic.

Keep the computer in a high traffic part of the house such as the living room. This will enable you to monitor your children's activities without making them feel as if you are watching over their shoulders all the time.

Take the time to find websites you think your children will enjoy and "bookmark" them. This will help direct your children away from using search engines where they might find inappropriate sites (you'd be surprised at what a simple search such as "games" can turn up).

Most importantly, spend time with your children talking about their experience online. Give them a chance to show you what they have learned, their favorite sites and topics.

Many of these safety issues are further discussed on various websites. Use search engines (www.google and www.yahoo.com for example) to find more information regarding safety on the Internet for further reference. By taking appropriate precautions, you and your family can explore and enjoy the many wonderful features of the Internet.