



Keeping Your Kids Safe: The Internet

Parents are now facing modern fears and concerns that they've never dealt with before in this age of the Internet. Multiple Internet sources such as cell phones and play stations also make it even more difficult to keep track of what your child is doing online. With this new threat to children's safety, Parent Trust has researched steps parents can take to keep children safe and secure from online predators and cyber bullying.

Cyber Bullying: Cyber bullying has become common with today's youth. Cyber bullying is when a child plays a hoax, harasses, or shows aggressive behavior towards another child through electronic sources such as computers, mobile phones, or play stations. This can include a direct attack, stalking, playing a prank, or sharing other's personal information (Fogarty, 2006). These activities are worrisome and if your child is a victim of cyber bullying, it could affect their self-esteem, emotional wellbeing, and weaken their social support network in serious ways. There also may be legal repercussions if your child is the perpetrator of cyber bullying.

Online Predators: This particular subject has received much media attention. Children are meeting strangers and potential "predators" through websites such as Facebook.com, Myspace.com, AIM, chat rooms and many more online locations. Although these websites have made an effort to locate dangerous people, there are still threats out there that may put your child in danger.

A parents' first instinct may be to prohibit these websites however, this may be ineffective as your child may do it without permission, either hiding their behavior at home or finding outside sources for Internet usage.

Here are eight tips to keep in mind when thinking about computer safety:

1. Keep the family's computer in a central location so that your children's computer use can be monitored.
2. Educate and talk to your children about the possible dangers online
 - Tell your children about not talking to strangers *online*.
 - Tell them that sharing or posting personal information is not safe. You wouldn't give a stranger on the street your address; you shouldn't give your address to a stranger online either.
3. Ask if your child has ever heard of cyber bullying, if they know anyone who has been cyber bullied, or if *they* have been cyber bullied themselves.
 - Knowing the answers to these questions can help you determine if your child is at risk.
 - Know what friends your child communicates with online. Assess the risk -- if your child has a friend with a history of cyber bullying, talk to you child about the possible risks involved.

4. Learn from your children! Ask them what can be done on the Internet. Doing so, can make you aware of the websites your child goes to and you might even learn something along the way.
5. Establish clear rules for Internet use. This can include time limits, with whom they can communicate, and what is permissible viewing. Revisit rules frequently.
6. Obtain software that can block inappropriate websites and monitor computer use. You may use this monitoring software just like you would a security camera. It may not be necessary to view your child's computer history on a daily basis, but if you suspect something, you can check it out. If you have these software programs, you should let your child know. Honesty is the best policy when it comes to monitoring your child's Internet usage.
7. Know what websites your child regularly goes to: you can ask!
8. You can also check your child's browsing history; have a conversation with your child to let them know you will be doing this. *Privacy is very important to adolescents and checking without their knowledge could cause issues surrounding trust.* Be open and upfront about your safety concerns.

Have open, positive conversations with your children about their online experiences. These can be great opportunities to talk with your children about something they enjoy.

Want to learn more?

Wired Safety, <http://wiredkids.org/parents/parentingonline/index.html>, has a great booklet on how to parent online. This booklet includes a parent/teen agreement form!

Kate Fogarty wrote a great piece on Internet safety and teens for parents. It details more in depth about sexual predators and cyber bullying. http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/document_fy848

References and Resources

Fogarty, Kate. (October 2006) *Teen and Internet Safety*. This document is FCS2248, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.