



## Learn the Lingo!

**INTERNET.** A global network that connects computers via telephone lines and/or fiber networks to storehouses of electronic information. All you need to connect with people from all over the world is a computer, a modem, a telephone line and a service provider.

**PUBLIC CHAT ROOMS.** Places on-line where multiple users can connect with one another and/or meet new people. They usually cover a broad range of topics such as entertainment, sports, game rooms, children only, etc. Systems operators may monitor some chat rooms for illegal activity and inappropriate language.

**ELECTRONIC MAIL (E-MAIL).** The transmission of messages and files between computers over a communications network similar to mailing a letter via the postal service. E-mail is stored on a server, where it will remain until the addressee retrieves it.

**CHAT.** Real-time text conversation between users in a chat room with no expectation of privacy. All chat conversation is accessible by all individuals in the chat room while the conversation is taking place.

**INSTANT MESSAGES.** Private, real-time text conversation between two users in a chat room.

# The Scoop on Safety!

## Children's Internet Safety Edition\*

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Children are increasingly spending more time on computers, especially since they are being integrated into the school system at an earlier age. While there are definitely positive aspects about the progress of technology and the impact of Internet on making our lives efficient, there are also downsides. The Internet raises societal concerns about privacy, security, pornography, and virtual communities. Although the young minds of children can easily grasp the functions of e-mail, search functions, and chatting, children may not be able to understand the complexity of the Internet.

Research indicates that there may be a developmental difference in understanding the functioning of computers and the Internet. A study by Yan (2006) suggests that by Grades 5 and 6, children reach the adult level of understanding the Internet's technical complexity, in that the computer is connected to multiple components. Yan (2006) also suggests that by Grades 7 and 8, children reach the adult level of understanding the Internet's social complexity.

The Internet has changed the meaning of social interactions from personal connections to virtual connections. There are advantages of communicating with people through the Internet, but children and youth are engaging in relationships with people they meet virtually. This may lead to sharing personal information and in some cases, attempting to meet in person. Needless to say, these younger generations are also at a higher risk of encountering sexual predators. Due to increasing risks that children and youth are exposed to through the Internet, it is important for parents to educate children about the age-appropriate computer and Internet usage.

*\*This newsletter is focused on parents with children in elementary or early adolescence, but information is applicable to parents of children of all ages.*

## Signs Your Child Might Be At Risk:

- 1) Spending long hours online, especially at night.
- 2) Phone calls from people you don't know, or unsolicited gifts arriving in the mail.
- 3) Your child suddenly turns off the computer when you walk into the room.
- 4) Withdrawal from family life and reluctance to discuss online activities.



## Helpful Tips for Internet Safety:

If your child has Internet access available in the home, please take time to talk to them about safety and try to set boundaries or rules concerning computer usage. If you already have rules in place, fantastic! Please take some time to review them periodically with your child. The Internet can be a great asset to all of us, but due to the curiosity that children express from an early age, it is important that your child know about the potential dangers and what to do if a problem occurs.

- ✓ **Create a parent-child contract for Internet safety:** Draw up rules of Internet use in your home to be kept by both the child and parent that encourage openness in the home about any strange or uncomfortable activity the child encounters on-line. The contract should be signed by everyone and posted in a visible area near the computer.
- ✓ **Exercise trust in your child's computer and Internet use:** Try not to hover or make it obvious that you are watching your child's every move on-line. Encourage communication about any suspicious computer usage, spend time with your child on-line and let your child share with you favorite Internet sites.
- ✓ **Keep the computer in a common room in the house:** Make sure that the computer is not in an isolated area. It is more difficult for computer sex-offenders to target your child when you can see the computer screen. Also, if you see your child spending too much time on the computer, encourage offline activities such as homework, sports, or arts and crafts.
- ✓ **Use parental controls on your computer and Internet browser:** Set up the appropriate age restrictions on web browsing and contact your service provider for any blocking software for additional security.
- ✓ **Teach your child how to use Internet resources responsibly:** The more your child knows; the less likely they'll stumble across trouble on-line. Teach them to alert you when they do come across suspicious activity. Bookmark appropriate sites for them for easy access. Share an e-mail account with your child to monitor messages.

## Remind your child not to share:

### Personal Photographs & Private information:

- 1) Full name, 2) Home address, 3) Phone number, 4) Social Security #, 5) Passwords, 6) Names of family members, 7) Credit card numbers

## Useful Websites:

**Microsoft's Tips for Online safety and securing your home computer**  
[www.microsoft.com/protect/parents/childsafety/age.aspx](http://www.microsoft.com/protect/parents/childsafety/age.aspx)

**FBI Publications: A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety**  
[www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide\\_e.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide_e.htm)

**Kids Health For Parents\***  
[http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net\\_safety.html#](http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net_safety.html#)

**Kids Health For Teens\***  
[http://kidshealth.org/teen/safety/safebasics/internet\\_safety.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/safety/safebasics/internet_safety.html)

*Partnering sites on Internet safety*  
**ConnectSafely\***  
[www.connectsafely.org](http://www.connectsafely.org)

**SafeTeens & SafeKids**  
[www.safeteens.com](http://www.safeteens.com)  
[www.safekids.com](http://www.safekids.com)

**Net Family News**  
<http://netfamilynews.org>

*\* Website has Spanish language alternative*

## References:

Dombrowski, S. C., LeMasney, J. W., Emmanuel Ahia, C., & Dickson, S. A. (2004). Protecting children from online sexual predators: Technological, psychoeducational, and legal considerations. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 35*, 65-73.

Yan, Z. (2006). What influences children's and adolescents' understanding of the complexity of the internet? *Developmental Psychology, 42*, 418-428.