



INTERNET SAFETY: A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

The Internet, including web sites, e-mail, chat rooms, social networking web sites, and instant messaging, is increasingly part of young people's lives. Risks of Internet use by adolescents are an intensification of risks of media and society at large, but they come in forms that adults may not be familiar with and did not experience when they were growing up. Parents and others concerned about young girls and women should educate themselves about the Internet world and help adolescents deal with it safely.

What are the risks of Internet use by adolescents?

- Teens may come across material that is inappropriate and disturbing, including sexual, violent, drug-promoting, or otherwise offensive images and messages.
- Some information provided online is not accurate. Even sites that look professional may not provide correct information.
- Excessive use of the Internet and time spent sitting at the computer may take important time away from studies, athletics, hobbies, or social activities.

What are chat rooms and are they harmful?

- Chat rooms are places on the Internet where users can exchange instant messages in real time.
- Access to chat lines can be open (public) or restricted (private).
- Chat rooms usually are not moderated (ie, there is no one to keep the discussion focused on the topic or to try to control inappropriate messages). However, some Internet servers offer monitored chat rooms for various age groups.
- Chat rooms are considered to be the most dangerous area for potential sexual offenses on the Internet.

What are risks of sexual harm from the Internet?

- One in three adolescents aged 10–17 years who use the Internet report unwanted exposure to sexual material while surfing the web.
- One in seven adolescents aged 10–17 years who use the Internet report at least one unwanted invitation to participate in sexual talk or sexual activity or is asked for personal sexual information.
- While most online solicitation is from people met online, a fair amount comes from friends and acquaintances, as does a great deal of online harassment.

Who is at risk for online sexual offenses?

- Girls are at higher risk than boys for sexual solicitations.
- Older adolescents are more likely to be solicited because they tend to use the computer unsupervised.
- The risk is increased for those who participate in chat rooms, talk to strangers online, or use the Internet at houses other than their own.
- The risk also is increased for children and adolescents who post personal information, talk with strangers about sex, make rude comments or sexual jokes, or look for X-rated sites.

What can adults do to protect adolescents from the risks of Internet use?

- Learn about the Internet and the information that is available on it.
- Discuss the possible dangers of Internet use with your children and adolescents.
- Be aware of how, when, and where your children and teens use the Internet.
- Monitor and limit the amount of time your children spend on the computer and the web sites they visit on the Internet.
- Ask your children to whom messages are sent and from whom messages are received.
- Review young people's profiles on social networking web sites and their instant messaging "buddy lists."





- Keep home computers in a family room or living room where you can supervise use.
- Use Internet safeguard functions (software or services that filter or block inappropriate web sites, e-mail, and other materials).
- If an adolescent reports getting a message of a sexual nature, do not blame or punish the young person but use the opportunity to talk about sex. The e-mail should be forwarded to the Internet provider and the provider should be informed that the e-mail is offensive. Many Internet providers have specific e-mail addresses for these types of reports. The police also should be contacted.

What should you teach your teens about how to use the Internet safely?

- Never give out personal information, such as their full name, address, telephone number, or school online. Use a fake name for a screen name instead of a real name. Keep their profiles “private” so that only people they authorize can see them or write to them online.
- Never agree to meet someone they met only on the Internet.
- Never give e-mail addresses to anyone whose identity cannot be confirmed.
- Do not respond to any message or e-mail that makes them feel uncomfortable. Report these messages to parents, guardians, or other authorities.
- Tell parents or another trusted adult about any sexual messages or pictures involving children found on the Internet because they are illegal.
- If someone bothers them in instant messaging or e-mail, block them.
- Do not post anything they would not want others to see. Once they press the send button, the message lives forever on the web.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American Academy of Pediatrics
Telephone: (847) 434-4000
Web: www.aap.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444
Web: www.acog.org

Crimes Against Children Research Center
University of New Hampshire
Telephone: (603) 862-1888
Web: www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html

Enough is Enough
Telephone: (888) 744-0004
Web: www.enough.org/

Family Online Safety Institute
Web: <http://fosi.org/>

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
Telephone: (703) 274-3900
24-Hour Hotline: (800) THE-LOST [(800) 843-5678]
Web: www.missingkids.com
NetSmartz Workshop: www.netsmartz.org

Parent’s Guide to Internet Safety
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Crimes Against Children Program
Telephone: (202) 324-3000
Web: www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm

Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center
National Criminal Justice Reference Service
Telephone: (800) 627-6872
Web: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

SafeKids.com
Web: www.safekids.com