

# Teach Kids Online Safety

The Internet is not as dangerous a place for children and teens as we previously thought, according to a recent law enforcement task force report. Real threats remain, however, and parents need to educate themselves and their children about online safety and privacy.

## Be aware of Internet safety.

There are six major areas parents need to be concerned about:

- ★ Amount of overall Internet/computer use
- ★ Inappropriate websites—violence, pornography, hate groups
- ★ Internet predators, perhaps posing as children or teens
- ★ Online abuse and bullying
- ★ Divulging confidential family information or ID numbers
- ★ Downloading/installing malicious software

## Create a family policy.

Your Internet policy will depend on how old your kids are and what level of individual responsibility you're willing to grant them. The point is to *have* a policy.

- ★ Use parental controls (see below) to enforce the level of safety you're comfortable with.
- ★ Ask the child to suggest a reasonable amount of daily computer usage. Reach agreement on this and then hold the child accountable. Renegotiate if necessary—again, the point is to have an agreed standard, not to expect that the limit will never be exceeded.

## Emphasize safety and privacy.

- ★ Be sure that children understand that talking on the Internet is the same as talking to strangers.
- ★ Talk to children about the dangers of giving away family secrets—whether it's bank account numbers or vacation schedules.
- ★ Make sure children understand that anyone they "meet" on the Internet might not be who they claim to be.
- ★ Teach children to be wary of free offers or attractive lures.

## Use parental controls.

Install **parental controls** and kid-appropriate Web browsing and email software at an early age. Let your children decide when they want to ask for less restricted access, and talk to them about their decision. And remember, controls are not foolproof.

Parental controls are available at several different levels.

- ★ Many Web portals, such as Yahoo! and America Online, offer child- and teen-appropriate portals that block inappropriate content and activities.
- ★ Your PC or your wired or wireless router may include a program that lets you monitor all websites visited and the amount of time each family member spent on the Internet.
- ★ Third-party solutions, such as the parental controls in the Norton Internet Security™ and Norton 360™ free add-on packs, enable even greater control and flexibility.

## Conclusion

The Internet is no more dangerous—or safe—than the real world. You can't protect your children from everything, but you can guide them toward sensible and responsible Internet behavior.