

## **Children & the Internet: Keeping our Kids Safe**

Whether your kids use the Internet to do research for a school project or to chat with their cousin living overseas, it's clear that the web is a great resource and tool for the exchange of information. But it's also rife with dangers for young users who are ill-prepared to face them.

So, how can you protect your children when they use the Internet?

1. Get to know the technologies your children are using.

This will help you understand the risks and to be able to talk to them about what they are doing online.

2. Discuss the risks with your children and agree on some rules for Internet use. Post them clearly near your computer.

Remember that not only are children much more trusting than adults (and therefore, the perfect targets for sexual predators and scam artists), but they often see the fun in any activity but very seldom understand the risks and dangers involved. So, just as you (as a responsible parent) would ensure that your children put on their safety helmets before riding their bicycles, it's every bit as important for you to ensure that your children understand the basic risks they face and what safety precautions they need to take before they start surfing the Internet.

The main risks that children face include:

- Cyber bullying (particularly if they are active users of social networks and are already being bullied in school, or do not have many friends in real life);
- Identity theft (particularly if they are not careful about who they share personal information with online);
- Scams (particularly if they have access to confidential family information, such as bank account numbers or computer passwords) via spam or phishing activities; and
- Online grooming (particularly if they are active Internet users and have few friends in real life).

Educate your child on how to stay safe online. Encourage them to tell you if they come across anything suspicious or if anybody says or does something that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.

3.This can best be done by:

- Placing the computer in a family area of the home (such as the living room, rather than their bedroom). This way, you can monitor your child's Internet activities and what he posts (if he is an active blogger or likes to use social networks), and who he is in contact with (so that you'll know if your child starts receiving sexually inappropriate images – known as 'sexting' – from a sexual predator or his peers); and

- Not allowing your child to have his own computer, but rather allowing him to use a shared family computer, which he is not permitted to modify or upload data onto without the permission of his parents. This way, you can monitor and manage your child's Internet activities (an Internet content filter is most useful in this area, as it will enable you to restrict what content is viewed and downloaded) even after he has logged off from the computer, and you can also more easily manage the amount of time he spends online.

For more information on how to keep your children safe online, check out:

- <http://www.safekids.com>

- <http://www.kidsmart.org.uk>

- <http://www.common sense media.org>

- [http://us.trendmicro.com/imperia/md/content/us/pdf/aboutus/globalcitizenship/internetsafetyforkidsandfamily/safetyguide\\_webthreats.pdf](http://us.trendmicro.com/imperia/md/content/us/pdf/aboutus/globalcitizenship/internetsafetyforkidsandfamily/safetyguide_webthreats.pdf)

- [http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net\\_safety.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net_safety.html)