



INTERNET SAFETY

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Benefits

The Internet has created countless new opportunities for learning. You can now read about virtually any subject from your living room, and teachers are finding ways to harness the power of the Internet to make their classrooms more conducive to student learning.

The Internet is a great tool for searching for new ways to interact with the offline world. Families can use the Internet to learn more about community activities or to turn a rainy day into a virtual field trip.

Rapidly developing technology is making online communication easier and more convenient than ever. The Internet makes it easy to stay in touch with relatives and friends across the country; families can use the Internet to share pictures and videos of growing children or to find the cheapest airfare for grandma's next visit.

Risks

Internet predators seek out victims who are looking for acceptance and looking to be heard. You can help protect your child from predators by carefully monitoring your child's online activities and relationships and discussing them with your child. In addition, teach your child to be wary of providing personal information online. Periodic reviews of what information about your family is posted on the Web can also help prevent offline danger.

Cyberbullying is a growing problem and is just as real and hurtful as traditional bullying. Children may have a stronger reaction to mean e-mails and hurtful Web posting than their parents may realize. If your child shows warning signs of being bullied (e.g., suddenly becoming withdrawn, suddenly losing interest in things he or she used to enjoy, being anxious, sad, or moody, or having trouble sleeping), don't forget that the threat may be coming through the computer.

The Internet has the potential to create a cyberbully, too. When communicating online, it can be easy to forget that there is a real person on the other end, and children may say things they would never say in person. Because you aren't able to account for body language or tone of voice in written messages, online communication can also lend itself to unintended misunderstandings. Make sure your child knows and uses proper "netiquette."

What you can do

Make sure your children feel comfortable talking to you about their online experiences, both good and bad. Never threaten to take away Internet access as a punishment for something that happens (intentionally or not) to your children while they are online. Chances are your children will just find another way to go online, and this time they may not tell you about what they are doing there.

Keep your family's computer in an open space in a common room. You want to be able to casually monitor what your child is doing. In addition, having a computer facing the corner of the room, or generally out of sight of other people, can make the user

feel more isolated, making him or her more vulnerable to online risks.

Educate yourself about what your child is doing online, and make sure you are comfortable using the programs your child uses. If you don't understand something, ask your child. This can be a great way to start conversations with your child. Periodically review with your child his or her list of online contacts. If you don't know someone listed, ask your child about that person.

Search the Web for information about your family. Using a search engine, periodically search for your family members' names on the Internet to see what comes up. You want to stay a step ahead of potential predators, and this is one way to find out what type of information they are able to access about your family. If your child is being cyberbullied, this is also one way you might detect hateful information about your child that is being posted online.

Install blocking or monitoring software on your family's computer. There are many tools available to help you keep an eye on what your children are doing online. Make sure your children know that you have installed the software and why you have decided to do so. This may make them think twice before doing something online that they know is against your family's rules. However, don't forget that these are just tools; you should always supplement these tools with honest communication with your children.

Establish a Media Use Contract with each child in your family. It is important that you have a conversation with each child to set rules and limits that are appropriate for him or her. In your conversation, be explicit about how you intend to monitor your child's online activities and what the consequences will be if the contract is broken. Once the contracts have been signed, post them next to your family's computer as a reminder.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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everychild.anevoice.