

Parents' Guide to Internet Safety



The Internet is an exciting and wonderful place! There are numerous benefits to using the Internet, including:

1. **Information!** There are an unlimited number of websites to find any information you want, from the latest news to history and science.
2. Educational games that reinforce concepts learned at school.
3. E-mail and the web reinforce literacy—lots of reading and writing!

Dangers of the Internet:

1. **Online predators:** Your child can interact with anyone anonymously through chat rooms or e-mail. There are predators online that target children and pretend to be their friend. They may pretend to be the same age and sex as the child and will correspond with them for a while to develop trust. Then they will exploit that trust. I don't need to go into all the horrible things that can and have happened. This is why your child needs to be monitored when they are on the Internet, and you should make a point to know the people they are talking to. And make sure your child knows that just because someone says "My name is Susie and I am a 10 year-old girl", doesn't mean they really are--they could be a 40 year-old man with bad intentions.
2. **Cyber-bullying:** When children chat on-line with friends or blog (a type of website where you can post messages), things can turn ugly very quickly with devastating consequences. There have been instances where children have been bullied on-line by classmates and it has led to the child committing suicide. This is another great reason for you to make it a point to know who your child is talking to and monitor what they are saying, particularly if you notice behavior changes in your child (more withdrawn, angry, etc.)
3. **Inappropriate websites:** There are hate-message sites out there that masquerade as legitimate websites. We need to know where our children are going on the Internet and what they are doing so that they are not influenced by inappropriate messages. And we need to teach them to recognize and avoid sites that advocate pornography, hate and violence.
4. **Advertising:** Children are bombarded by messages to buy this or that, to be cool and get the latest gadget or toy. We need to teach them how to

discriminate and be critical thinkers, and not accept all the messages they get as true or accurate.

5. **Viruses and Spyware:** Spyware and viruses inadvertently downloaded from the Internet could infect your computer and cause loss of proper function and a loss of privacy (others could gain access to your personal information).

Guidelines for Home Internet Use:

1. Put the computer in a public place in your house. Don't put it in a child's bedroom. This is so that you can supervise their use of the Internet more effectively, and they will be less likely to visit places that are inappropriate or put themselves in risky situations.
2. Use a special software or Internet provider tools that block offensive and inappropriate content or websites (like Webwatcher, SpectorPro and Spy Agent). Be aware that children often can get around these restrictions, and nothing takes the place of good supervision. Some of these programs are also tracking programs to track what websites your child visits (the "History" menu on your web browser is good for that as well).
3. Purchase a good virus protection program for your computer and keep it updated. Some Internet service providers include this in their services.
4. Set rules of Internet use for your child. Rules should include:
 - a. Specify when they are allowed to use the Internet, for how long and for what purpose (schoolwork, e-mail, games, etc.)
 - b. No unsupervised on-line activity should be allowed.
 - c. They should never give out personal information (name, age, password, address, phone number, name of their school or a picture).
 - d. They should never use a credit card without your permission.
 - e. Never arrange a meeting in-person with someone they have met online.
 - f. Don't respond to messages that make them uncomfortable. They should tell you or a trusted adult right away if they get a message or come across a website that makes them feel this way.
 - g. They should never use bad language or send mean messages online. This is called cyber-bullying and can be very upsetting to the person on the receiving end.
 - h. They should check with you before downloading any software or images (pictures or graphics). Downloading always carries a risk of infecting your computer with viruses or spyware.

Common sense and parental supervision are the keys to an enjoyable and safe Internet experience for your family. Safe surfing!

[Click here](http://www.lausd.net/Hobart_EI/websafety.html) to return to Mrs. Timm's Internet Safety Page
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