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# INTERNET SAFETY

## PROTECTING YOUR CHILD

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The technology of computers and the Internet offer many benefits, as well as a darker side. Child predators use the Internet to find victims. Parents must be aware of what their children are doing on the computer to protect them from the dangers online.

Below is information to protect your children from online threats:

### FAST FACTS:

- s Millions of children under the age of 18 are using the Internet every day.
- s 1 in 5 children between the ages of 10 and 17 has received unwanted solicitations online.
- s 1 in 4 children have been exposed to sexually explicit pictures without seeking or expecting them.
- s 1 in 17 children has been threatened or harassed online.
- s 1 in 33 children has received an aggressive solicitation to meet somewhere.
- s Only half of the children who are threatened or harassed report the incident to their parents.

### THREATS OR HARASSMENT ONLINE:

The Internet makes it easy for predators to locate potential victims and communicate with them.

1. While most offenders are male, a child predator can be anyone: male or female, young or old. They often hold respectable jobs and tend to relate more easily to children than adults and may seek employment or volunteer at a children's organization.
2. ANY child can be vulnerable to a predator.
3. In a Chat Room, people "talk" to each other by typing messages. Those in the chat room can view all of the conversations taking place at once on their computer screen.
  - § A predator pays close attention to the conversations taking place and to the participant's screen names. Revealing or useful information can be obtained from a child's screen name.
  - § For some teens and preteens, the apparent privacy of a chat room is comforting; however, adults use this anonymous venue to observe, approach and attempt to lure a child to meeting outside of their home.
  - § Predators rely on the inexperience of their potential victim and they know what to say to gain their trust.
4. An Online Profile may contain personal information such as a child's email address, interests and hobbies.
  - § Once a profile is located, e-mails and instant messages can be sent directly to the child.
5. A predator will work to build trust with the child and then ask them to keep the relationship secret.
6. With time and research, someone who is stalking your child may be able to find his way right to your door.

### TIPS FOR PARENTS:

1. WARNING SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR:
  - § Your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night.
  - § You find pornography on your child's computer.
  - § Your child receives phone calls from someone you do not know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you do not recognize.
  - § Your child receives mail, gifts or packages from someone you do not know.
  - § Your child hides what they are doing on the computer.
  - § Your child is using another e-mail account.

## 2. MINIMIZE RISKS:

- § Control access to chat rooms and instant messaging.
  - a. Chat rooms are not safe for children, particularly young children.
  - b. Adults seeking to exploit children spend countless hours in chat rooms.
- § Keep screen names anonymous.
  - a. Make sure screen name does not include personal information such as name, age, home address or school name.
- § Avoid online profiles.
  - a. This information can be accessed and used by predators.
- § Access your child's e-mail.
  - a. Maintain access to your child's account. E-mails are not private like a diary. E-mails, chatting and instant messaging are an open window to your child's life. It is not intrusive, check it frequently.
- § Place computer in a common area.
  - a. Computer should be placed in a central room of the house with the screen facing out, into the room.
  - b. Remind children that computer use is not confidential.
- § Parental Controls:
  - a. Contact your Internet Service Provider (ISP). Learn about parental control features offered on your computer and by your ISP. They offer services to help control what your child can or cannot access on the Internet.

## **TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN:**

1. Tell your child what is dangerous about the Internet:
  - § Legal or financial harm to the family, if you "click" without getting permission.
  - § Exposure to harmful material (violence or sexually explicit scenes).
  - § People online who may start off friendly but then change "don't talk to strangers."
2. Encourage them to tell you when:
  - § Someone they do not know attempts to engage them in an online chat.
  - § An inappropriate website comes up on the screen.
  - § Someone harasses or threatens them online.
  - § Teach your children about the differences between pretend and reality on the Internet.
    - a. Many children like to pretend to be someone else online.
    - b. They feel anonymous and may take risks.
    - c. Other people also like to pretend to be someone else for very different reasons.
  - § Sit with your children and see the sites they like to visit.
  - § If a site is inappropriate, explain to them why you think it is not a site for them to visit.
  - § **Make it clear that they will not lose Internet privileges or be punished if they tell you when something questionable happens to them online.**

## **REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY:**

1. Contact your local law enforcement:
  - § If your child or anyone in the household has received child pornography or invitations for sexual acts or unsolicited obscene material.
  - § If your child has received obscene material from someone who knows that your child is under the age of 16.
  - § If someone threatens your child with violence.
2. Do not delete or erase threatening e-mails, voicemails, etc.
3. You may also call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at (800) THE-LOST or visit [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com).

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## FAMILY RULES FOR INTERNET USE

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Using the computer is a privilege. In order to enjoy this privilege and use the computer, we agree to follow these rules.

Computer use is not confidential, and we do not hide what we are doing on the computer.

1. In our family, we get permission to access the Internet, and we use our personal login.
2. We visit websites that are appropriate for our age, and we do not visit websites or access information that are off limits for us.
3. We do not send photos or give out personal information without permission, and we will tell our parents about any online messages we received that make us uncomfortable.
4. We share an e-mail account with our parents. We will not open or use any other e-mail accounts.
5. We do not enter chat rooms.
6. We can go online between the hours of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Time on the computer is limited to \_\_\_\_\_ hour(s) per day.
8. Time on the Internet is limited to \_\_\_\_\_ hour(s) per day.
9. Instant messaging is only allowed with people that we already know. We will provide our parents with a current list of our buddies.
10. We do not respond to messages from people we do not know.

These rules apply to our home computer and all other computers we use.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_