

Safety Advice: Parents Guide

The Internet - It's A Real World Out There!



It can be a tough job keeping up to date with kids these days. Just when we thought we were doing OK and could set the video recorder, along comes the Internet. Suddenly we have a new piece of technology, new language and new challenges for us parents! This guide will help you understand the online safety issues and gives practical help as you talk to your children about their Internet use with the SMART Safety Tips.

But My Kids Know More Than I Do!

Many adults can feel intimidated in using the Internet and are baffled by some of the terms and technology. While it is true that many children may have better technical skills than you, children still need parental advice and protection in using this new tool. After all, you can teach your children the importance of wearing a seat belt in a car without understanding how the car engine works!



So What Are The Dangers?



The Internet is like bringing a city into your living room: there are the exciting places for children to go and enjoy but also lots of places where you wouldn't want your children to go unsupervised! The main dangers for children can be grouped into:

Potential CONTACT - from someone online who may wish to harm them. Children must re-learn the "stranger=danger" rule in a new context and never give out personal details or meet alone with anyone they've contacted via the Internet.

Inappropriate CONTENT - keep an eye on the material your children are looking at and agree the ground rules about where your children go and how they behave.

Excessive COMMERCIALISM and advertising which invades your child's privacy. Encourage your children not to fill out forms which ask for lots of personal details.

Can't I Just Use A Filter?

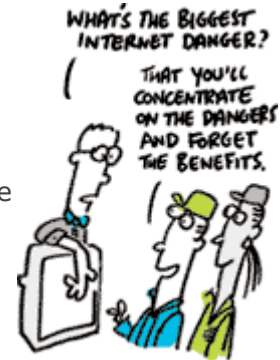
Filtering software can help to block a lot of inappropriate material but they are not 100% effective and are no substitute for good parental involvement. Internet use at school is generally filtered, supervised and safe. But many children use the Net at friend's homes, Internet cafes, libraries and youth clubs where there may be no filters and little supervision. It's therefore important to help educate your children about how to behave online and discuss problems which they may have. It helps to keep the computer in a family room - not tucked away in a bedroom.

What About Mobile Phones?

The issues about being careful online apply equally to mobile telephones. The next generation of mobiles and handheld devices will have more and more Internet facilities on them. It is very important to encourage your children not to give out their mobile numbers to strangers or people they cannot trust completely. Talk about the sort of text messages your children are receiving and sending.

Stick To The Positive

Encourage your children to stick to the fun and positive sites on the Net that reinforce their interests. Just as you look out for good TV programmes for children take the time to find the best and most useful websites for you and your family.



Communicating Your Issues

If you start by telling your child never to do something most children will ask "why not?" and then try to find out! Discussing the potential dangers with your children therefore needs care and sensitivity and involves helping them to see for themselves how they might get into difficulty. Most children will respond more positively if you encourage them to be SMART or "Cool" on the Internet rather than giving them a list of "Dos and don'ts"! The following SMART TIPS have been written especially for children aged 8-14 years.

- S** **SAFE** - Staying safe involves being careful and not giving out your name, address, mobile phone no., school name or password to people online.
- m** **MEETING** someone you have contacted in cyberspace can be dangerous. Only do so with your parent's/carer's permission, and then when they can be present.
- @** **ACCEPTING** e-mails or opening files from people you don't really know or trust can get you into trouble - they may contain viruses or nasty messages.
- r** **REMEMBER** someone online may be lying and not be who they say they are. Stick to the public areas in Chat rooms and if you feel uncomfortable simply get out of there!
- t** **TELL** your parent or carer if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried.

To order the "Keeping up with your Child on the Internet" leaflet from Childnet [click here](#).

There are a number of practical steps you can take using the computer itself to help protect your children. These topics are covered on Childnet's [Kidsmart](#) seminar for parents.

The Kidsmart site also has a special interactive quiz called ["Staying Smart online"](#) which you can do with your children.



There are also [Childnet safety posters](#) which you can order from Childnet.