

Internet Safety

Kids today are growing up online. Studies show that almost every school child has been online, and three-quarters of young people have Internet access from their homes.

Not only do more children have access to the Internet than ever before, but they are using it more, too. Many schools incorporate the Internet into their curricula and encourage online research for projects. But that's not all kids are doing online. They also email, chat with friends through instant messenger and in chat rooms, play games, create websites and web blogs, and just surf the 'net.

Even as kids grow savvier in their use of the Internet, it can still be a dangerous place. The good news is that most dangers can be avoided if children and their parents learn about smart Internet use.

What Parents Can Do

- Talk with children about the benefits and risks of the Internet. Ask them what they do online, what websites they visit, who they chat with, and what games they play.
- When possible, go online with your children. Have them show you their favorite websites, online games, and chat rooms.
- Go online and look at websites, chat rooms, and blogs that your children might visit. This will help you identify what you think is important to discuss with them. Make a list of any websites you find that you think your children will enjoy and share it with them.
- Keep the computer in a busy area of the house.
- With your children, agree on rules of what they can and cannot do online, when they can go on the Internet, and how long they can stay.
- If your children tell you that they saw something inappropriate online, don't blame or punish them. Remember that how you react will affect what your children share with you in the future.
- Ask who your children talk to online and how they communicate (i.e. email, instant messenger, chat rooms, blogs, etc.). Tell them that you expect them to be as nice online as they are offline. Make sure they know the dangers of meeting new friends online.
- Decide if you want to allow your children to purchase items or sign up for online services (e.g., membership to a gaming website) on their own or if they should ask your permission first.
- Teach children about plagiarism. Explain that if they conduct online research they must give attribution to the author, organization, or website that created the content.
- Talk with children about downloading music and movies online. If you decide to let your children download files onto your computer, show them legal ways to do so, such as using pay per download or pay per month services like iTunes, Napster, etc.
- Consider using a filter, blocking, or ratings system for your computer.