



Internet Safety Tips for Parents and Guardians

- Install antivirus software on your computer and keep it up to date. Use a firewall for protection. Young people are notorious for downloading games and applications from Web sites that may include harmful viruses. Make sure you back up files regularly.
- Take advantage of any free parental controls and spam blockers provided by your Internet service provider.
- When kids are young (elementary-school age), the best practice is to bookmark appropriate sites for your children to visit and reach an agreement that these are the only sites they can visit online. If they wish to venture to a new site, they should check with you first. Teach them to use a “kid-friendly” search engine, such as Yahoo!igans, and set your Google Search Preferences on Strict Filtering to avoid the display of inappropriate content.
- Limit your children’s online time to 1 hour or less a day.
- As kids move into the tween and teen years, consider adding monitoring software. Monitoring software allows you to view the sites they visit and to review chat sessions and comments they post on social-networking sites. You can also view the history of the sites visited on your computer by using the Control/Shift/H keys on a PC or selecting View from the toolbar on a PC or Mac. Kids often learn how to clear the history by selecting the Delete History option. If your child appears to be deleting the history of sites visited, you will need to add monitoring software.
- Teach your child how to communicate appropriately in cyberspace. Explain how easy it is for messages to be misinterpreted online.

Discuss the golden rule as it applies to cyberspace. Stress to your child that, “If you wouldn’t want someone to say that to you, don’t send it in a message.” Discuss how easily rumors get started online and the importance of avoiding gossip. Teach your child how to be a rumor blocker (don’t pass it on) rather than a rumor starter. Remind him or her not to respond to a message when feeling angry or upset. It’s okay to respond after calming down.

- Discuss with your child what information is appropriate to share online and what information is too private or personal. Make sure your child knows to avoid posting his or her phone number, cell phone number, date of birth, or home address on Web sites or in instant messages.
- Younger children should be prohibited from sending and sharing personal photos online or through a cellular phone without your permission. Discuss with tweens and teens with whom they can share photos and what types of photos are appropriate. Explain that sharing nude photos of minors is against the law. If your teen is posting photos on a social-networking site, make sure he or she uses a privacy feature that only allows friends to view the photographs.
- Respect the minimum-age guidelines of social-networking sites. Do not allow your children to lie about their ages to bypass the age limits. If you are willing to let your child have a profile on a social-networking site such as MySpace.com or Facebook.com, set it up together. Emphasize how important it is for you to know their passwords.
- Make sure your child understands the importance of keeping their passwords private. Good friends may become enemies and could wreak havoc if they know your child’s passwords.
- Online friends should be friends in the real world. Make sure the friends on your child’s buddy lists and social-networking sites are people he or she knows, rather than friends of friends.
- Google your child’s name, screen name, phone number, and address regularly to see what pops up. Teach him or her the importance of building a positive online reputation for the future, because employers and colleges may search online for information about him or her.

- Keep the computer in a central place, but recognize that you need to set guidelines for other wireless devices, such as cell phones, PDAs, and gaming devices. Computers and laptops that have Internet capability should not be in bedrooms. As your child enters his or her later teens, you may be able to relax some of these standards based on your teen's demonstrated appropriate use of technology. This will also prepare him or her for the increased freedom to come in college and adulthood.