

Sometimes adults feel like they don't know quite as much as their children do about the internet. Below you'll find some quick tips to better equip you to keep your kids safe online.

How do I talk to my child about Internet safety?

When talking with your children, be positive. The Internet can be a fun, exciting place and a valuable tool for your child. While you do not need to be overly graphic, you should make children aware of the potential risks that can exist online and talk with them about steps they can take to minimize the risks they are exposed to.

Establish guidelines and rules for using the Internet in your home. Post these rules near the family computer. Print the NetSmartz Internet safety pledge and discuss it with your child.

Keep it public. Place the family computer in a common room where you can supervise your child's online activities.

Know what your child likes to do online and ask questions about his or her online activities. Ask your child to show you his/her favorite websites. Talk together about these sites and what is on them.

Explain to your child that Instant Messaging is only for real-life friends. Using IM can be fun, but children should chat only with school and family friends they know off-line and face-to-face. Explain to your children that we never truly know who is on the other end of the computer. The person may tell them he is a child their age, but there is no way of actually knowing that for sure. Talk to them about never meeting in person with anyone they first "met" online.

Know who communicates with your child online. Sit with your child at the computer and ask them to explain the real-life identities of every person on their buddy list or profiles.

Reinforce that people online are not always who they say they are. Explain to your children what personal information is (address, phone number, email, school name, town they live in, clubs or teams they're involved in) and explain how risky it is to give out personal information online. Websites for children are not permitted to request personal information without a parent or guardian's permission.

If your child has a profile or blog on a social networking site, ask him or her to show it to you. Discuss privacy settings and have them set their page to private. Talk with your child about only allowing people they know and trust from face-to-face interactions to access their page.

Talk with your child about posting photographs online. Often photos contain information that reveals where children go to school, who their friends are, the names of clubs or teams they belong to, or where they live. Urge your child to think carefully before posting information online.

Keep the lines of communication open with your child. Sometimes children do and/or see things that they shouldn't online, but don't want to tell parents or guardians because they are afraid of losing Internet privileges. Encourage your children to tell a trusted adult if they see something that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused online. Emphasize that it's not their fault if they see something upsetting.

Talk to children about not responding to offensive or dangerous e-mail, chat, or other communications. Do not delete the evidence; turn off the monitor and contact local law enforcement. Also report such instances to www.cybertipline.com.

More Resources... check out Net Cetera- Chatting with Kids About Being Online at www.onguardonline.gov; CyberBully411.org; iKeepSafe.org; and NetSmartz.org. These are just a few of the informative sites online that can help you talk to your kids to keep them safe online.

Safety tips adapted from Keeping Kids Safer on the Internet: Tips for Parents and Guardians. Copyright 2009. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.