INSIGHTS

FOR FAMILIES

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Tips to keep your child safe on the Internet

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June/July 2012

With extra time on their hands during summer break, many children will turn to the Internet for entertainment. Teach your child basic safety skills to stay safe while surfing the Web with these tips from CommonSenseMedia.org.

Five essential facts of digital life

- **Kids are the creators.** It's all about participating, communicating, making music, images, videos, and posting written content. And the content that's there? Kids must be able to know if it's credible or not.

- Everything happens in front of a **vast, invisible, and often anonymous audience.**

- Once something is out there, it doesn't go away. **Everything leaves a digital footprint.**

- **Information cannot be controlled.** Anything can be copied, changed, and shared instantly.

- **Distance and anonymity separate actions and consequences.** Kids think they can get away with unethical or unacceptable behavior because they don't see immediate consequences.

Internet safety is more than protecting kids from strangers or blocking inappropriate content. It's about helping kids use the Internet and practice safe responsible online behavior. Getting involved in your kids' online life is the key to helping them reap the benefits while minimizing the risks.

Follow these tips to address the most common concerns about online safety for children.

→ **Best "starter" websites**

Three things are important when evaluating websites for little ones: age-appropriate games and activities that won't frustrate your child, audio instructions for pre-readers, and little or no advertising.

Sites that emphasize early learning, positive social skills, and imagination are all great for little ones. Aggressive characters, flashing graphics, and ads for junk food and pricey toys aren't. See commonsensemedia.org/website-lists/online-games-for-kids for recommendations.

→ **The "right" age for online activity**

The age children begin online activity is up to you. These guidelines will give you a good start:

- Always sit with little kids while they're online so you can explain things.
- Put a time limit on your sessions.
- Find age-appropriate sites with high learning potential.
- Avoid just-before-bed computer time. It can be stimulating and interrupt sleep.

→ **Share these essential Internet safety basics with your kids**

Do

- Ask your parents if you can use the Internet.
- Have basic social skills.
- Understand the site's rules and know how to flag other users for misbehavior.
- Recognize "red flags," like if someone asks you personal questions.

Don't

- Go online without a parent's permission.
- Share passwords.
- Pretend to be someone else.
- Share personal details, like name and address.
- Be mean.

→ **What do I need to know about multiplayer games?**

Multiplayer games (called "massively multiplayer online games" or MMOGs or MMO for short) let kids play against their friends and other people they meet on the game network. Most of these sites allow instant messaging and conversation through headsets. Players are supposed to be 13 to register for an account.

Some MMO's are free and some will need a credit card to play, so that's a good time to check the age-appropriateness. Also, look at the privacy settings the site offers and talk to your kids about responsible online communication. Read through the site's "parent section" if it has one. Beyond that, be sure to set time limits.

→ **Facebook pages and kids**

Kids must be 13 to go on Facebook, but younger kids can — and do — register with a false birthdate. We advise kids to wait until they're 13 for both safety and privacy reasons. If your kids want to go on Facebook, stay involved and help them follow these five rules:

- Think before you post.
- Be respectful.
- Call out cyberbullying if you see it.
- Know that anything you post online can be used in ways you never intended.
- Use privacy settings.

→ **What are the rules of responsible online behavior?**

It really all boils down to respect. Respect for other people, respect for other people's work, and respect for yourself. The Internet is a community. Here's how to keep it a nice place to hang out:

- Share, but don't overshare. Information spreads quickly to unknown audiences online.
- Treat others kindly. Stand up for people who are targeted.
- Respect creative work. Give proper attribution to any work you use — whether for school reports, videos, or music remixes.

→ **Privacy issues and kids**

Privacy means two things: Personal privacy refers to your own online reputation; consumer privacy refers to the data that companies can collect about you. Kids need to manage both by being careful about what they post and by being aware of what kinds of data companies collect.

Strict privacy settings can help protect both personal and consumer privacy. But kids who are active online must understand that it is up to them to manage their own online reputation.