

Children and the Net - A Short Guide for Parents

produced by

CARITAS Social Action

An agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
(Formerly the Catholic Agency for Social Concern)

Now that the Internet has become so common, many parents are asking:

How do I help my children use it wisely?

This short guide is designed to give a few tips to help answer that question.

Ten key rules to keep safe

- 1.** Explore the Net with your children and learn to use it yourself. Know the sites your children are using - not all are educational - help them find the best ones!
- 2.** Agree who uses the Net, when and for how long. Put the computer in a family area of the home and if you have interactive TV have rules for that too.
- 3.** Encourage children to tell you about any e-mails or anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or bothers them.
- 4.** Explain that personal details, passwords and credit card numbers are private so they should always check with you if anyone asks for details.
- 5.** Caution your children never to send photos or arrange to meet anyone before checking with you and to be wary of chat rooms.
- 6.** Take time to learn about parental controls and software to filter out Internet material, but remember - no method is foolproof yet.
- 7.** Don't miss hidden discs - using pornographic or hate-filled material tends to be secretive.
- 8.** Remind your children that these rules apply when using computers outside the home.
- 9.** Complain to your service provider about anything objectionable on the Net
- 10.** Communicate. The best protection is a healthy Christian family life in which family members talk and pray together.

Common Worries and Signs of Trouble

Monitoring use of e-mail and the Internet can be a worry for parents. Here are some common worries and a few signs of trouble to watch out for.

1. Inappropriate Contacts. Children may talk with people online who are not who they seem. Chat room encounters could lead to an exchange of e-mails or mobile phone text messages. Children might give out information or arrange a meeting that could risk their safety or the safety of other family members. In a few cases, paedophiles have used online services and bulletin boards to gain a child's confidence and then arranged a face to face meeting.

Watch out for a child becoming secretive about the use of the Internet or their mobile, or unknown numbers appearing on your phone bill.

2. Exposure to Inappropriate Material. Children may accidentally or deliberately access sexual, violent or racist material.

Watch out for a child becoming secretive about time online or downloading files onto floppy discs or CDs.

3. Harassment or Abuse. Children might encounter abusive, harassing, demeaning, or hate filled e-mail or bulletin board messages.

Watch out for children becoming withdrawn and isolated.

4. Excessive Use. Children could spend so much time on the Net that they neglect homework, outdoor activities or social life with friends and family.

Watch out for signs that other aspects of a child's life are being neglected.

5. Excessive Costs. Children may carelessly run up large bills or, in some cases, use your credit cards to buy on line via computer or TV.

Watch out for higher than normal Internet or telephone bills or unknown transactions.

Safer Surfing - Children

When on-line never give anyone your last name, address, phone number or school. Always keep your password secret.

There's great stuff on the Net, but bad stuff too. So tell your mum , dad or whoever looks after you if anything makes you feel uncomfortable.

It's cool to make new friends on the Net but tell your mum and dad about who you've met.

Never meet an on-line friend face to face unless your mum or dad is with you.

Chat rooms are fun, but get out of a chat room straightaway if someone makes you feel uncomfortable or worried.

The Internet - A Guide to the basics of getting started

A good guide to the basics of getting started and how to make the best use of it is the NCH booklet:

Internet Safety: A Parent's Guide.

Copies can obtain a copy from:

NCH

85 Highbury Park

London N5 1UD

Telephone: 020 7704 7106.

Some On-line Resources

<http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk>

Superhighway Safe. An excellent guide from the Department of Education on safe use of the Internet. Has special advice for schools.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise>

BBC site giving simple advice on Internet issues. Includes guidance on viruses, health and safety and personal safety.

<http://www.internetwatch.org.uk>

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has been set up to combat illegal use of the Internet.

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/comm/cyberspace.htm>

Text of the US Catholic Bishops' message Your Family and Cyberspace.

<http://www.nch.org.uk>

Excellent site containing a great deal of helpful information produced by NCH Action for Children.

<http://www.netparents.org>

US site with information about safety, a brief history of the Net and guidance on filtering software.

<http://www.pin.org.uk>

Advice on the safe use of the Internet for families produced by the Parents' Information Network. Also deals with mobile phones and other issues.

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