

Keeping Kids Safe



Internet Safety Tips

Tool or Toy: Child Safety Hangs in the Balance Internet Safety

In many households, computers and the Internet challenge our sensibilities and provide today's parents with a deeply complicated threat to their children's safety. Too often, the younger members of a family know more about operating technical tools than the oldest. While technically savvy, they're still kids whose awareness of the big picture and the requirements for safety fall well short of necessity.



The Problem:

- "Devices" and the Internet have become woven into the fabric of modern daily life.
- Children and teenagers were born into a world of digital tools/toys. They typically use them with the same fervor and abandon they apply to other toys.
- Children and teens expect their safety and wellbeing to be assured by others. That expectation is normal to their development. The Internet is an open environment in which any individual's safety is dependent on their reasoning and judgment.
- Internet use can be difficult to monitor. While various monitoring software programs are available, these can create new dis-ease for parents as they find themselves "spying" on their family members.
- Many of kids have large blocks of unsupervised time to spend on the Internet. Evening time is particularly vulnerable to the presence of Internet predators.
- Many kids have their own cell phones and computers they use in the privacy of their own rooms. Experts see this set-up as the recipe for disaster regarding Internet safety. Modern social networking sites cannot provide more safety for children than parents.
- The proclivity for uploading pictures to one's personal page and for sharing image files with others greatly raises the danger of exposure to online predators.

The Solutions:

- Be involved. Be a full privilege friend with your child on Facebook and other social networking sites and pay attention to what he/she posts and displays.
- Set time limits for Internet use and require that the "history" record of your Internet browser not be cleared without you present.
- Randomly check your child's email account to assure email exchanges with known, appropriate people.
- Use the parental controls available through your Internet provider and in your Internet browsers.
- If you use monitoring software, make that known to your family upfront. Discuss with your children your observations of their Internet travels. The precedent: no secrets.
- Require that your child share with you the content of their "image" files and their friend lists.
- Instruct your children to never agree to "face-to-face" meetings with strangers they meet online.
- Instruct your child to never give out personal contact information, i.e. phone number or address, to strangers they meet online. Children and teens are vulnerable to quickly trusting anyone who is accepting and friendly. Remember, online predators masquerade as "peers" to worm their way into a child's world.