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Teaching Children Internet Safety

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Technology is now a normal part of our everyday lives and continues to advance faster than we can comprehend. Smart phones, laptops, and tablets are in more homes and hands now than ever before. At the same time, computer hackers are becoming smarter, and child predators surfing the Internet are more prevalent. So, how do we keep our children safe with this ever-evolving technology and the easily accessible World Wide Web? Like any safety issue, it is wise to have a serious talk with your children about the dangers that lurk on the Internet, take advantage of resources that help protect them (and you), and keep a very close eye on their activities.



For children with special needs, some of the following issues may be hard for them to comprehend. It is particularly important to monitor their Internet activity and continually talk about social and technology dos and don'ts.

The Internet opens up wonderful resources for our

children. If a child knows how to enter just a few letters, he or she can access any kind of information and make contacts or play games with other children around the world in just a matter of seconds.

With this easy access, there are hazards. For example, if a child is searching the Internet for a particular subject, one missed keystroke can take him or her to a very inappropriate site. Be aware of what your kids are searching. Check the "History" of sites your child has visited. If there are sites listed in the computer's history that are inappropriate (even if accessed accidentally), delete and block them.



Congress enacted the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)* in 1998 to prevent online solicitors and others from gathering a child's personal information. "The primary goal of COPPA is to place parents in control over what information is collected from their young children online. The Rule was designed to protect children under age 13 while accounting for the dynamic

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nature of the Internet.” COPPA requires websites to reveal and explain their privacy policies up front and get parental consent first before collecting or using a child’s name, address, phone number, or Social Security number. The law also prohibits a site from requiring a child to provide more personal information than necessary to play a game or participate in a contest. Older children who are savvy with a computer will sometimes check the necessary information as if they are the parent and continue navigating through the website. Even with COPPA laws, your child’s best protection (along with protecting your private information) is you!

Here are some tips for monitoring your child’s computer actions and website availability. Follow the rules you set for your child, as well as those set by your Internet service provider.

- Help your children create screen names to protect their real identity.
- Enable the parental control settings on your computer and/or devices to block certain material from coming into your computers. Certain software programs can block access to sites based on a “bad site” list that your ISP creates. Use filtering programs to block sites from coming in and restrict personal information from going out online. However, none of these parental control options can guarantee 100% protection. 
- Monitor social media sites.
- Block children from private chat rooms using safety features provided by your Internet service or with filtering software. *Posting messages in a chat room reveals your email address to everyone else in the chat room.* 

Help protect your children from predators and explicit material by:


- Becoming computer literate and learning how to block objectionable material.
- Keeping the computer in a common area where you can watch and monitor its use. 
- Spending time online together and teaching appropriate online behavior.
- Sharing an email account with your child in order to monitor messages.
- Bookmarking your children’s favorite sites for easy access and eliminating the possibility of accidentally entering other sites.
- Finding out what kind of online protection (if any) your school offers or any place your child has access to the Internet without your supervision. 
- Encouraging your child to *always* tell you if something isn’t right about someone attempting to contact or befriend him or her online. Take your child seriously if he or she reports an uncomfortable online exchange.
- Forwarding copies of obscene messages or materials that you or your child receive to your Internet service provider. If messages continue, contact the police.
- Contacting your local law enforcement agency or the FBI if your child receives suggestive or inappropriate messages or is being “courted” online. Child predators often assume the role of a teenager or “friend of a friend” after stalking social media sites where all of your child’s friends are on one list.




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Warn your child to:

- **NEVER trade personal photographs over the Internet.** If someone online is asking your child to provide photos of himself or herself via the Internet (or to view inappropriate photos), call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at (800) 843-5678. 
- **NEVER reveal personal information online:** address, phone numbers, school name or location, bus stop, dance studio, favorite store, or any information about their daily routines.
- **NEVER agree to meet anyone that is attempting to get to know him or her online,** and tell another adult immediately if someone is persistent about meeting him or her in person.
- **NEVER respond to emails or messages from people he or she does not know.**
- **NEVER call someone he or she "met" online using your landline or cell phone.** You may have told your child

not to give out phone numbers; so, pedophiles (acting as friends) encourage children to call them. Using their caller ID, offenders instantly have the child's phone number, and with that number, all sorts of information is easily obtainable. 

Monitor Your Credit Accounts for Online Purchases

Young children (and their friends) playing games online can easily download new games, tokens, or more challenging levels through an in-app purchase and not fully understand that they are charging money to your account.

Older children may know enough information to go in and purchase apps in an app store account that you have set up and still not realize that they're spending your money. Monitor your credit card and phone bills closely for unfamiliar account charges. Never give your passwords to your children or any other information that will allow them to make purchases of any kind online. 

Resources:

Bureau of Consumer Protection Business Center. (2013) *Complying with COPPA*. Retrieved July 2013 from <http://www.business.ftc.gov/privacy-and-security/childrens-privacy>.

Goodwill Community Foundation, Inc. (2013) *Teaching Kids About Internet Safety*. Retrieved July 2013 from <http://www.gcflearnfree.org/internetsafetyforkids/1>.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. (2013) *NetSmartz Workshop*. Retrieved July 2013 from <http://www.netsmartz.org/internetsafety>.

The Nemours Foundation. (2013) *KidsHealth – Internet Safety*. Retrieved July 2013 from http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net_safety.html.

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