

## MINIMIZE RISKS

Be sure you:



Alabama Department of Education



**Discuss with your child which online content and activities are and aren't OK.** (Ask to see your child's favorite Web sites. Chat rooms, networking sites, e-mail and instant messages are just some of the ways people interact online.)



**Set rules for when your child can be online and for how long.**



**Discuss with your child that they should never meet an online friend in person** and to tell you if someone suggests meeting.



**Discuss with your child that they should not share any personal information online,** including in a blog or personal profile.



**Review sites visited** by checking the browser's history log. (See the browser's help section.) Know your child's passwords and screen names.



**Look into software and "parental controls" for limiting online activities.** For example, ask your service provider for advice.



**Put the computer where you can keep an eye on its use**—not in your child's bedroom.



**Report any offensive, threatening or sexual material** to your Internet service provider, [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com) and law enforcement (if criminal). **Keep any evidence.**

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# staying safe on the Internet

a guide for parents





## Everyone should know about Internet safety.

The Internet is a wonderful resource for learning and fun, but it has its risks—especially for children.

### Why is Internet safety so important?

The Internet is part of most children's lives now. While it is a rewarding educational tool, it can expose children to:

- sexually explicit material
- sexual predators and other criminals who use the Internet to exploit children
- violent and other offensive material
- other illegal activities, such as gambling or drug use.



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## You play the key role in your child's safety while online.

### Your child needs your guidance to be safe online.

When it comes to using the Internet, use the same parenting skills you use in the "real" world. The keys to Internet safety are to:

- Learn about the Internet and how it works.
- Supervise and monitor your child's Internet use.
- Teach your child about Internet safety.
- Use software and other tools to help protect your child.
- Know what to do if your child is exposed to a potentially dangerous situation online.

Learn more about keeping your child safe online...



### Important Notice

**Please read:** The information this publication contains does not necessarily describe particular situations you may encounter. You should ask a qualified expert or professional for advice about your particular situation.

The persons whose photographs are depicted in this publication are professional models. They have no relation to the issues discussed. Any characters they are portraying are fictional.



## The Internet—a whole new world...

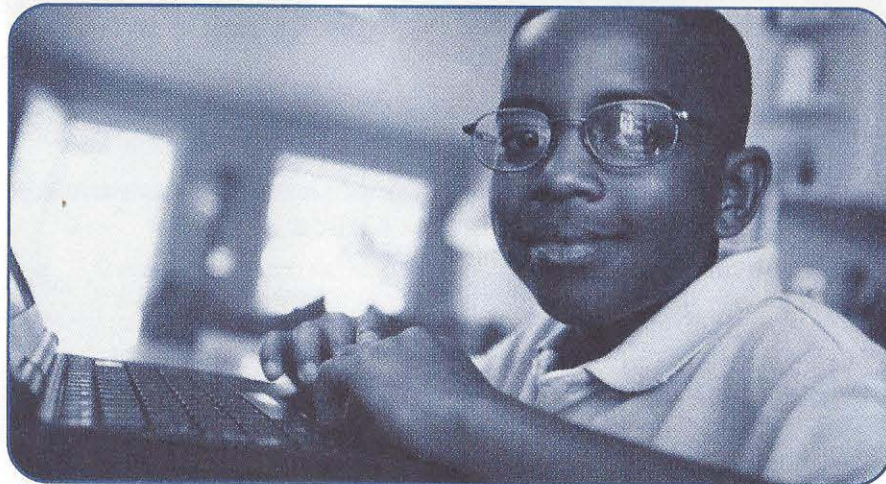
It not only offers educational opportunities, but also new ways to stay in touch with people and have fun. Your child may use the Internet to:

### Find information

Your child can learn about almost anything on the Internet. "Search engines"—special programs found on the Internet—help you find Web sites on different topics.

A Web site may contain written material and pictures, and provide links to other related Web sites.

Some Web sites give accurate information. Others do not. Anyone can create a Web site and post information—it does not necessarily have to be truthful or accurate.



### Enhance learning

The Internet can help children:

- access information or resources that otherwise may not be available to them
- work on school projects
- stay in touch with teachers and classmates
- develop important computer-related skills.

### Meet and talk to people

The Internet offers ways to share information with people from all over the world. Some examples are:

- chat rooms—Web sites where people can have real-time discussions about a common interest
- news groups, forums or bulletin boards—discussion groups about specific topics where people post messages for others to read (and respond to) either right away or at a later time
- instant messaging—similar to chatting, except it is usually between two or more people on a user's "buddy" list. It is more private than chatting.

### Send and receive e-mail

E-mail (electronic mail) can be sent from one computer to another anywhere in the world. E-mails can include word messages, pictures, videos, sounds or other computer files. "Spam" is electronic "junk mail."



**As a parent, you can help your child benefit from the Internet—and steer clear of its dangers!**



# Dangers on the Internet

The Internet can also be a risky place for children. A child may encounter:

## Sexually explicit material

It is easy for anyone to accidentally come across pornography on the Internet. Some children and teens may be curious and actively seek it out.

In addition, "spam" e-mails are often about sexually related material. These e-mails often include direct links to sexually explicit sites. (Generally, sending these e-mails is not considered illegal, unless the advertiser knows the material is being sent to a child.)

## Sexual predators

The Internet has made it easier for some sexual predators to locate, contact and abuse children without being found out. Sexual predators often use chat rooms for this purpose. A sexual predator may try to gain access to a child's phone number, address or other personal information.



## Child pornography

Child pornography is illegal. But sexual predators can use the Internet to send and receive child pornography. They may also meet children online and lure them into being subjects of child pornography.

## Violence

Children may come across material that promotes violence, including:

- violent online games
- instructions on how to make bombs or other weapons
- hatred aimed at people of different backgrounds, spiritual beliefs or sexual orientation
- graphic images of violence.

## Bullying

Children may be harassed or bullied by chat room members or via instant messaging. Although some chat rooms have moderators to prevent this, many do not.

Also, classmates or other people can bully a child online by posting threats or negative information on a Web site or by sending hateful e-mails.

## Information about other offensive or illegal activities

Children may also be exposed to a variety of other offensive materials or illegal activities, such as:

- drug use, including how to get or make illegal drugs
- gambling
- cults.

**Despite certain risks, you can help make the Internet safer for your child!**



# Internet safety starts with you!

Get involved! It's the single most important thing you can do to keep your child safe online.

## Learn about the Internet.

Take a class in computers and the Internet at your local library or community center.

## Teach your child why Internet safety is important.

Explain that:

- not everything online is true
- people using the Internet are not always who they say they are
- some people may use the Internet to take advantage of children or for illegal activity.

## Go online together.

Spend time online with your child to learn about his or her interests. Find information together online and learn how to use e-mail.

## Help your child create a screen name.

This is a name your child goes by when he or she is online. Screen names should never contain any identifying information, such as any part of your child's name, address, date of birth, or school name or location.

## Keep the computer in a family area.

This allows you to monitor your child's Internet use. Avoid putting the computer in your child's bedroom or other private area of your home.

## Agree to time limits.

You may want to decide:

- what times of the day your child can go online
- how much time your child can spend online.

## Decide what material is off-limits.

Prevent your child's access to sites that contain material inappropriate for his or her age, such as:

- sexual material
- violent or hateful material
- information about alcohol or other drugs.

## Find out where your child has Internet access.

Your child may be able to go online at:

- schools
- public libraries
- community centers
- friends' homes.

At each of these locations, find out what safety measures exist to protect your child.

Your child may also be able to access the Internet from his or her cell phone, if your child has one.

## Check your Internet history log regularly.

This is a list of Web sites that have been most recently visited. It is usually available on your Internet browser (software that allows you to use the Internet) or from your Internet service provider (the company that connects you to the Internet for a monthly fee).

## Maintain trust and communication.

Respect your child's privacy as much as possible. Let your child know you will be monitoring his or her online activity because you want to make sure he or she is safe. Talk with your child about what sites or activities are off-limits and why.





## Internet safety guidelines

Discuss each of these rules with your child.  
You may want to post them near your computer.

**Never give out personal information,**  
such as your:

- personal name, school name, or the names of family or friends
- address, the area you live in or school location
- telephone number
- password
- credit card number.

**Never meet face-to-face with someone you meet online,**  
unless your parents are with you. The meeting should take place in a public area.

**Never respond to e-mail, chat or bulletin board messages that are suggestive, obscene or threatening.**

Tell your parents immediately. Always tell a parent or other trusted adult if you see something online that makes you scared or uncomfortable.

**Never post pictures of yourself on the Internet.**

**Never download pictures from an unknown source.**

**Never open e-mail from someone you don't know.**

## Parental control tools

They can help make the Internet safer for your child.

### What are parental control tools?

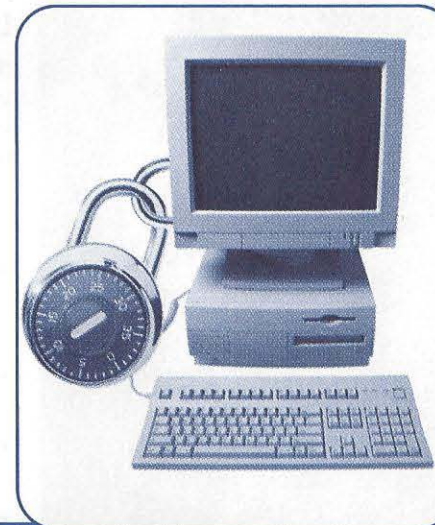
They are programs or software that help you control what your child views or participates in on the Internet. They may permit you to:

- view your child's e-mail or reject e-mail from specific addresses
- block access to material that is not appropriate for children
- monitor what sites your child visits online
- set time limits for being online
- control access to chat rooms
- prevent your child from posting or sending personal information online.

Although parental control tools are useful, they cannot protect your child completely from all the dangers he or she may encounter online.

### Where can I find parental control tools?

- Your Internet service provider and Web browser may provide them and help with using them.
- You can also buy parental control software that filters out or blocks access to certain types of material. It can also monitor or track your child's Internet use.



These tools are not a substitute for supervising your child's Internet use. Remember, you are your child's best protection online.



## Is your child at risk for online abuse?

Every year, about one in five children will receive a sexual solicitation on the Internet.



### Teach your child what to do.

Explain that if he or she ever receives a sexual or other unwelcome solicitation online, your child should:

- not answer it
- immediately end any contact with that person
- report it to a parent right away.

### Learn the warning signs.

If your child does become involved with an online sexual predator, you may notice unusual behavior. A child who is at risk may:

- spend long hours on the Internet—especially late at night
- switch off the screen monitor or change screens when you come into the room
- receive odd phone calls from people you don't know
- receive gifts in the mail or have a lot of unexplained cash on hand
- get upset if Internet service is cut off
- withdraw from family and friends.

(These signs may also indicate other problems.)

## What to do if you suspect online abuse

### Talk with your child.

Tell him or her what you have noticed. Explain that you are concerned for his or her safety. Ask your child to tell you about the situation.

Never blame your child if he or she is the target of a sexual predator or has been sexually abused. It is never the child's fault.

### Report sexual abuse or child pornography immediately.

These are serious crimes. If you believe your child (or any other child) may be the target of a sexual predator or has been used in child pornography, contact both:

- your local or state law enforcement agency
- the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
[www.missingkids.org/cybertip](http://www.missingkids.org/cybertip)  
1-800-843-5678.

Keep your computer turned off to preserve any evidence. Do not delete any files, messages or photos.

### Report harassment or other serious threats.

Using the Internet to harass or threaten someone is illegal. If your child is the subject of harassment, contact your local or state law enforcement agency. Also, report the incident to your Internet service provider.





## Responsible Internet use

Talk with your child about right and wrong ways to use the Internet. It's a chance for you to discuss your values.

### Insist on Internet etiquette.

Being respectful of others online is just as important as it is in everyday life. Your child should always use polite language in e-mails and chat rooms.

Don't allow your child to use the Internet to say negative or hurtful things about others. Many Internet service providers will terminate the accounts of people who do this.

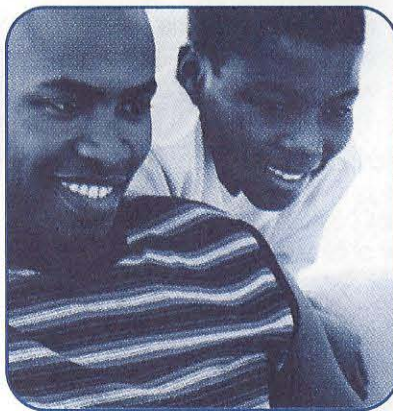
### Help your child respect copyright laws.

Unless permission is obtained from the copyright owner, it is illegal to use and share written works, music, pictures and other works of art from the Internet. In general, software is also protected by copyright laws unless it is "freeware" or "shareware."

### Discuss other Internet laws with your child.

Explain that some online activities are illegal. These include:

- "hacking"—trying to gain access to another person's computer
- spreading computer "viruses"—files that may damage another person's computer
- threatening or harassing others.



**Special notice to federal employees:** You can make a donation to Prevent Child Abuse America through the federal government's annual fund-raising program, the Combined Federal Campaign. Designate your gift by writing Prevent Child Abuse America on the CFC pledge card you will receive during the campaign.

## Start teaching your child online safety today!

Learn more about the Internet.

Review Internet safety rules often.

Monitor your child's online activities.

Know what to do if you suspect a problem.

With your help, your child can safely enjoy all the Internet has to offer!

### Resources

For more information about Internet safety and child abuse, contact the:

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)  
 1-800-843-5678

Federal Bureau of Investigation's Crime Against Children Program  
[www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/crimesmain](http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/crimesmain)

Childhelp USA®  
[www.childhelpusa.org](http://www.childhelpusa.org)  
 1-800-422-4453

Prevent Child Abuse America  
[www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)  
 1-312-663-3520

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**Prevent Child Abuse  
America**

For more information, write Prevent Child Abuse America, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 17th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604-2404, call (312) 663-3520, or visit our Web site at [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org).