

Understanding Safety on the Internet

The Internet provides many benefits for your child. Access to the Internet can improve your child's reading skills by providing interesting materials to read. As children use the Internet to connect with places around the world, they can learn about other cultures and traditions. Your children can use the Internet to access libraries around the corner or around the world and to specific collections of information and reference materials.

There are also dangers to the Internet. Below are some safety guidelines to discuss with your child or teen.

- Never give out personal information like phone numbers, birth dates, passwords, and addresses. This includes posting this information on web sites and online diaries like *Xanga, My Space, Bebo, Hi5, or FaceBook. Consider using a pseudonym; avoid listing your child's name and E-mail address in any public directories and profiles.
- If your child has a web site, online diary, profile, or other web space for public viewing, periodically check the content for appropriateness and give helpful direction. Have your child explain how to view this information. Some suggest having your own personal site.
- Many sources encourage no posting or sharing of pictures of your child or teen online. If posting pictures, make sure it is acceptable with all the people in the picture. Also, ask yourself how a person visiting the web site may interpret the picture, considering what type of clothes or poses are portrayed. They may interpret the picture differently than you intended.
- Just like stranger safety rules, tell your child to inform you if someone he/she met online asks for a face-to-face meeting. Know who your children are talking to and ask them to go through their buddy list explaining who each person is. Get to know their "online friends" just as you get to know all of their other friends.
- Keep the computer in a common area such as a family room, kitchen, or den so you can monitor your child's use of the Internet. Have children and teens report obscene or violent materials. ***"Teenagers are particularly at risk because they are more likely to participate in online discussions regarding companionship..."***
- Monitor the amount of time your child or teen spends online. If it is for entertainment purposes, it is important to be clear on how much time is permitted. ***While children and teens need a certain amount of privacy, they also need parental involvement.***
- Be honest about the dangers of the Internet. Some people they meet online are not who they claim to be. Children or teens might encounter e-mail or *chat room /

bulletin board messages that are harassing, demeaning, or belligerent.
Acquaintances or friends may post words that they would not ordinarily say to someone face to face.

- Monitor phone and Internet bills for unknown charges to make sure that children or teens are not accessing inappropriate sites or purchasing merchandise.
- Instruct children or teens to NOT click on *links that are contained in e-mails or *Instant Messages from persons they do not know. These could lead to inappropriate web sites or downloads.
- Inappropriate pictures can come from cell phone text messages as well. Instruct your child on the appropriate usage of cell phones that take pictures and picture sharing.

My Rules for Online Safety (Post these rules by the Computer)

1. I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
2. I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
3. I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother or father along.
4. I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
5. I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the online service.
6. I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

Helpful Internet Sites

www.safekids.com www.kidsdomain.com www.protectkids.com

***Terms and Definitions**

- **Instant Messenger(IM)** – Direct communication with others on the Internet by typing and sending the information instantly.
- **Buddy List**– List of buddies, friends, acquaintances that appear on a customized list when online. People can IM each other from Buddylists. Strangers can also IM people online.

- **Xanga, My Space, Bebo, Hi5, and FaceBook**– are some of the communities of online diaries and journals. Anyone can sign up for this free community where people of all ages share thoughts with friends and meet new friends. Some have age restrictions but rules seem inconsistently enforced. Postings are open for anyone to read unless a setting is used to block unknown users but pictures can still be copied and sent. (See www.Xanga.com, www.myspace.com, www.bebo.com, www.hi5.com, and www.facebook.com.)
- **Chat Room**– Where groups of people sign on for topic discussions or just chatting.
- **Links**– Click on words, names, or pictures that take you to another web site.

"The best way to assure that your children are having positive online experiences is to stay in touch with what they are doing"