

Protecting Your Children

on the Internet



Using the Web, E-Mail, and Chat Rooms Safely

The World Wide Web offers many opportunities for your children to learn about their community, state, country, and world. With the click of a mouse, children and youth can access information, visit far away people and places, play games, and learn more about hobbies or special interests. However, because there is also a lot of commercial information, such as products being advertised and marketing information, parents need to help their children become information literate. Therefore, parents should encourage the use of noncommercial sites.

Children and youth can also use the Web to find help with homework or research various topics. Web users often use a search engine to help them find the information they are looking for. When a user types in a single word or phrase, such as "horses," the search engine provides a list of sites that contain the word horses in either the Web address or the site content. Users then click on any of the listed sites to visit those pages. While search engines help make the Web user-friendly, parents need to be aware of the potential hazards that accompany Web usage.

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FAMILY- AND CHILD-FRIENDLY SEARCH ENGINES

Many search engines have created family-friendly filters that allow you to set limits on what can be viewed. These must be turned on before a search is begun. Other search engines were created for children's use. A few of these search engines include:

Education World
[http://](http://www.education-world.com/)

www.education-world.com/

Yahooligans
www.yahooligans.com

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

KidsClick
[http://](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick!/)
[sunsite.berkeley.edu/](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick!/)
KidsClick!/

Ask Jeeves for Kids
www.AJKids.com

Web Hazards

- Using search engines or Web links given on other pages, children and youth can intentionally or accidentally find sites that contain sexually explicit or otherwise objectionable material (such as hatred, violence, drugs or alcohol, or cult activity).
- Because the material on Web sites is not monitored, information that a child finds may be unreliable, untrue, misleading, or outdated.
- Many games that are available on the Internet are excessively violent.
- Internet sites are not restricted in marketing alcohol or tobacco products to children.
- Many sites request personal information, including name, address, phone number, credit card information, or social security number. Be sure and explain to your children not to share this information on-line without checking with you!

Protecting Your Child When Using the Web

- Keep your computer in a central location in your home (such as a family room). With other family members around, children may be less likely to view inappropriate material.
- Lay ground rules before allowing your child to surf the Web. Post the rules in a visible spot by the computer. Good rules to include are:
 1. Never give out personal information on the computer without parental permission.
 2. Children are only allowed to use the computer for a set period of time each day.
 3. Do not order products over the Internet without parental permission.



WEB TIP

Not comfortable letting your children surf alone? Using your computer's toolbar, create a favorites list of sites that you have already reviewed. Your children can then surf to sites you've already checked out. Remember, **this is not a foolproof safety method**. Many sites contain links to other sites—it's impossible to check out every site your children could potentially access.



- Surf the Web with your children—see what your children are interested in and learn from their computer experience!
- Know where your children spend time. Just as you want to know the friends that your children hang out with, you should also know where they spend their time on the computer. If you use *Internet Explorer* or *Netscape Navigator* to access the Internet, you can view your browser's search history. Just click on the toolbar button marked "history" to view all previously visited Web sites.
NOTE: It is easy to clear a search history. If children begin clearing their search histories, it may be a sign that they are visiting inappropriate sites.
- Use filtering or blocking software to block certain sites from being viewed on your computer. There are many types of blocking or filtering software, so it is important to visit a computer store to determine the best product to meet your family's needs.
- Encourage your children to tell you if they have accidentally visited an inappropriate site. By keeping communication open, children know they can approach you about any topic.

Reporting an Internet Crime

It is often difficult to tell the difference between annoying and illegal Internet material. If you suspect a criminal activity, contact your local state police department. If there is an immediate danger to your children or your family, call 911.



E-Mail Safety

Electronic mail (e-mail) can be used by your children to keep in contact with friends, family, teachers, and classmates. Children who use e-mail can also develop their writing and typing skills. It is important, however, that parents are aware of to and from whom their children are writing and receiving mail. Messages written by someone your children know or unsolicited e-mail, (often called “spam”), can contain objectionable material or offensive language.

SURF MONKEY

www.surfmonkey.com

Looking for a safe e-mail account for your children? Visit Surf Monkey to sign up for a free account. Children who have a Surf Monkey account can only receive e-mails from addresses approved by their parents. If your child receives a message from someone who is not approved, the message will be locked until it is viewed and approved by you. Children using a Surf Monkey account cannot receive spam mail. This program is ideal for elementary-aged children.

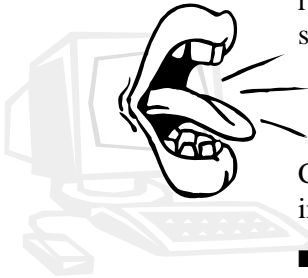


Protecting Your Children When Using E-Mail

In order to protect your children when they are using e-mail, ask them about the people they are communicating with. Remind your children never to meet with anyone they e-mail unless they have received your permission. Finally, look into the parental control features offered by your e-mail service. Many programs offer the option of routing a child’s e-mail to an adult account for screening. Other programs reject e-mails sent from specific addresses. Still other programs block e-mails with offensive language from being sent or received.

Chat Rooms

Chat rooms are places on the Internet where people can communicate to one another by typing messages that will appear for everyone else to read and respond to. Chat rooms are often designed to discuss topics of interest to the participants, such as a particular hobby or television show. As with any Internet tool used by children, parents must be alert to the on-line chat rooms their children are participating in. Most chat rooms are not monitored for inappropriate conversations or offensive language.



Protecting Your Children When in a Chat Room

Consider the following suggestions before allowing your children to chat:

- Always use a screen name rather than your real first or last name so that you will not be sharing any personal information with unnecessary people.
- Visit a chat room with your children until you are comfortable with the topics being discussed and with your children's knowledge of safety rules.
- Remind your children never to give out personal information about themselves, including their name, address, the school they attend, or anything else that would help someone to identify them.
- Make sure your children understand that people they chat with may not be who they say they are.
- Remind your children *never* to arrange a meeting with someone they meet on the Internet without your approval and presence.
- Always check out any chat rooms your children are interested in visiting.



Looking for fun projects for children and youth that are also educational?

Check out the Pennsylvania 4-H

Web site at:

<http://>

[pa4h.cas.psu.edu/
curric.html](http://pa4h.cas.psu.edu/curric.html)



Web Resources

The World Wide Web and all its related tools are valuable resources when used safely. The most important thing for any parent to do is to become involved in what their children are doing on the computer. To find more about the topics discussed in this article, visit any of the following Web sites:



<http://www.psp.state.pa.us/psp/cwp/view.asp?A=13&Q=82316>

This site for kids is sponsored by the Pennsylvania State Police and provides useful information about Internet safety.



<http://www.ou.edu/oupd/kidtool.htm>

This site by the University of Oklahoma Police Department describes the benefits and risks of the Internet and offers guidelines for parents on keeping their children safe on-line.



www.getnetwise.org

This is a great site to help users differentiate between illegal and simply annoying Internet activities. The site also highlights the risks associated with Internet use and offers helpful information on reporting computer crimes.



<http://www.yahooligans.com/parents/>

A great Web site that includes guidelines and resources for making a family's Internet experience positive, safe, and fun.



<http://www.xdetect.com/main.html>

This site describes a variety of monitoring software programs for parents to purchase. It also includes articles on computer safety.



www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/50.htm

This page is a wonderful resource for parents. It includes 50 great Web sites for children and families to visit together.



www.childrenspartnership.org

Parents can download a free information guide to Internet safety from this site. *The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway* offers information to help families become computer savvy, set safety guidelines, and learn more about using computers for educational purposes. The guide also helps you to determine your children's readiness for using computer resources.



www.familyguidebook.com

This site offers useful information for family Web surfing. It includes benefits of using the Web, as well as safety information and cautions for families to consider. This site also includes tips on "netiquette," or proper computer etiquette to use while surfing the Web.



Prepared by Daniel F. Perkins, Ph. D., associate professor of agricultural and extension education.

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