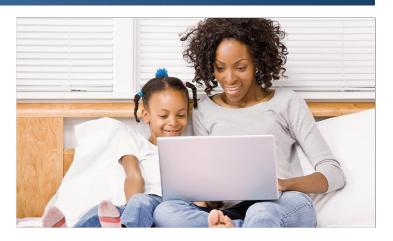# Keeping Your Kids Safe Online

Do you know what your kids are up to online? The Internet offers an exciting world of benefits for today's tech-savvy children. However, parents need to recognize potential threats in cyberspace and teach their kids about online safety. While security software can help parents restrict how kids interact with the Web, it's still important to take an active role in your children's Internet activities and show them how to avoid possible dangers.

Supervise your children until age 10. Sit with them when they are online-answer their questions and encourage your family to act as role models for young children who are just starting to use the Internet.

Use Internet monitoring software for children age 11-14. With kids who are more experienced with technology, use software to control access to websites, and report Internet activities. Talk to your kids about guarding personal information and explain why they shouldn't give it over the Internet.

Remind older teens about online safety. Be aware of the websites they frequent, and keep family communication as open about computers as you can. Teach them about responsible, ethical online behavior-talk to them about their online friends and activities, just as you would in the "real world."

Get security software that can track online activity and restrict personal information from being sent via the Internet. Your online service provider provides tools that will let you control your kids' access to adult material and help protect them from Internet predators. You can also purchase software to block viruses, hackers, and spyware, as well as filter offensive content, pictures, and websites.

If your kids use Facebook or other social media, make sure they strengthen their privacy settings and opt out of facial recognition tagging. Ensure they don't communicate with strangers on social media websites, post their address, phone number, or personally identifiable information.

Set the rules. Create guidelines about when and how long your children can use the computer. Be clear about what they can and cannot do online. Discuss rules about instant messaging, chat rooms, blogs, social networking sites, and virtual games.

Keep the computer in a common area–such as the kitchen or family room, not in individual bedrooms, where you can't watch and monitor its use. Limit nighttime computer use too.

Set up kids' Internet accounts. The parent should have controlling passwords, and use blocking and/or filtering devices. Children should not complete a profile for a service provider and children's screen names should be nondescript so as not to identify that the user is a child.

Don't allow kids to fill out online forms or surveys. If there is a legitimate site where they want to register, have them come to you first so you can check the site's privacy policy and rules of conduct.

Teach your kids about the dangers of email "phishing." "Phishing" is a common email scam designed to fool people into disclosing personal information such as credit card numbers, social security numbers, and account passwords. Tell your kids to ignore emails and messages from people they don't know. They should never open attachments they are not expecting.

Check out video games. Many video games and gaming systems allow kids to go online and interact with friends as well as strangers. Make sure you know exactly who your children are playing with.

Monitor cell phones. If your child has a cell phone, you should monitor it, just as you would with the Internet. Wireless carriers offer parental controls, which enable parents to control usage and filter content on their child's phone.

Stop your child from entering private chat rooms. Posting messages to chat rooms can reveal their email address to others. Make sure they understand that people can lie about who they are. Children should only use monitored chat rooms, with a screen name that doesn't give their true identity-and they should never agree to meet someone they met online in person.

Ultimately, you need to take steps to protect your children online, just as you would in the real world. No option is going to guarantee that they'll be kept away from 100% of the risks on the Internet. When you establish rules and teach your kids how to use the Internet safely and responsibly, you'll minimize the risk of them being exposed to scams, predators, and inappropriate material. Ultimately, the best protection is you!

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