

Internet Safety at Home

If you're a parent, you'd better learn about this stuff. If that means taking a class or getting a book, so be it. It's hard to protect your kids online if you don't know what they're doing.

Talk to your kids

The best thing that you can do is have an open and on-going conversation with your children about what worries you about the internet and what types of sites or material you would find inappropriate for them to be on. This can start with "anything that you wouldn't look at with me sitting next to you", but should probably become more specific as your child grows older.

Remember that in the next few years, your children will be in university with unmonitored access. **It is more valuable to your children to help them become smart, responsible users than it would be to block and police access.**

Make sure you talk with your children about:

- What worries you about their time "online"
- What type of content you think is not appropriate for them (do they have reasons why they think it should be?)
- Being safe with personal information – personal details are unnecessary. "Your friends already know how to contact you."
- Avoiding contact with people they don't know. There shouldn't be anyone on their buddy or friends list that they don't know personally.
- Telling you when they are contacted by someone that they don't know. This openness can help them avoid meeting up with "strangers".
- Being safe with what other people are posting or saying about them.
- Making their personal spaces accessible to their friends, but not accessible to the public (they will most likely know how to do this)

Basic tips for watching what your children do

There are some simple ways to keep an eye on what your children are doing. They are also simple enough that many kids know ways around them.

- Check the History of their web browser
 - In Internet Explorer you can do this by pressing CTRL + Shift + H
 - This is not foolproof, since settings can be changed to clear the history.
- Use search filtering in Google and Yahoo! (for example)
 - In Google, click Preferences and set SafeSearch to Strict or Moderate filtering
 - In Yahoo!, perform any search, then on the new page in the upper right corner, click Preferences. Change the SafeSearch by clicking Edit and changing the setting. You can lock here, but you will need to create a Yahoo! log in for this.
 - Keep in mind that this only puts protection on these search engines to prevent accidentally coming across inappropriate material in a search. It does not deny access to sites.

Filter Software

Web filter software can be set so that access to inappropriate sites is blocked on your child's computer. The software sometimes comes with remote access allowing you to change settings even if you are away from home. Also, most filter software can log what sites children are accessing or trying to access while blocking.

It is important to mention that filtering software is not perfect in blocking all objectionable content. Some articles have said that filtering blocks about 90% of the inappropriate material. That sounds impressive, but if 10% gets through, isn't that still an issue? Also, children sometimes work out ways "around" the software.

Some titles that are reviewed positively:

- Content Protect: US\$39.99 per year.
 - <http://www.contentwatch.com/products/contentprotect.php>
- K9 Web Protection from Blue Coat: Free for home use.
 - <http://www.k9webprotection.com/index.html>
- Other brands reviewed:
 - <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/>

Vocabulary you should know

- MySpace
A "social networking site" where people can set up profiles about themselves, make contacts with their friends and their "spaces" and communicate with each other by leaving messages. This site is VERY popular with teens right now.
- Blogs
Short for Web Log, these are web sites that allow people to post thoughts and discussions very easily on the web. Blogs have allowed non-technical people to become contributors and participants on the internet.
- Web Filter
Software that runs on a computer monitoring and blocking sites that are deemed inappropriate based on settings made by the administrator (parent).
- YouTube
A video networking site where anyone can post video clips onto the web and anyone can view them.
- P2P
"Peer to Peer" file sharing system that allows people to download music and video and other files from other personal computers around the world – the more people who have the file, the faster it will download to you. You also become an "uploader" of these files as you download other files.

Resources

- Web Aware: A website dedicated to educating parents and children about online safety
<http://www.bewebaware.ca/english/default.aspx>
- Web Aware specific to ages 14-17
http://www.bewebaware.ca/english/safety_tips_14_17.aspx
- Article from CNET on Kids outsmarting Web filter software
http://news.com.com/Kids+outsmart+Web+filters/2009-1041_3-6062548.html
- Yahoo! family links to making sure your children are safe internet users
<http://family.yahoo.com/family/parents>
- Article on MySpace and how it can be misused.
<http://ms1.blogsome.com/2006/10/01/myspace-extremely-popular-with-teens-but-is-it-safe/>