



Privacy, Security & Virus Information

Protecting Your Children From Online Risks

Parents these days are finding it difficult to balance children's use of the educational technology of the Internet, and the dangers and fears associated with cyber crime. Parents understand that the Internet can be a wonderful tool for children to use. On the other hand, there are predators and criminals in cyberspace that parents need to protect their children from. In several cases, many children are more technologically advanced than their parents. Often, parents can feel intimidated by this technology and may refrain from enforcing rules that are imperative to protecting their children. It is important for parents to understand this technology in order to protect their children as they surf and socialize online.

Luckily, there are new developments in computer technology that have begun to take pressure off parents to stay current with every risk. There is security software that is available that can restrict what kids see and do on the web. It is important, however, that parents become more involved with their children's online activities. It is also important to make sure that their children know how to act and how to react to what they see on the web.

Online Risks: What You Should Be Concerned About

There are several online experiences that can result in inappropriate or illegal activity. However, meeting a predator online ranks among the worst fears for parents. Kids need to be educated about issues of online safety. Kids need to be told that not everything they read online is true and that there is a tremendous amount of material that is on the web that is not meant for their eyes. Children should understand that there are inappropriate sites including, fascist, drug, and pornography websites containing explicit content that an unprotected child can easily view. However, there are filtering technologies, child-safe browsers, and search engines that restrict where they can search online.

Chat Rooms and Websites

Children should be informed by their parents how to protect their personal information and the information of their family and friends. Many child-oriented Web sites solicit information from kids in surveys and forms in exchange for prizes, and get them to register online for fan clubs. In some of these online chat rooms, sharing their gender, age, and favourite hang-outs may seem harmless – but predators can easily use this information to track down the child.

Online predators pretend to be children in order to gather personal information and ultimately contact and meet their unsuspecting victims. Kids, however, can also pretend to be older than they actually are – not thinking about the potential effects of such actions.

The threats to children over online bullying are also a common problem. It is also common for kids to get into online fights via email, chat, and instant messaging, especially when the child is at a vulnerable age.

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Social Networking and Blogs

Ask your kids to reveal their online profiles and blogs, so you can check the content. Blogs and social networking sites, such as MySpace, are online places where kids sometimes share too much personal information—not only names and addresses but also personal photos that sometimes show illegal acts, such as underage drinking. Use Google's search tools to locate whether or not your child has had their personal information copied and posted elsewhere on the net. Type into the search engine your child's full name, phone number, and other personal information.

P2P File Sharing

There have been new privacy problems concerning Peer-to-peer file sharing (P2P). These new programs have allowed people to browse and download files from the Internet-connected computers of anyone else with the same P2P program. However, this software makes it easy for cyber criminals to spread viruses, spyware, and Trojan horses. Children can also accidentally download pornography that is labelled misleadingly.

What Can Parents Do To Protect Their Children?

Parents can take the time to protect their children from online threats. By sitting down with your child and reviewing the 10 rules of online safety, you can protect them in order to allow them to have a worry-free experience that encourages learning and understanding.

10 Ways to Protect Your Children While Online:

1. Keep track of your children's use of the Internet. Re-locate your computer to a high traffic area of your family home. Limit your child's night time use of the computer.

2. Install your computer with strong security software and make sure to keep it up to date. The McAfee Internet Security Suite guarantees protection from viruses, hackers and spyware. The software protects your children from offensive content, pictures, and Web sites that are inappropriate. By automatically scanning email attachments and files downloaded from P2P file sharing sites, this software will also protect your computer from viruses and spyware.

3. When your kids use social networking sites, such as MySpace and blogs, make sure that understand basic online rules. Explain to your child that they should guard their passwords and that they should never post personal information or inappropriate photos. Blogs and social networking sites offer privacy tools that can be turned on to restrict potentially dangerous users. For kids under the age of 15, these sites automatically provide protective tools. Children should only share information with people that they know and trust from the real world.

4. If your child arranges a meeting with someone online, it's critical that you know all information available. Before the meeting even takes place, you should confirm all personal information about the 'friend'. Always accompany your child to the meeting at a public location.

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5. Kids should not download files from users who they don't know, especially when using P2P file sharing programs. The child could be downloading pictures, games, infected files, and music that are inappropriate, or media files protected by copyright law. Kids should be instructed that it is illegal to upload their music files unless they're certain that they have permission to share and use them. Parents can disable the upload feature in order to prevent their children from engaging in illegal music file sharing. The University of Chicago offers advice on how to disable the upload feature in most file-sharing programs.

6. Discourage your child from filling out online forms or surveys. If your child would like to fill out a form from a legitimate website, such as Disney or Nickelodeon, have them ask you first if it is allowed. This will allow you to review the site's privacy policy and make an educated assessment.

7. Limit your child's online chatting to only monitored rooms. Tell your child to only use a screen name that doesn't reveal their true personal information. Instruct your child to apply these rules to other website use, such as MySpace and Blogs. Do not allow your child to share photos with people they do not know. Make sure they understand that people can lie about who they are and that online friends are still strangers.

8. Show your kids how to ignore e-mails and instant messages from people who they do not know. Kids should never open download attachments, nor click on links in messages that they do not recognize. As with MySpace and blogs, kids should never send out personal information to those they do not know. Change your child's IM settings to disable the function that signs them in when they restart the computer. Have your child disconnect the DSL cable from the computer when they turn it off.

9. Use search engines designed with kids in mind. Children's browsers such as Kid Browser 1.1 do not display inappropriate words or images. These websites come loaded with kid-safe web site and pre-set word filters. Parents will only need to make sure they approve and review the default web sites and words. Kid-oriented search engines including Ask for Kids and Yahooigans perform limited searches and screen search results. Also, check with the website the Search Engine Watch. This site educates parents about how to turn on and off parental controls. The site also enables parents to use parental controls in regular search engines including HotBot, MSN Search, and Google.

10. Allow your kids to find appropriate and helpful websites using lists put together by Internet specialists. Check with the American Library Association to discover the ALA Great Web Sites for Kids. These sites, including the Gov for Kids web site, have child-friendly options and make excellent reference sites. Fact Monster is also an excellent site, packed with information and homework assistance.