



Make Prevention a CHOICE

Protecting Children In Cyberspace: Tips On How To Keep Your Child Safe On The Internet

Now that nearly every public school and library has access to the Internet, most American children have an opportunity to get “on line.” The Internet is by far the largest storehouse of information ever amassed and is enriching the lives of those who choose to take advantage of this amazing new educational tool. However, many parents are very concerned about the dangers that children face on the Internet.

This tipsheet has been designed to make you aware of the material on the Internet that can be psychologically damaging to children and offers some tips on how to keep children safe on “The Net.”

Harmful Internet Material

- Deviant Pornography - The Internet contains newsgroups with full color photographs of children being sexually abused and exploited! The psychological impact of viewing this material can be absolutely devastating for children.
- Predators lurking in chat rooms - Many child molesters are on the Internet talking with children in chat rooms. They often attempt to meet with these children alone and in person. Many incidences have already occurred where children have been abused by people they have met on the Internet.
- Recipes for manufacturing drugs and bombs - Newsgroups teach readers how to manufacture drugs and explosives from common materials that can be found around the house.
- How to commit suicide - Children can communicate with suicidal people at designated suicide newsgroups to learn the most effective ways to end their lives on the first attempt.
- Racism and Satanism - Colorful Web sites promote propaganda for hate and racist groups (e.g., Neo-Nazis and the KKK). Thousands of sites are dedicated to satanic worship.
- Ultra-violent video games - Children can download from the Internet, **for free**, without parental permission, extremely violent games that research suggests can lead to increased aggression and decreased attention spans.

What Must We Do To Protect Your Children

- **Parental guidance** - Parents can start by restricting home Internet access to those hours when there is a parent home to provide supervision. Some software programs can disable the Net during certain specific hours. Parents can periodically glance at the screen to make sure their child is in a safe place.
- **Filtering software** - By typing in the words “computer filtering software” on any search engine, parents will find a wide variety of programs that will help to control what their children have access to. Many of these programs are very effective and can be customized to provide different levels of safety. Some of these programs are less effective than others and parents should never rely on just one approach. Using a combination of several different filters is by far the most effective solution. Parents are often surprised by how well many of these programs work toward protecting their children.
- **RSACI** - The Recreational Software Advisory Counsel for the Internet is a system that provides consumers with information about the level of sex, nudity, violence, and offensive language in software, games, and Web sites. This is a valuable tool that parents can find on the Internet and use to evaluate and screen what their children have access to.
- **Encourage traditional play** - Using the Internet or even watching television should never take time away from traditional forms of play such as pretending, painting, drawing, and sports. These forms of play are necessary for healthy psychological development. Turn off the electronics and they will turn on their imagination!

The first step to becoming an Internet responsible counselor, teacher, or parent is to accept the fact that although the Internet is an amazing new resource that can enrich our children’s lives, it can also be dangerous. Once we accept that there is some potential harm, we must take the necessary steps to protect our children in cyberspace.

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