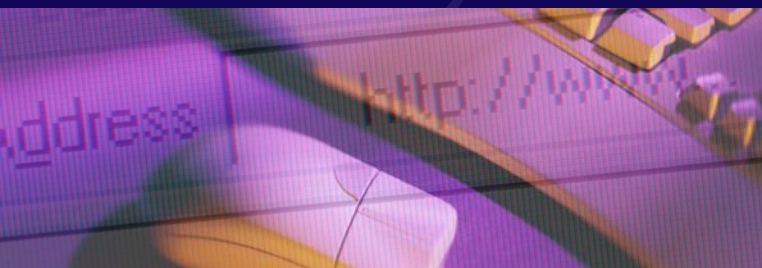


Internet Guide for Parents



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President
Family Research Council

Internet Guide for Parents

BY STEPHEN SWEET

A recent Pew Internet & American Life study found that more than 55 percent of American Internet users have access to high speed Internet either at home, school, or in the workplace.¹ This number becomes much higher when other internet connections are factored in. A study conducted by the US Department of Education found that 59 percent of students in grades K–12 have access to the Internet on a daily basis. By high school, nearly all students (80 percent) use the internet daily. Clearly, parents cannot avoid the Internet or the dangers that often lurk within.

Warning Signs:

The FBI lists the following signs that your child may be at risk on the Internet:

- Your child quickly turns off the computer or changes screens when you approach.
- Your child spends a large amount of time on the computer, especially at night or in chat rooms.
- You find pornography on your child’s computer.
- Your child becomes withdrawn from family and friends.
- Your child is using an online account other than one you have established for him or her. This includes free trial accounts.

STEPHEN SWEET recently graduated from Grove City College with a double major in Political Science and Communication. This pamphlet is based on the Family Guide to Internet Safety that Stephen wrote for the Pennsylvania Family Institute. Stephen is planning to get his graduate degree in Public Policy / Government, and continue his work in the areas of family values and the free market system.

INTERNET GUIDE FOR PARENTS

BY STEPHEN SWEET

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- You begin noticing that your child is spending extended periods of time on computers without having tangible results for the time spent.

Practical Suggestions for Parents:

- **Set ground rules with your family and post them near the computer.** The most effective way parents can shape their child's Internet behavior is to supervise their online activity.
- **Avoid sites that ask for personal information.** It may be shared publicly without your knowledge. Instruct your child to never give out his or her name, address or other personal information on the Internet.
- **Your home may not be the only place your child is accessing the Internet.** Computers at friends' homes, the library, in school, and after school care programs may not have appropriate Internet safeguards.



- **Remind your children that not everything they read online is necessarily true.** Internet chat rooms have become a stalking ground for sexual predators who give phony information about themselves in order to lure unsuspecting young people.
- **Make computer usage a family activity.** Keep the computer in the family room rather than in the child's bedroom. Ask them about their "online friends" just as you would their other friends.
- **Visit www.FilterReview.com for more help monitoring your children's exposure on the Internet.** Show interest in your children's Internet experience. If your children know that you are involved in and aware of their activities online, they will be less likely to engage in unsafe behavior or to explore questionable content.

Safety Checklist:

- Put your computer in a common room where the screen is clearly visible at all times.
- Frequently check the "Internet History" to learn what sites your child has visited. The history can be found on the Internet Explorer toolbar.
- Periodically check internet files stored in memory caches, Temporary Internet Files, or files that have been downloaded. While in Internet Explorer, temporary internet files can be accessed by clicking on the "Tools" tab and selecting "Internet Options." Click the "Settings" option in the Temporary Internet Files section and select "View Files." Look for files with the extension .jpg and .gif (photos) or .mpeg, .avi, and .mov (videos).
- Set parental controls to monitor the content children can access on the Internet. The "Content Advisor" is located in Internet Options as well,

under the “Content” tab. The parent can adjust the rating levels, block or approve specific sites, or activate more advanced protection mechanisms.

- Allow access only to agreed upon “favorites.” Discuss and allow greater access on an “as-needed” basis. This option is located in the Content Advisor under the “Approved Sites” tab.
- Purchase a filtering software program or subscribe to an online filter service.



Chatting Online

Just as children like to talk on the phone or at school, they also enjoy chatting online. Chatting can be educational as children are able to keep in touch with family members or learn how people live in other parts of our country and even around the world. Like anything else, however, a good thing can be misused and cause harm. In addition to the obvious danger of contacting sexual predators, chatting can present other areas of concern for parents.

What Are the Dangers?

- Many children become addicted to chatting. It gives them an opportunity to anonymously talk to others in a setting where it is easy to develop “friendships” and even create a fictitious life.
- Because there is no face-to-face contact, children can fail to develop important social skills if they spend too much time chatting.
- Chatting can take the place of other important activities such as homework, hobbies, and reading.
- Chatting can lead to a sedentary lifestyle at the computer, replacing beneficial physical activities such as playing with friends, bike riding, or team sports.

Instant Messaging

Instant Messaging is very popular among young people today.

Instant Message - (or, more commonly, “IM”)
- A software that allows communication between users across the Internet in real time. Messages can be sent and received instantaneously.

Instant Messenger is very similar to e-mail, and many people view it as being a safer alternative to chat rooms because it is a conversation between just two people. Some well-known messaging programs are AOL Instant Messenger, MSN Instant Messenger, and Yahoo Instant Messenger.

IM can often be easily monitored by adults, and through certain programs (such as Dead Aim), one can even record entire Instant Messaging conversations to ensure the dialogue taking place is appropriate. An IM user can accept or reject incoming messages and screen strangers. In addition, IM



'names' are theoretically accessible only when a user gives his name to another user. Communicating with an IM program has some of the same security and privacy benefits as e-mail, but as with any Internet experience, there are still risks involved.

Precautions

- There is no guarantee of truthfulness and honesty when online. The person claiming to be a fourteen-year-old girl from Delaware may actually be a middle-aged man from Florida.
- Children should always be reminded that, while online, they should never pretend to be someone they are not.
- Closed "buddy lists" most effectively limit contact. Open chat rooms are very public places, and can present dangers when children communicate with people they do not know.

Problems with Online Relationships

For young people who value relationships as opportunities to share feelings, laugh, and grow, the

Internet is an amazing technology that has the potential to unite people. However, because relationships created over a computer are easier to control, those with wrong motivations have found the Internet a virtual playground. The lack of accountability and the relative anonymity create two distinct dangers.

First, the inability to communicate face to face can create a "they can't see me" mentality that causes some individuals to stretch the truth or make false statements and claims. Young people become deceived by both their desire for new intimacies and by unseen "friends" whose solicitous friendliness and expressed interest are masquerades for inappropriate amorous advances.

Second, habitually communicating through the computer screen can lead people into the trap of believing that personal interaction isn't necessary. The danger, ironically, lies in the lack of risk—the vulnerability that engenders genuine friendship, fosters familiarity, and hones the kind of honesty that makes relationships vigorous and vital. People who spend too much time chatting online can miss out on real life experiences and all of the joys which accompany them.

For Additional Information please visit: www.chatdanger.com

Blogging

The Internet trend called blogging is growing in popularity. Bloggers enjoy the freedom of posting their own thoughts, rants and raves, likes and dislikes, in their own private Internet space. Blogging has been likened to having a private journal that is open for everyone who has Internet access to read.

Blog - A short term for "weblog," a blog is a personal journal published on the Web. It is a public web site where users post informal journals of their thoughts, comments, and philosophies. It is usually updated frequently, and normally reflects the views of the blog's creator. It can be viewed by anyone interested, or just by a select group of people.

The Benefits and Dangers of Blogging

According to a Pew Internet Study, more than 50 million Internet users read blogs regularly. There are approximately 12,000 new blogs created every day and about 10,800 blog updates per hour.² Blogging can be both a cost-effective and time-efficient way of connecting with people and voicing opinions:

- Users can create a network of friends and relatives, allowing them to keep in touch through updates and news on the blog. This method is similar to sending out a mass email, except that the recipients choose to access the information rather than having it delivered.
- Blogs can also be used as scrapbooks, where digital photographs can be uploaded and viewed by others.
- Blogs allow the exchange of information, issues, and opinions by allowing users with similar views to connect and converse.

But like everything found on the Internet, weblogs aren't perfect:

- Don't trust everything found in a blog.
- Be discerning; keep in mind that what is written can be accessed by anyone. Even if the blog address is only known by a few people, it is still on the Internet.
- Don't give out too much personal information in a blog.

Often, people don't take into account the intersection of the real world and cyberspace, and they don't believe that anything they do online will affect them in real life. Young people especially may not understand that anybody could be reading their blogs and possibly compiling any information they disclose.

MySpace

One type of online blogging websites stands out as posing a particular threat to youths: the "MySpaces" of the Internet.

MySpace is a type of "social networking" site that allows its members to create individualized webpages containing pictures, information, musical clips, videos, animations and online diary entries. Members can then "become friends" with other members or search through all of the other personal profiles. Over 100 million people currently have a MySpace account, and the site attracts more than 4 percent of all Internet traffic daily, easily making it the largest networking site.



The phenomenon extends beyond simply MySpace. An estimated one-half of school-age children have some form of blog or personal webpage. While a majority of the top 15 sites visited by teens 17 years of age and younger were either blogs or social networking sites (such as MySpace or Xanga), it is still estimated that few parents have any idea of what these sites contain.

MySpace presents a risk of exposure to obscenity by serving as a potential link to obscene photos or obscenity-laced dialogue. Other risks are not so obvious. When people join MySpace, they discover a world where they can be whatever and whoever they want to be. Sometimes young people struggling with low self-esteem may tune out friends and family to meet and impress people with an imaginary or exaggerated identity online. Cyber interaction can replace reality for these individuals.

For more information on blogs and other social networking sites, and how to deal with their use, visit: www.wiredsafety.org/internet101/blogs.html

Obscenity: The Dark Side of the Internet

Most people think of Internet pornography as naked, airbrushed women or “pin-up girls.” This view is hopelessly naive. In addition to graphic sex between two adults, every imaginable sexual deviation is displayed, involving violence, animals, excrement, and group sex, to name a few.

Parents may mistakenly believe that the “bad” hardcore pornography requires a credit card to obtain, and thus children are not likely to view it. While porn sites do invite you to use a credit card to get deeper into the site, many of them have numerous free “sample” images. There are also innumerable free sites which offer the same content found on the larger “pay sites,” as well as countless homemade pornography galleries.

Parents often have a rose-colored view of what their kids may or may not do. In one sense, that’s good—kids need to know that their parents will err in the direction of trust rather than mistrust. But parents must not let that trust lull them into complacency. A teenager’s hormone-fueled curiosity is an extremely powerful force; you should not

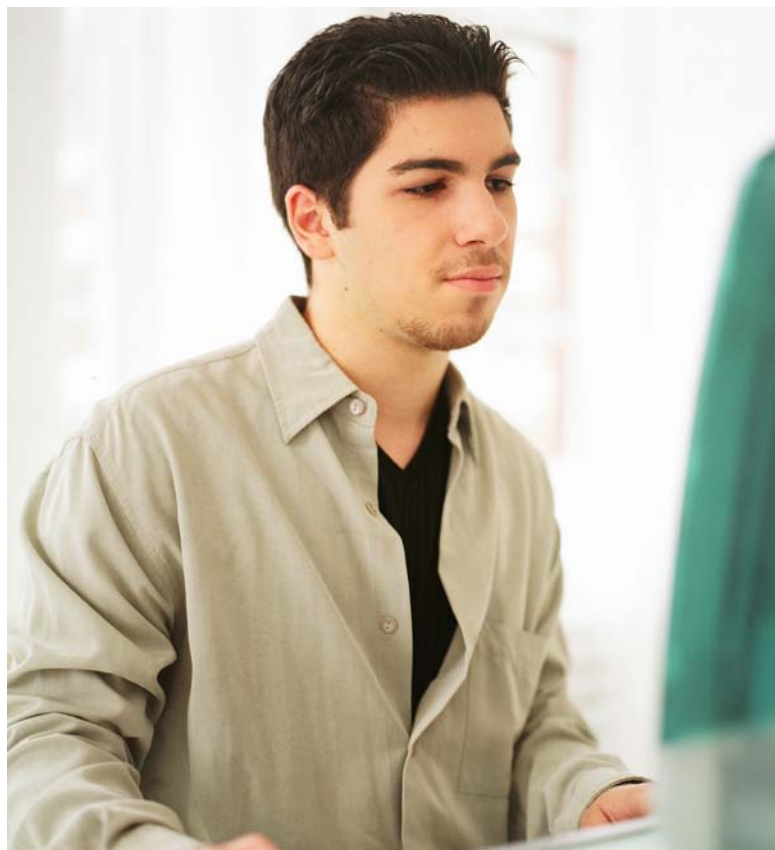
underestimate its power to draw your “good kid” into the darker side of the Internet. Many parents never imagined that this could be a problem in *their* home—until it was.

Don't Look in the Box

Hello, Son. You've probably noticed that big cardboard box in the middle of your bedroom floor. As you've heard, it contains a bunch of Playboy and Penthouse magazines. Underneath those are hardcore magazines. Underneath those are hardcore magazines containing some of the worst kind of hardcore sexual imagery available in the world, including illegal child pornography—you've probably been curious about what "hardcore" looks like, haven't you?

Well, here's the deal: don't look in the box.

I'm sorry that it has to be in the middle of the floor—I know you'll trip over it every time you enter the room, which will renew once again your curiosity about what



the box contains. Also, I'm sorry about all that mail which comes to you and enticingly describes certain magazine issues which are in the box. Remember: don't look in the box.

You're 15 now; old enough to spend significant time home alone as your Mom and I go on various errands and events, and your brother and sister are involved in their activities. Of course, there is no way I would know if you looked in the box. In fact, you could safely remove quite a few issues and keep them elsewhere—I wouldn't notice. But please: don't look in the box.

I realize that as a teenager, your sexual drive is stronger now than at any other time in your life. So, not only will curiosity fuel your desire to look in the box, but your hormones will be begging you to do so as well. And once, when you tripped on the box and one issue tumbled out, what you saw as you hurriedly put it back ignited your interest. It took every bit of willpower you had to not flip through the issue in your hands.

But no matter what: don't look in the box.

The Enemy Works a 24-7 Shift

The Internet's dark side is not a passive danger. Pornographers have many tools in their arsenal to draw your teenagers into their world, intending to hook them for life. For example, porn proprietors hijack common misspellings of popular sites. They even take harmless sounding words, such as the names of animals, and use them for their web addresses. These web sites are both easy for young children to stumble across and easy for teens to hide due to their innocent sounding titles and lack of graphic words or descriptions.

Another way in which pornographers attempt to hook viewers is by sending out thousands of speculative "spam" e-mail messages containing inviting web hyperlinks. If a child clicks on one of those e-mail message links, many browser windows are often spawned simultaneously, each one opening to a



different porn site. These windows often employ a concept called *mouse trapping*, meaning that if you try to close a window, it automatically re-opens to a different porn site. Also, if you respond to such e-mail messages with an "unsubscribe" directive, your e-mail address is sold on a premium "active" list, which will spark much more of the pornographic e-mail spam. Porn sites also sell advertising space to other porn sites, so one page can lead to another and another.

What makes *home* Internet access so dangerous (as compared to the public library, for example) is the combination of privacy and opportunity. All families leave older children home alone at times, and many kids will find the temptation to explore the Internet's dark side irresistible.

Dealing With the Dangers

Parents need to help their children to be internally motivated to avoid pornography and to recognize how degrading and dangerous it can be. This is not as hard as it may seem. Educate them about the negative nature of pornography. Help them conclude that, even given an opportunity, they *want* to avoid it. Then, the barriers placed between kids and pornography will be seen as friendly reminders—like a fence alongside a cliff—helping them avoid giving in to temptation. Educated agreement is the best protection, because it is active wherever your child goes.

It may seem obvious, but also make sure that children understand that accessing Internet pornography on the home computer will not be tolerated. Violation of that family policy should at the very least result in loss of Internet privileges. If this consequence is posed in the right spirit, the child should consider it another friendly protection from what he or she already knows is wrong.

Avoiding Obscenity

According to a survey commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 25 percent of surveyed youth reported unwanted exposure to sexually explicit material on the Internet within the past year.³ Nearly three-fourths occurred while surfing the Web, with the remainder occurring through e-mail or while Instant Messaging. The great majority of exposures involved pictures with nudity; and 38 percent even showed people having sex. The good news from all of this is that over two-thirds of these incidents took place in the home of the child and therefore should be relatively preventable if the parent chooses to establish some lines of defense for the Internet entering their home.

Detection: How Parents Can Find Out What Their Kids are Up to by Using the Temporary Internet Files Cache

This section describes one of the most useful detection methods of Internet activity, the Temporary Internet Files. When a web browser loads a page from the Internet, it keeps a temporary “local” copy (on the computer’s hard disk) of everything on the page. This makes loading the same web pages faster the next time, since less data needs to be downloaded from the Internet. These records can be viewed by following a few simple steps:

Recently viewed websites can be accessed by clicking the down arrow on the right hand side of the

address bar. This makes it easier to look at previously viewed websites. Online activities can also be monitored by a host of downloadable programs which track sites viewed. The following websites contain programs which track online activities:

www.1spysoftware.com

www.allaboutspyware.com

For more information concerning the use of your computer’s history to track online activities, visit:

www.microsoft.com/athome/security/children/childrenonline.mspix

www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/using/howto/basics/history/button.mspix

A browser’s internal history of activities is usually saved automatically for 7-10 days, but that length of time can be adjusted. Internet histories can, however, be wiped clean by a user wishing to mask their Internet activities. Beware of empty or very limited histories; this could be a sign of a computer-savvy user covering up online indiscretion.

Filters for Families

The first line of defense is to set parental controls in the existing browser to filter inappropriate material. Browsers such as Microsoft Internet



Explorer and Netscape Navigator allow you to set appropriate levels for language, violence, and nudity. Unlike a V-Chip, which monitors and blocks based on an external “rating,” filtering systems like those on Internet Explorer 7.0 look at “labels.” A “label” is information a computer receives about the information a website contains—such as level of profanity, violence, nudity, etc. The filter sees these facts about a website and either allows it to open or does not, based on the parents’ decision. With internet-content filtering parents have the ability to determine what *specific sort of content* is or is not appropriate for their children, and to instruct their filter to allow or block websites accordingly. Apart from Internet Explorer 7.0, the next generation Microsoft operating system, Vista, will include “family safety settings,” which filter through data labeling.

There are also filtering systems available which are separate from browser or operating system based filters. One example is the ICRA^{plus} software, which can be downloaded for free from www.icra.org/icraplus. ICRA^{plus} provides external label filtering, while working in conjunction with whatever local filters are present in a browser or operating system.

Although many more sites are labeling their content, labels are not yet everywhere. An effective second line of defense may be to subscribe to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) which filters material automatically. This is the least flexible option since the ISP does all of the filtering, and you cannot reverse a block on material that may be acceptable. Like filtering software, there are many ISPs that provide parental controls or filtered services.

Finally, in order to avoid finding objectionable sites during searches, you may want to use the following search engines which are filtered for inappropriate content:

Ask Jeeves for Kids	www.ajkids.com
Yahooligans	www.yahooligans.com
Onekey	www.onekey.com

Certain popular search engines, such as Google, also have search filtering. In the “Preferences” tab on Google’s search page, there is an option for SafeSearch, which reorders search results, placing inoffensive ones first on the queue.

Other Steps

Some Internet users may want to avoid filters by implementing an accountability system. This approach allows users to police their own unlimited access to the Internet with the knowledge that a friend or family member has the ability to review the sites they visit and the time they spend on the Internet. For more information, see:

Covenant Eyes
www.covenanteyes.org (877) 479-1119

Netaccountability
www.netaccountability.com (214) 580-2000

GetNetWise
<http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/blocksex>

Finally, be careful when opening attachments to e-mails unless they come from someone you know and trust.

Footnotes

- 1 “Improving Access to the Internet: A Report to the Congress.” *A Report of the General Services Administration*. January 24, 2005. <http://www.cio.gov/documents/icgi/report.pdf>
- 2 Rainie, Lee. “Data Memo: The State of Blogging.” *PEW Internet & American Life Project*. January 2005. http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_blogging_data.pdf
- 3 Mitchell, Kimberly, Ph. D. and Ybarra, Michele, Ph. D. “Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and Adolescents: A National Survey.” *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*. 2005. Volume 8, Number 5. <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/jvq/CV76.pdf>



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Dealing with Pornography - A Practical Guide for Protecting Your Family and Your Community BC05C01
Written by the former chief of the U.S. Department of Justice's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, this extremely practical pamphlet explains how to fight porn in stores, on the Internet, and on television -- what options you have, who to contact, and what to expect.

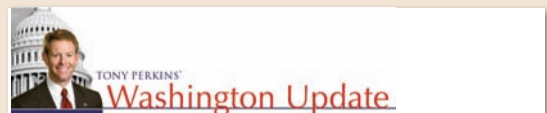
Suggested Donation \$1.50



Why Wait: The Benefits of Abstinence Until Marriage IS06B01

Abstinence-until-marriage programs have proven to be very effective in reducing sexual activity among young people. Practicing abstinence helps couples avoid the long-lasting negative consequences of premarital sex, including out-of-wedlock childbearing, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), emotional problems, promiscuity, and future marital break-up. This Insight paper provides talking points and answers to commonly asked questions about this subject.

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