



► PROTECT Your Family

Online safety and security begin with you

The Internet is both a classroom and a virtual playground where children can learn, experience new things, and have fun. As kids get older, they also use the Internet to form social networks—exchanging e-mail and instant messages with friends, creating blogs and personal Web pages, sharing music, and playing games.

But just as there are places in every city and town that are unsafe or inappropriate for children and teenagers, there are places online that are not good for kids.

Learning about the risks your children may encounter on the Internet, and how you can reduce those risks, will help you keep your children safer online.

► Top online risks for children

Generally, the Internet is a rewarding place for kids, but the potential risks are real:

- **Exposure to inappropriate content**—As your children explore the Internet, they can stumble upon information or images that don't fit with your values or are not appropriate for kids.
- **Cyberbullies**—Most people play nice online, but some use the Internet to harass, belittle, or try to intimidate others. Attacks may range from name calling to physical threats and are rarely seen by parents.
- **Invasion of privacy and online fraud**—Children may innocently share photographs or personal information about themselves or their families on personal Web pages, when playing games, or in registration forms. Such information could put children at risk from Internet thieves or child predators.
- **File sharing abuses**—Sharing music, videos, and other files online is risky. Careless use of file-sharing (peer-to-peer) programs might expose your children to disturbing content or open a door for malicious software that could damage, delete, or copy data stored on your family computer.
- **Exposure to inappropriate and potentially dangerous contact**—Predators may use the Internet to befriend vulnerable children and teens by pretending to be another child or a trustworthy adult, or by playing on teens' desire for romance and adventure, and then trying to persuade kids to meet them in person.

Understanding the risks your children may face online is important, but you need active strategies and tools to help you put that knowledge to work. Here are four steps to help protect your family online:

► Talk to your children about what they do online

Talk with your children regularly about the things they enjoy and the friends they talk with online. Create an environment that encourages them to tell you about anything online that makes them uncomfortable—with no fear of losing their computer or other privileges.

- Talk with your kids about Internet risks and how their own behavior can increase or lessen those risks.
- Learn about the games your children play online and which chat rooms they visit. Your children can teach you about the newest sites and latest online trends.
- Read what they write in their blogs and their profiles on social networking sites.
- Teach your kids to trust their instincts and to tell you immediately if they ever feel threatened or scared by something that happens online.

▶ Set clear rules for Internet use

Establish clear rules about when and how your children can use the Internet, and post the rules near your family computer. Encourage your children to:

- Keep Internet-connected computers, game consoles, and other devices in your family room or another central location where you can be aware of what your kids are doing online.
- Never open attachments, share music, or click links in e-mail or instant messages. They could be downloading malicious software or disturbing content.
- Treat others as they want to be treated. Bullying other people online is not just hurtful and rude; in some jurisdictions it's a crime.
- Stand up for themselves. If someone bullies them online, they should ignore it and block further contact. If necessary, help your kids report the cyberbully to the appropriate Web site managers, school officials, or other authorities.
- Respect the property of others. Unauthorized copying and sharing music, games, and other copyrighted material is piracy and is illegal.
- Never go alone to meet an Internet "friend" in person. People your kids meet online may not be who they say they are, or they may have bad intentions.

▶ Keep personal information private

Teach your children never to share personal information about themselves or your family online without your permission, and never with anyone they don't know and trust in the real world.

- Make sure you know who your kids are sharing information with through e-mail, instant messaging, blogging, and social networking sites.
- Help your child choose a screen name or e-mail address that reveals nothing personal and isn't suggestive. For example, *musicfan*, but not *john13* or *sexysusie*.
- Personal information includes not only facts—such as your child's name, age, phone number, or address—but also photos and feelings. Predators look for vulnerability—sadness, loneliness, or anger—and they can sometimes use what seems like disconnected information to locate a child.

▶ Use family safety software

Many companies offer family safety technology to help you protect your children and reduce your risks online.

No one technology solution will suit every family, so you may want to explore different tools to help keep your children safe. You can get a comprehensive list of popular tools for family safety at kids.getnetwise.org/tools.

▶ What to do if you run into problems

If someone threatens or continually harasses your kids, or attempts to lure them into face-to-face meetings for illicit purposes, report the problem to:

- Your school or community organization, if your child is being bullied online by a fellow student or teammate.
- Your local police. If you believe the child is in immediate danger, call 911.
- The CyberTipline at **1-800-843-5678** or at www.cybertipline.com, which is hosted by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.



▶ Helpful Resources:

www.staysafe.org

kids.getnetwise.org/tools

 staysafe.org