



Internet Safety Tips for Caregivers

The internet offers many opportunities for adults and children to learn, and the Internet has also dramatically changed how we communicate.

Unfortunately, the Internet is also a place where children and adults can be seriously victimized by various kinds of predators. Children and adults can be exposed to: cyber-bullying, inappropriate content, and loss of privacy.

In order to effectively protect our children, parents need to know the dangerous aspects of the Internet, including taking the necessary steps to promote Internet safety for your family.

The Crimes Against Children Research Center found that one in five youth using the Internet received online sexual solicitations. We need to encourage our children to come to us when something inappropriate happens.

Following are some tips that may be helpful for you and your children.

Establishing Family Ground Rules

Families have established house rules for a multitude of behaviors and expectations, but sometimes families neglect to address the importance of developing clear and consistent rules regarding computer usage.

Families can post a written *Family Internet Agreement* that should:

- ❖ Set clear boundaries on prohibiting the posting or sharing of personal identifying information online; such as names, pictures, telephone numbers, addresses, passwords, or credit card numbers.

This includes *not* letting your child's last name appear on the "from" line and some foster parents don't allow their child to have even his or her first name as part of the email address. Absolutely do *not* let your child

have an email address such as:
Jane.Doe2011@email.com

- ❖ Designate the amount of time that each child can be online.
- ❖ Specify time frames when each child can be online.
- ❖ Give a general outline of which sites are appropriate (i.e. Disney, Ask Jeeves, Wikipedia, etc.) and which sites are forbidden (i.e. all sites that require the viewer to be 18 or older).
- ❖ Establish specific Internet ground rules of what is acceptable and appropriate behavior.
- ❖ Specify who the child should tell if he or she receives any threatening material.
- ❖ Prohibit opening of e-mails or attachments from an unknown person.
- ❖ Depending on the team members' input, consider making one of the rules be that the foster parent (and others as necessary) be allowed to know the password of the account and monitor mail periodically. Stress that the child has a right to absolute privacy with "snail mail," but that the Internet is a riskier place.
- ❖ Share this Internet agreement with other members of the child's team (birth family, social worker, school staff, respite providers, etc.).

Educate:

- ❖ Become familiar with the Internet. This is important whether or not you have a computer in your house because computers are easily accessible to your children.
- ❖ If need be, enroll in a computer class or consult with your friends, neighbors, or colleagues.

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- ❖ Set up a time to talk with your children and have them teach you what they already know. You're likely to learn something new, and it helps build your child's self esteem to teach you something.

Communicate: Talk openly about the dangers that exist on the Internet and encourage to be responsible.

Supervise: By placing your computer in a central and visible location, such as a living room instead

of a bedroom, you will be able to closely and consistently monitor Internet use. Make sure that the monitor is facing in such a way that people who are passing by can view it easily. This has an added benefit of the kids knowing that you're going to safe sites when you're at the computer, as well.

Explore Together: Learn from one another by utilizing the Internet as a teaching tool and educational resource. While the Internet can be dangerous, it is also an invaluable resource of opportunities to learn and grow together.



Resources

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has developed a parent's guide to Internet safety: <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm>

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's website is the Nation's Resource Center for child protection: <http://www.missingkids.com/>

The Children's Partnership website has many resources including a PowerPoint presentation that you can download for free as well as a free downloadable resource booklet entitled: The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway: Rules and Tools for Families Online: <http://www.childrenspartnership.org>

NetSmartz provides resources for parents and guardians, educators, law enforcement, teens and kids and in addition, there is a Spanish online resource: <http://www.netsmartz.org>

i-SAFE.org incorporates classroom curriculum with dynamic community outreach to empower students, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and concerned adults to make the Internet a safer place: <http://www.i-SAFE.org>

SafeKids.com provides tips and resources for families, youth and adults about safely navigating and exploring the Internet and in addition, they include an Online Safety Quiz: <http://www.safekids.com>

Be Safe Online provides advice and information about Internet safety for parents and teachers, plus opportunities to discuss problems and share solutions: <http://www.besafeonline.org>

GetNetWise is a public service created by Internet industry corporations and public interest groups with the goal of having "Internet users are only "one click away" from the resources they need to make informed decision about their and their family's use of the Internet." <http://www.getnetwise.org>

Filters Software

Parents can elect to purchase filter software that will block pornography, hate sites, questionable chat rooms, as well as other dangers on the Internet. The following are a few suggestions.

<http://www.bsafehome.com>

<http://www.netnanny.com>

<http://www.cybersitter.com>