



# The Parent Pamphlet

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*Advances in computer technology and the Internet have changed the way America works, learns, and communicates. The Internet has become an integral part of America's economic, political, and social life.*  
~Bill Clinton

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## Cyber Safety: How safe is your child?

Internet use has become a common activity in many homes today. Children learn from young ages how to navigate their online worlds that include games, discussion forums and social networking sites and tools. Some sites require or encourage users to give personal information such as their name, address and telephone number to play a game or join a club. Although parents are legally responsible for guaranteeing their child's online safety, they may not always be aware of the extent of their child's online activity. Online sites do not always require parental permission.



Stories in the media have exposed the dangers that can occur with online use. Children and teenagers have been exposed to sexual predators including sexually explicit exchanges, unwanted solicitations and requests for face-to-face meetings. They may also have experienced pornography or harassment while surfing the internet. Recent statistics have actually shown a decrease in unwelcome online solicitation of minors in the past several years.

Although this is promising news, parents still need to be aware of the possible dangers of their child's online use.



## Consider the Benefits

This information may have you considering banning internet use or even throwing out the computer. Take a couple deep breaths and consider the positive effects the internet may have on your child. Educational advantages include expanding argumentation skills and critical thinking in discussion forums along with seeking advice from peers regarding homework. Users may also be exposed to people from different ethnicities or cultures they may not have otherwise come into contact with; this fosters an increased global perspective along with sensitivity. YouTube has been found to be used by adolescents as a source of information on topics such as the war in Iraq. Video games help increase cognitive skills like visualization, analog representation (reading images) along with the ability to divide visual attention.

Psychosocial benefits from internet social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook help adolescents to explore their identities, engage in new viewpoints and receive autonomy and social support. Teens may reflect on their values, their strengths and weaknesses while becoming more open and sensitive to others. Children and adolescents also tend to seek advice (i.e. family issues, conflict with friends, relationship and sexual advice, etc.) from their peers and many find it easier to do so online rather than face-to-face.

## What To Look For

- Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.
- You find pornography on your child's computer.
- Your child receives phone calls from men you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize.
- Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know.
- Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.
- Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.
- Your child is using an on-line account belonging to someone else.



*Children are one third of our population and all of our future.  
~Select Panel for the Promotion of Child Health, 1981*



## What Can You Do?

The fact is the internet is here to stay. The dangers to users will always be present; if a “safe bubble environment” is not an option for you or your child the best you can do is encourage and educate your family to become “tech-savvy” and eliminate as many risks as possible.

1. **Communicate** with your child about the real dangers they may encounter online
2. **Teach** signs to look for that they are talking to a predator; how to access privacy controls on certain sites; to never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met on-line; to never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet or on-line service to people they do not personally know; to never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number; to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing; that whatever they are told on-line may or may not be true; how to remove themselves from distressing situations and how to report to authorities and adults (cybertipline.com from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children).
3. Have the computer in a **common room** in the house
4. **Spend time** with your child learning their online activities i.e. who they talk to and what sites they visit
5. **Monitor** their chat room use and keep access to their online accounts including email; **explain** the safety reasons of doing this
6. **Know** when to contact authorities: Your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography; Your child has been sexually solicited by someone who knows that your child is under 18 years of age; Your child has received sexually explicit images from someone that knows your child is under the age of 18.

## Resources

<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm>

Run by the government this website describes some ways in which children may be sexually exploited online, at-risk signs for parents to look for and precautions parents can take to protect their children. This website informs parents in what situations they should contact authorities and how preserve evidence of attempted exploitation. Also available to parents are definitions for internet terms and some frequently asked questions.

<http://www.netsmartz.org/index.aspx>

This website is run by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. It gives parents access to definitions, online risks, internet safety news, statistics and Public-Service Announcements. Parents can do online activities with their children to help teach safe and appropriate use of the internet. A page of resources is also available including books, websites, workshops and organizations.

**Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Learn to Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly** by: Nancy E. Willard (Paperback, 2007, \$11.21 Amazon.com) Endorsed by Douglas Levin, Senior Director of Education Policy, Cable in the Classroom

**Me, Myspace and I: Parenting the Net Generation** by: Larry D. Rosen (Paperback, 2007, \$11.53 Amazon.com) Endorsed by Scholastic Parent and Child Magazine on Amazon.com

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