

Overall Tips for Internet Safety Just the Facts!



Internet Use Danger Signs

The Internet is like going downtown at night; there are good places, bad places, good people, and bad people, and you can never be certain what will happen. You learn the places where you feel safe and who the good people are, as well as the places you should keep away from and the people you should avoid. The Internet is popular among kids, and there are some important signs you should be aware of to protect your children from the bad places and the bad people they can encounter online.

Hiding Material

Have your kids ever tried to block you from seeing the computer screen? It could mean they're trying to hide something. Other signs include quickly closing out windows or shutting off the monitor or computer when you enter the room. Information can also be stored on disks, and these are easily hidden.

Kids may try to hide pornography, violent images and video games, or inappropriate conversations or stories. If your kids are hiding something from you, you can be sure it is something they think you won't like.

Late or Night Surfing

It's late at night: do you know where your children are? If they're on the Internet, they could be anywhere. Using the Internet late at night is a way for kids to go online without adult supervision, and it's the best time to contact people who are only available late at night.

While online predators can prey on kids at any time, most have jobs during the day, so they spend evenings and nights online. This makes Internet use after hours more risky, especially for chat room and instant messaging users.

Providing Personal Information Online

Kids shouldn't give out too much personal information online. There is a fine line that separates too much identifying information from the amount of information kids need to provide to make their computer interactions worthwhile.

E-mail addresses, street addresses, phone numbers, or pictures are always too much information to give to someone your kids haven't met in person. School names, hobbies, or favorite hangouts can also lead the wrong person to your kids. Online predators don't need much information to track down a victim.

Unusual Charges on Bills

Make sure to check your credit card and phone bills carefully for any charges that seem unusual. Be suspicious of charges made to a "Web site" or other company names you don't recognize. Often, pornographic Web sites or phone sex providers use legitimate, regular-sounding company names to ensure the privacy of their users. This can make these companies very difficult to identify when you want to.

Computers in Private Spaces

Young people want, and need, increasingly more privacy as they are growing up. But here is a word of caution about computer privacy: Internet-connected computers should be kept in open areas you and your family can all access.

A shared computer, out in the open, is more likely to keep kids from visiting sites they shouldn't. Having a computer in an open, shared room makes it easy for you to look in on what your children are doing online. In addition, a common computer area will also make your kids feel less vulnerable if they are approached by an online predator.

Gifts from Strangers

If a stranger approached your kids with a chocolate bar, hopefully your kids would refuse the offer. Well, the same principle applies for the Internet.

It is common for online predators to send letters, photographs, and gifts to potential victims to bribe them into their confidence. Watch e-mail for the delivery of files that end in .jpg or .gif on your computer. These are pictures and should be checked out.

Also, watch for any gifts that come by mail or courier for your kids, and check to see that you know who sent them. Keep in mind that getting gifts from strangers could mean that your kids are giving out too much

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Gifts from Strangers cont.

identifying information, and this is definitely worth further investigation.

Summary

There are many things you should consider when your child uses the Internet. You should be cautious of your children's Internet habits and behaviors. Be aware of what your kids are doing on the computer and whom they are interacting with. The Internet can be a practical learning and entertainment tool if you can recognize and implement safety measures to reduce the chances your child will fall victim to an online predator.