



Internet Safety Tips for Caregivers

The internet offers many opportunities for adults and children to learn, and the internet has also dramatically changed how we communicate.

Unfortunately, the internet is also a place where children and adults can be seriously victimized by various kinds of predators. Children and adults can be exposed to cyber-bullying, inappropriate content, and loss of privacy.

In order to effectively protect our children, parents need to know the dangerous aspects of the internet, including taking the necessary steps to promote internet safety for your family.

The Crimes Against Children Research Center found that one in five youth using the internet received online sexual solicitations. We need to encourage our children to come to us when something inappropriate happens.

Following are some tips that may be helpful for you and your children.

Establishing Family Ground Rules

Families have established house rules for a multitude of behaviors and expectations, but sometimes families neglect to address the importance of developing clear and consistent rules regarding computer usage.

Families can post a written *Family Internet Agreement* that should:

- ◆ Set clear boundaries on prohibiting the posting or sharing of personal identifying information online, such as names,

pictures, telephone numbers, addresses, passwords, or credit card numbers

This includes *not* letting your child's last name appear on the "from" line and some foster parents don't allow their child to have even his or her first name as part of the email address. Absolutely do *not* let your child have an email address like Jane.Doe2011@email.com.

- ◆ Designate the amount of time that each child can be online.
- ◆ Specify time frames when each child can be online.
- ◆ Give a general outline of which sites are appropriate (e.g., Disney, Ask Jeeves, Wikipedia, etc.) and which sites are forbidden (e.g., all sites that require the viewer to be 18 or older).
- ◆ Establish specific internet ground rules of what is acceptable and appropriate behavior.
- ◆ Specify who the child should tell if he or she receives any threatening material.
- ◆ Prohibit opening of emails or attachments from an unknown person.
- ◆ Depending on the team members' input, consider making one of the rules be that the foster parent (and others, as necessary) be allowed to know the password of the account and monitor mail periodically. Stress that the child has a right to absolute privacy with "snail mail," but that

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the internet is a riskier place.

- Share this internet agreement with other members of the child's care team (birth family, social worker, school staff, respite providers, etc.)

Educate

- Become familiar with the internet. This is important whether or not you have a computer in your house, because computers are easily accessible to your children.
- If need be, enroll in a computer class or consult with your friends, neighbors, or colleagues.
- Set up a time to talk with your children and have them teach you what they already know. You're likely to learn something new, and it helps build your child's self-esteem to teach you something.

Communicate: Talk openly about the dangers that exist on the internet and encourage responsibility.

Supervise: By placing your computer in a central and visible location, such as a living room, instead of a bedroom, you will be able to closely and consistently monitor internet use. Make sure that the monitor is facing in such a way that people who are passing by can view it easily. This has an added benefit of the kids knowing that you're going to safe sites when you're at the computer, as well.

Explore Together: Learn from one another by utilizing the internet as a teaching tool and educational resource. While the internet can be dangerous, it is also an invaluable resource of opportunities to learn and grow together.



Resources

[A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety](#) (an FBI resource)

[The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#)

[Resources from NetSmartz](#) for parents and guardians, educators, law enforcement, teens, and kids. They also have a Spanish online resource.

[Online Teen Safety Guide](#)

Filters Software

Parents can elect to purchase filter software that will block pornography, hate sites, questionable chat rooms, as well as other dangers on the internet. The following are a few suggestions:

- <http://www.netnanny.com/>
- <http://www.cybersitter.com/>



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