

CYBER-SAFETY FOR KIDS (AND THEIR PARENTS!)

Recent news reports have caused great concern for parents of children using the Internet. While the Internet can be a great place for learning, researching and even socializing, there are precautions that parents should make their children aware of. The Internet has great resources for families interested in learning more about online safety and real risks to our children. ***Keep in mind that parenting your children in the cyber world is the same as parenting them in the real world.*** You wouldn't leave your fourth grader at the mall for two hours, just as you shouldn't let them surf the internet unsupervised for two hours. The easiest ways to keep your children safe, and your computer free from viruses and objectionable material are:

1. Know what your children are viewing online by keeping the computer in a family room or common area.
2. Discuss rules for using the computer, and agree to follow them. (*See the Family Internet Contract that follows*)
3. Balance your child's computer time with activities in the real world.
4. Discuss what information may be shared with cyber pals, and what remains private, such as personal information, real name and address.
5. Routinely check the computer activity by viewing the history files, favorites and bookmarks. Keep anti-virus software up to date.
6. Find help if you need it – take a class, ask a friend, surf the web yourself. Some good websites to get you started are www.safekids.com , and www.wiredsafety.org .

Parents have to remember that whether or not we understand how the Web works, or even how to turn on a computer, we are still the parents. We are still in charge. We still have the better judgment. We have to make sure that we teach them to be trustworthy, and how to avoid dangers posed by others.

As parents, we each teach our children how to make responsible decisions. ***We need to recognize that their technology skills far outdistance their judgment.*** It's our job, as parents, to fill this gap with our greater experience and judgment. (No one ever said parenting was easy.) Bottom line: It's not your kids you have to distrust; it's the millions of others online. We have to arm our children with the skills they need to stay safe in this environment, while still enjoying it.

Remember: You're still the parent. The Internet hasn't changed that.

*Liz Pearce, PTA Health and Parenting Committee
Additional text compiled from www.wiredsafety.org and www.boutell.com*

STAYING SAFE ONLINE: AN INTERNET CONTRACT

You can create a different contract for each child in your family with Internet usage rules set appropriately by age. Everyone signs his or her contract to show that they understand the rules and they agree to follow them when they go online.

I will ALWAYS tell a parent or another adult immediately if something is confusing or seemed scary or threatening.

I will NEVER give out my full name, real address, telephone number, school name or location, schedule, password, or other identifying information when I'm online. I will check with an adult for any exceptions.

I will NEVER have a face-to-face meeting with someone I've met online. In rare cases, my parents may decide it's Ok, but if I do decide to meet a cyber pal, I will make sure we meet in a public place and that a parent or guardian is with me.

I will NEVER respond online to any messages that use bad words or words that are scary, threatening, or just feel weird. If I get that kind of message, I'll print it out and tell an adult immediately. The adult can then contact the online service or appropriate agency. If I'm uncomfortable in a live chat room, I will use the "ignore" button.

I will NEVER go into a new online area that is going to cost additional money without first asking permission from my parent or teacher.

I will NEVER send a picture over the Internet or via regular mail to anyone without my parent's permission.

I will NOT give out a credit card number online without my parent present.

Child: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Visit www.safekids.com for more information and useful tips for internet safety