

Internet Safety

The Internet, or “the Web,” is a large part of young people’s lives today. The risks involved in Internet use are similar to risks in other aspects of a child’s or teen’s life, but they present themselves in new ways that may seem new or unfamiliar to parents.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO MY CHILD WHEN USING THE INTERNET?

- **What is on the Internet:** All kinds of information and material are on the Web. Your child may come across material that is inappropriate or disturbing, including sexual, violent, or substance-use promoting messages. Another concern is that some of the information online is not accurate. Even Web sites that look professional may provide false information.
- **Who is on the Internet:** People on the Internet may not be who they say they are. People may send inappropriate messages or try to get information from your child. People you don’t know may try to meet with your child. Both people your child knows, and doesn’t know, may try to bully your child online.
- **Personal health:** Using the Internet and computer a lot may take important time away from other parts of your child’s life, such as friends and family or sports and hobbies. Too much time on the Internet can lead to Internet addiction; this month’s issue of the *Archives* features a research study describing Internet addiction.
- **Privacy:** If your child displays personal information, it may allow strangers to find him or her. If your child displays risky or intimate information online, it may impact his or her ability to get a job and increase the risks that strangers will contact him or her online.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO TEACH THEIR CHILDREN INTERNET SAFETY?

Parents may remember being told “don’t talk to strangers” or “don’t hang out in places that are unsupervised” when they were children. Many of these safety rules apply to the Internet. Parents should feel confident that adapting and applying rules that they already know will help them promote Internet safety. The key is to communicate early and often with your child.

- **Learn about the Internet:** Take time to learn about the Internet yourself. If your child has a social networking Web site profile, create a profile yourself. Learn the privacy settings on the profile, and review those with your child.
- **What is on the Internet:** Talk to your children about what they have seen and learned on the Internet on a regular basis. Share your own stories of what you have seen and how you interpreted it.
- **Who is on the Internet:** Just as you do in your child’s offline life, learn who your child’s online friends are and check in frequently to view their online friends.
- **Personal health:** Make sure your child’s life has a good balance of offline time to enjoy other activities. Set time limits for Internet use and enforce them.



- **Privacy:** Teach your child to never give out personal information to strangers online and to limit what personal information they display. Emphasize that everything public on the Internet can be seen by the whole world.
- **Computer location:** Keep the computer in a public part of your house so that you can monitor computer use and time spent.
- **Be a role model:** Model appropriate media use yourself. Do not interrupt family time by answering cell phones or sending e-mails.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Academy of Pediatrics.
<http://safetynet.aap.org/>.

For further reading: www.wiredkids.org and <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/june09socialmedia.htm>.

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