

Safeguarding Kids' Online Activities



The Internet is an extraordinary resource for our children. It allows them to see what the Mars Rover is up to in real time or watch video footage of animals in the wild.

However, it can be a frightening place for parents, which is why families need to be involved. Here's how to start:

Learn the lingo. In a few short years, many children will grow up far more conversant with digital technology than their parents. Your digital capacity needs to grow alongside theirs if you expect to monitor their online activities.

Limit their access. Through your Internet service provider (ISP), set up parental controls on your child's screen name to prevent him or her from venturing into inappropriate sites. Log on to getnetwise.org/tools for help.

Look beyond the computer. Install parental controls on all their devices—phones, tablets, and TVs—and protect your own with passwords your kids don't know. By keeping the family computer in a public area, you can see what sites your younger child is viewing. But once kids get to be preteens, there's very little you can do to control their portable devices unless they're preprogrammed.

Cut out spam. Install a virtual filter on all devices to prevent unsolicited email and other potentially harmful materials from being delivered. If your email service doesn't already include a spam filter, there are plenty of software programs that can do the job.

Emphasize the NEVER. Make sure your kids understand NEVER to give out any personal information for any reason to anyone, no matter how innocent the request

may seem. Unless instructed otherwise, children are too often eager to post their names and addresses to get free gifts or gain access to "fun sites."

Patrol their social media. Starting in the preteen years, kids text and post on Facebook to communicate with their peers a lot. Kids think whatever they post is private and believe that it can only be accessed by their friends. Emphasize that whatever they post online is available for anyone to read; and that includes you, their parent.



Patrol your own social media. Don't let family pride leave you and your kids vulnerable. Too many people post so much information, photos, and details about their children that they're actually endangering them. Make sure your privacy settings are strictly in place.

Beware of lurking impostors. Sexual predators are skilled at enticing children into online relationships, usually with fake identities. Strongly stress to kids that they cannot trust anyone online whom they or you do not know personally. If an online stranger tries to strike up a regular correspondence, makes a Skype request, wants to telephone them, or seeks to meet in person, ask your kids to tell you immediately.

Learn more. Visit NetSmartz.org/parents for more information on cyber bullying, inappropriate content, and gaming.