

10 Things you can do Today to Protect Your Children on the Internet

1. Take personal responsibility for ensuring your child's safety. Define for your family what is acceptable internet use and what is not.
2. Educate yourself in the key issues surrounding internet use.
 - Look for local resources like a computer or internet class at a community college, night classes at a local high school, etc.
 - Learn how to use the tools your children use on the internet like chat rooms, instant messaging, internet service providers, e-mail and message boards.
 - Identify web sites that you would like your children to explore.
 - Identify web sites that you would like your children to avoid.
 - Learn the internet use habits of your children and their friends.
 - Learn the danger areas for children using the internet (check with your local police or state's Attorney General).
 - Use existing online resources to further your internet education. (www.childnetinternational.org; www.fbi.gov; www.netmom.com, www.getnctwise.org).
3. Talk with your children specifically about using the internet. Clearly communicate your goals and values, your expectations, and what you consider to be acceptable uses of the internet. Spend time using the internet with them. Talk about the fun things as well as the dangers.
 - Use the *ICRA Children's Bill of Rights for the Internet* as a starting point for a discussion.
 - Visit www.NetSmartz.org with your children to learn about safety on the internet and how to report dangerous or illegal material online.
4. Place the computer in a common area of the house. Do not let your children have free access to the computer and the internet at all hours and without any supervision.
5. Set parameters and agree to ground rules. Use the *ICRA Family Internet Contracts* as a basis for the "rules of engagement" on family internet use.

Rules should include:

 - Keep all personal information private. Define personal information (name, address, phone number, e-mail address, school name, parents' names, etc.).
 - Use nondescript screen names.
 - Do not give out credit card information over the internet.
 - Don't talk to strangers.

You should clearly define:

 - How long your children can spend online each day.
 - Which internet sites they can visit.
 - How dangerous it may be to open things from people they don't know or trust.
 - Use appropriate language – no code words allowed.
6. Enforce the rules.
 - Revisit the ground rules periodically to make sure they match up with your children's ages and maturity.
 - Post the ground rules in a place visible to both you and your children.
7. Learn about technology tools like filtering software or other safeguarding programs or options. You can learn about these from your Internet Service Provider, your local police department, or perhaps your state's Attorney General's office. Decide if an (or several) of these options are appropriate for your family and implement them. Revisit your settings every six months to make sure you're current with the technology and the data you're monitoring.
8. Maintain control by keeping all internet accounts in your name and control all passwords.
9. Do not let your children meet someone in person whom they met online without your permission or without another adult present.
10. Review histories or logs on your computer to see where your children have been.