



# How to Ensure Your Children Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly: Strategies For Parents

## FACT SHEET

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While the online world offers children many unique benefits, it also offers some of the same risks as the real world. Maintaining an open and respectful dialogue with your kids helps them feel comfortable coming to you for guidance when they see something that concerns or confuses them. This kind of approach will ensure children gain the knowledge and learn the skills they need to cope when parents aren't there to guide and protect them.

Since kids are likely to go online from many locations, Cable in the Classroom recommends a combination of three simple, comprehensive strategies for parents to guide their children's safe and responsible use of the Internet. For more details on how to implement these strategies, please visit us online at [www.ciconline.org](http://www.ciconline.org).

## Internet Safety Strategies for Parents

1. Set rules;
2. Use parental controls; and
3. Instill media literacy skills.

For more information about these recommendations and links to additional resources, please visit [www.ciconline.org](http://www.ciconline.org).

### 1. Set Rules.

Experts advocate setting some basic ground rules for safe Internet use. Parents should talk to their children, explain the rules and discuss why they are important. For instance:

- Do not give personal information to online strangers through your online profile, IM, email or chat room conversation. Your address, the name of your school, and your phone number could all be used to identify who you are and where you live.
- Do not post pictures or videos that could identify who you are, or where you live or go to school.
- Do not meet in person anyone you have met only online.
- Treat others as you would like to be treated. Do not become a cyber bully by spreading rumors or by being mean to or saying inappropriate things about others online.
- Cheating, plagiarism, stealing, and harming others or their property is as wrong in the online world as it is in the real world.
- Tell your parent or another adult if something you see online makes you uncomfortable.
- Think before you post. Do not post words or pictures you would not want your parents, teachers, or future employers to see.
- Do not open any email attachment unless you are sure you know what it is and who sent it.



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## 2. Use Parental Controls.

Talking with your kids about Internet safety and media literacy encourages an open dialogue. Make sure they know your expectations about their online behavior. You should also keep an eye on what they do online and take advantage of the appropriate technology tools.

- Place Internet-connected computers in common areas of the home, where you can see what your children are doing.
- Set rules about when and how long your children can go online and about what they're allowed and expected to do online.
- Monitor what they are doing online. You have a right to oversee their online activities and an obligation to help them learn to be safe online.
- Ask your Internet Service Provider (ISP) about any parental controls they may offer.
- Install a content filter and/or monitoring filter and learn how to check your computer's Internet history to see what sites your child has visited.
- Make sure you have up-to-date virus protection and a firewall. Regularly scan for adware and spyware.
- If your child participates as a character in an online game or has a blog or a profile at MySpace, Facebook, or other social networking site, have them show you what it is and how it works. Then, take a look at the kind of information they've posted and to what other sites they link.
- Rules and technology are helpful, but they are not perfect. Your children will, sooner or later, stumble onto something they should not. An important strategy is to teach children how to use these tools thoughtfully and responsibly. Media literacy skills will help your children be better able to handle the unexpected and more thoughtful about what they do online.

## 3. Instill Media Literacy Skills.

Talking about how to find, analyze, evaluate, interact with, and create information online can be a great conversation starter with your children. In fact, the following concepts and

questions can help you and your children reach a deeper understanding of how we can all make more effective, safe, and responsible use of the Internet.

- Do not panic! The Internet helps educate us and can make our lives more efficient, interesting and enjoyable. Take some precautions, educate yourself and your child and enjoy taking advantage of all the online world has to offer.
- Don't scold or they might withhold. The Internet is an important part of many kids' lives. They may clam up and go to others for advice if parents are overly afraid or critical. Listen to what they like about using the Internet and what concerns they have. Make your points but respect theirs, too. A trusting, two-way communication can keep them coming to you to ask questions or to seek guidance.
- Learn about how the Internet continues to change and evolve. Things change so fast today, especially on the Internet. Your children may know how to use the tools better than you do, but they still need your help. When you hear about a popular new website or online service, take a minute to learn something about it. Ask your neighborhood librarian, your child's teachers or your tech-savvy friends about the benefits and risks. Have your children teach you how the latest newest tool works and go to the "Media Smart" area of Cable in the Classroom's website ([www.ciconline.org](http://www.ciconline.org)) for articles and links to information about new media tools.
- Realize you're not getting the whole story. What you find online isn't always 100% accurate. The Internet is a great place to find information, but some websites are trying to sell products or points of view. Some sites are satire and some are scams. Just as your child's online profile isn't a complete and accurate picture of who they are, the people they meet online may not be who they say they are. It pays to be skeptical and ask "Who created this and why did they do it?" Then check three or four other sources to be sure you're getting the real story.
- Understand the tools of the trade. Professional websites are carefully designed. The photos, graphics, layout, colors, words and sounds



are all chosen to achieve specific results. Help your child analyze how websites are put together and what their owners are trying to achieve with each design element. This will help them to think critically about what they post online.

- Remember that people interpret things differently. What your teen says in their blog or posts on their profile may shock and amuse their peers, but what will a college admissions officer or the personnel department of a future employer think when they see it? Help your child think about how different audiences will perceive what they post online. That thoughtfulness can help kids become better communicators and prevent them from posting something they should not.
- Examine values and beliefs. Websites, online profiles, blogs and streaming videos convey information about the values and beliefs of their creators. Look at a news website or an online profile and see if you can tell what the author's choice of images and words expresses about their point of view. Understand that what you post online says something about who you are. It can also help children avoid sending the wrong messages.
- Follow the money. Modern media give advertisers many more ways to reach consumers. Instead of a 30-second TV ad, marketers are creating interactive websites, online games and viral videos. Movie companies are even creating MySpace profiles for the characters in new films! Can your child tell if a site is trying to say something or sell something? Help your children identify online marketing by asking if the intent of the website is to inform, persuade or entertain.