

Log on to Safety

Protect your family with these simple **online tips**.

By Colleen Marble

With a click of a mouse, your kids can jump onto the World Wide Web. The Web is an amazing resource children can use to research term papers, connect with friends, play games online, and keep up with pop culture.

But despite the benefits, using the Web is not without danger, especially for children and teenagers who have yet to learn how to avoid Internet danger zones. Inappropriate material, identity theft, predators, and “cyberbullies” are just a few of the threats lurking “out there.”

As parents, we want to do all we can to protect our children from harm. We supervise their playdates, we ask questions about who their friends are, we teach them to avoid strangers ... yet many of us aren't as careful as we need to be when we allow our children log on to the Web.

So what's a parent to do? Start by following a few basic Internet safety tips.

Limit screen time.

The less time your child spends online, the less chance he has of finding inappropriate material, predators, and other dangers. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours a day of total screen time (which includes computer and television, as well as video games).

Watch the computer.

It's easier to monitor your child's online activities when the computer is in a common area of your home, like the den or the kitchen. Avoid allowing children, even teenagers, to have a computer permanently located in their bedroom, where they may be online without your knowledge.

Track their activities.

Invest in a software package that allows you to monitor past online surfing, and check often to make sure your child is not visiting sites that are off-limits.

Talk often.

Discuss Internet safety and responsible online behavior with your children. Let them know that they can and should come to you if they ever feel threatened or uncomfortable with messages, content, or other online experiences.

Become Net-savvy.

It's difficult to set and enforce rules if you don't understand what a blog is or how MySpace, Club Penguin, or Facebook works. Take time to visit the sites your child visits. ●



Free Internet Protection for Your Family

You can make the Web a safer place to surf for your entire family by taking advantage of a free software package like Windows Live OneCare Family Safety (<https://fss.live.com>) from Microsoft.

Family Safety offers:

- **Safer browsing for your kids, with guidelines you personalize.** Family Safety gives you the tools to help guide each member of the family based on your values and their age. Developed in partnership with the AAP, Family Safety's three age-based default filtering settings are:
 - **Up to age 10:** Supervise your child's computer use, and use Internet safety tools to limit access to content, Web sites, and activities that are inappropriate.
 - **Ages 11 to 14:** Children this age can be given a bit more freedom; however, they still need supervision.
 - **Ages 15 to 18:** Children this age should have fewer limitations on content, Web sites, or activities; however, they still need parents to define appropriate safety guidelines.
- **Safer searching and learning.** Family Safety works with MSN® Encarta®, Windows Live™ Search and other search engines to help block inappropriate search results and to help deliver age-appropriate information.
- **Activity monitoring with Web-based reports.** Keep an eye on your kids' online activities from almost any Web-connected PC, and give them permission to view content, even when you're not at home.
- **Unlimited users and computers in the home.** Once installed, Family Safety works on every computer in the house.
- **Filtering and guideline applications that work from almost any Web-connected computer.** Once your kids are registered, the filters and guidelines go almost anywhere with them, regardless of where they log on.

To learn more about how Family Safety can help your family, go to <https://fss.live.com>. For more information about your family's safety and the Internet, see the AAP publication, *The Internet and Your Family*, available at <http://safety.aap.org/internet.pdf>.