Parents' Guide To Supervising Children's Internet Experiences

The Internet, a global, decentralized network of computers, provides a means to access information far beyond the Library's own collections. The Internet is also a new opportunity for children to expand their minds and experiences, and to develop skills necessary for the future. The quality of a child's experience will be directly related to a parent's investment in that experience. If you take the time, you can make your child's Internet activities positive, productive, and educational**.**

No individual, company, or government controls or monitors the Internet. While most of the information accessed can be valuable and enlightening, the user may also find materials that are unreliable, personally offensive, or illegal under U.S. law. Therefore, parents are advised to supervise their children's Internet sessions at the Library. By taking responsibility for their children's online computer use, whether at the Library or at home, parents can minimize any potential risks associated with online computer use.

Most of the following guidelines apply to home use of the Internet. However, there are many suggestions here that will help you monitor your child's use of the Internet at the Library**.**

- Be aware of your children's online activities. If certain online material is offensive to you, take the time to teach your child your values. Explain to your child why you believe the material is wrong and the harm you believe it might cause.
- Should you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography while online, immediately notify your online service, if at home, or the librarian, if at the Library. You should also report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children by calling 1-800-843-5678.
- Never give out identifying information—home address, school name, or telephone number—in a public message or anywhere else, and be sure you're dealing with someone whom both you and your children know and trust before giving out any information via e-mail. Think carefully before revealing any personal information such as age, marital status, or financial information. Consider using a pseudonym or unlisting your child's name if your Internet Service Provider allows it.
- Have your child use a nickname distinct from his or her real name when entering chat rooms, bulletin boards, and other public rooms.
- Never allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with another computer user without parental permission. If a meeting is arranged, make the first one in a public spot, and be sure to accompany your child.
- Never respond to messages that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you feel uncomfortable. Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages. If you or your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy of the message to your service provider and ask for their assistance.

- Remember that people online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or hear the person, it would be easy for someone to misrepresent him or herself.
- Remember that not everything you read online is true. Any offer that's "too good to be true" probably is. Be very careful about any offers that involve your coming to a meeting or allowing someone to visit your house.
- Report suspicious activity. Some conduct is illegal in both the real and the virtual world. If someone is harassing your child, keep copies and records of the messages and let the authorities know. You may also wish to notify the systems administrator of both your service and the service from which the message was transmitted.
- Make the Internet a family activity. Consider keeping the computer in a family room rather than in the child's bedroom. Get to know your children's "online friends" just as you get to know their other friends.
- Set reasonable rules and guidelines for computer use by your children (see "My Rules for Online Safety" as an example). Discuss these rules and post them near the computer as a reminder. Remember to monitor your children's compliance with these rules, especially when it comes to the amount of time spent on the computer. Remember that personal computers and online services should not be regarded as electronic baby-sitters.
- Get to know the Internet services your child uses. If you don't know how to log on, ask your child to show you. Find out what kinds of information it offers and whether there are ways for parents to block objectionable material.
- Inquire into the availability of child accounts. Some online services have special accounts geared for children, with restricted access to chat rooms and the Internet.
- Be careful when setting up accounts that the information provided will not be publicly available.
- Consider purchasing filtering software. There are a number of programs (none being 100% effective) that filter and block access to adult Internet sites. Some are listed below; click on the link to each service's World Wide Web site for further information:

  Bess, the Internet Retriever
  CYBERsitter
  Cyber Patrol
  Net Nanny
  SafeSurf
  SurfWatch

- Monitor your credit card bill. Many adult Internet sites require credit cards in order to gain access.
- Review Internet sites dealing with child safety on the Internet, such as:

  CyberAngels
  FBI Safety Tips for Kids on the Internet
  Missing and Exploited Children's Program
  The Safe Child HomePage

[SafeKids](#) Internet street smarts from Microsoft and the Naperville (Ill.) Police Dept.
[SafeKids.com](#)
[Staying Street Smart on the Web!](#) Resources from Yahoo

- **Give your child a copy of "My Rules for Online Safety."**

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My Rules for Online Safety

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, my parent's work address or telephone number, or the name or location of my school without my parent's permission.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and will bring my mother or father along.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
- I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. If I do, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the Internet Service Provider.
- I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide on the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.