

The Internet and Your Family

The Internet can connect you and your family to all types of resources. At your computer, you and your family can read the latest news, look up information, listen to music, play games, buy things, or e-mail friends. The possibilities for learning and exploring on the Internet are endless. However, not all information and resources are safe and reliable. Read more about how to make sure you and your family's experience on the Internet is safe, educational, and fun.

About the Internet

The Internet (or the Net) is a vast network that connects people and information worldwide through computers. It's sometimes called the information superhighway. The World Wide Web (WWW or the Web) is a part of the Internet that includes pictures and sound as well as text. Online means being connected to the Internet. Surfing the Web means browsing or searching for information on the Internet.

When you and your family surf the Web it's important to keep the following in mind:

- Online information is usually not private.
- People online are not always who they say they are.
- Anyone can put information online.
- You can't trust everything you read online.
- You and your family may unexpectedly and unintentionally find material on the Web that is offensive, pornographic (including child pornography), obscene, violent, or racist.

Time limits

Surfing the Web should not take the place of other important activities, including homework, playing outside, or spending time with friends. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting total screen time in front of a TV or computer to no more than 1 to 2 hours a day for children older than 2 years. An alarm clock or timer can help you keep track of time.

Setting the rules

It's important to have a set of rules when your children use the Internet. Make sure your children understand what you consider appropriate and what areas are off limits. Let them know that the rules are for their safety.

Safety first

The following are tips you can teach your children about online safety:

- **NEVER give out personal information** unless a parent says it's OK. This includes your name, address, phone number, age, race, school name or location, or friends' names.
- **NEVER share passwords**, even with friends.
- **NEVER meet a friend you only know online in person** unless a parent says it's OK. It's best if a parent goes along and to meet in a public place. (Older teens that may choose not to tell a parent and go alone should at least go with a friend and meet in a public place.)
- **NEVER respond to messages that make you feel uncomfortable** or hurt your feelings. Ignore these messages, stop all communication, and tell a parent or another adult you trust right away.



Good behavior

The following is what you can teach your children about how they should act online:

- **NEVER send mean messages online.** NEVER say something online that you wouldn't say to someone in person. Bullying is wrong whether it's done in person or online.
- **NEVER use the Internet to make someone look bad.** For example, never send messages from another person's e-mail that could get that person into trouble.
- **NEVER plagiarize.** It's illegal to copy online information and say that you wrote it.

Other steps you can take

In addition to setting clear rules, you can do the following to create a safer online experience:

- Surf the Web with your children.
- Put the computer in a room where you can monitor your children. Computers should never be placed in a room where a door can be closed or a parent excluded.
- Use tracking software. It's a simple way to keep track of where your children have been on the Web. However, nothing can replace supervision.
- Install software or services that can filter or block offensive Web sites and material. Be aware, however, that many children are smart enough to find ways around the filters. Also, you may find that filters may be more restrictive than you want.
- Find out what the Internet use policies are at your child's school or at your library.

Cybertipline

If you or your children come across anything illegal or threatening, you should report it to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's CyberTipline. For more information, call 800/THE-LOST (800/843-5678) or visit the Web site at www.cybertipline.com.

Communicating on the Net

The following are some ways people can communicate with one another on the Internet. Keep in mind that information that is shared may not always be appropriate for children. Also, information on the Internet is often not monitored.

Blog (or Web log). An online journal or diary that can include images. They can be found on social networking Web sites and are becoming more popular than chat rooms.

Chat rooms. Chat rooms are a way for a number of computer users to communicate with each other instantly in "real time." For example, if you type a message and send it, everyone else will see it instantly in the chat room and they can respond just as quickly.

E-mail (electronic mail). Messages sent and received electronically between computers.

Instant messaging (IM). Sending and receiving messaging instantly in "real time" over the Internet.

Surfing the Net

When you go to the Internet, you may have a specific address in mind or you may browse through the Web, just as you would a library or a catalog. This is often called "surfing the Net." Following are several ways to get information on the Web:

- **Web addresses.** Every Web site has its own unique address. By typing the address in the space provided, your Web browser will take you there. Make sure you type the exact Web address. Any missing or incorrect characters could create an error or bring you to a totally different Web site. The last 3 letters in a Web site address can tell you what type of organization or company set up the site, for example: .gov (government), .org (nonprofit organizations), .edu (academic or education), .com (commercial).

AAP age-based guidelines for children's Internet use

Up to age 10

Children this age need supervision and monitoring to ensure they are not exposed to inappropriate materials. Parents should use Internet safety tools to limit access to content, Web sites, and activities, and be actively involved in their child's Internet use.

Ages 11 to 14

Children this age are savvier about their Internet experience; however, they still need supervision and monitoring to ensure they are not exposed to inappropriate materials. Internet safety tools are available that can limit access to content and Web sites and provide a report of Internet activities. Children this age also need to understand what personal information should not be given over the Internet.

Ages 15 to 18

Children this age should have almost no limitations on content, Web sites, or activities. Teens are savvier about their Internet experience; however, they still need parents to define appropriate safety guidelines. Parents should be available to help their teens understand inappropriate messages and avoid unsafe situations. Parents may need to remind teens what personal information should not be given over the Internet.

- **Links (or hyperlinks).** Many Web sites link to information on other sites. By clicking on the highlighted area, you can connect to another Web site without having to type its address.
- **Search engines.** Search engines are programs that can enable you to search the Internet using keywords or topics. For example, to find information about Abraham Lincoln, simply click on a search engine and type "Abraham Lincoln." A list of several Web sites will come up for you to select from.

Keep in mind—The Internet can be a helpful source of information and advice, but you and your children can't trust everything you read. Anyone can put information on the Internet, and not all of it is reliable. Some people and organizations are very careful about the accuracy of the information they post, others are not. Some give false information on purpose.

Begin your search for information with the most reliable, general information Web sites and expand from there.

The Web site for the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), www.aap.org, is a good starting point.



Source: US Department of Education booklet "Parents Guide to the Internet."

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