

Internet Safety Advice: Top 10 Tips for Parents



The thoughts of what your child might come across online can be worrying. Check out our top internet safety advice to make sure going online is a positive experience for you and your child.

1. Discover the Internet together

Be the one to introduce your child to the Internet. For both parent and child it is an advantage to discover the Internet together. Try to find web sites that are exciting and fun so that together you achieve a positive attitude to Internet exploration. This could make it easier to share both positive and negative experiences in the future.

2. Agree with your child rules for Internet use in your home

Try to reach an agreement with your child on the guidelines which apply to Internet use in your household. Here are some tips to get started:

- Discuss when and for how long it is acceptable for your child to use the Internet
- Agree how to treat personal information (name, address, telephone, e-mail)
- Discuss how to behave towards others when gaming, chatting, e-mailing or messaging
- Agree what type of sites and activities are OK or not OK in our family

3. Encourage your child to be careful when disclosing personal information

It is important to be aware that many web pages made for children ask them for personal information in order to access personalised content. Being conscious of when and where it is all right to reveal personal information is vital. A simple rule for younger children could be that the child should **not** give out name, phone number or photo without your approval.

Older children using social networking sites like Facebook should be selective about what personal information and photos they post to online spaces. Once material is online you can no longer control who sees it or how it is used.

Teach your social networking teenagers how to use and apply the privacy and security settings of the site. All responsible sites have a Safety Centre and a Block and Reporting system. Learn together with your teen how to use the safety and security settings of the site.

4. Talk about the risks associated with meeting online “friends” in person

Adults should understand that the Internet could be a positive meeting place for children, where they can get to know other young people and make new friends. However, for safety and to avoid unpleasant experiences, it is important that children do not meet strangers they have met online without being accompanied by an adult, friends or others they trust. In any case, the child should always have their parents' approval first.

5. Teach your child about evaluating information and being critically aware of information found online.

Most children use the Internet to improve and develop knowledge in relation to schoolwork and personal interests. Children should be aware that not all information found online is correct, accurate or relevant. Educate children on how to verify information they find by comparing to alternative sources on the same topic. Show them trusted sites they can use to compare information.

6. Don't be too critical towards your child's exploration of the Internet

Children may come across adult material by accident on the Web. Also a child may intentionally search for such web sites; remember that it is natural for children to be curious about off-limits material. Try to use this as an opening to discuss the content with them, and perhaps make rules for this kind of activity. Be realistic in your assessment of how your child uses the Internet.

7. Report online material you may consider illegal to the appropriate authorities

It is vital that we all take responsibility for the Web and report matters, which we believe could be illegal. By doing this we can help to prevent illegal activities online, such as child-pornography or attempts to lure children via chat, mail or messaging. The hotline.ie service provides an anonymous facility for the public to report suspected illegal content encountered on the Internet, in a secure and confidential way. The primary focus of the Hotline is to combat child pornography. Other forms of illegal content and activities exist on the Internet and may be reported using the service.

8. Encourage Respect for others; stamp out cyber bullying

There is an informal code of conduct for the Internet. As in everyday life, there are informal ethical rules for how to behave when relating to other people on the Internet. These include being polite, using correct language and not yell at (write in capital letters) or harass others. Also, children as well as grownups should not read other's e-mail or copy protected material.

9. Let your children show you what they like to do online

To be able to guide your child with regard to Internet use, it is important to understand how children use the Internet and know what they like to do online. Let your child show you which websites they like visiting and what they do there. Acquiring technical knowledge could also make it easier to make the right decisions regarding your child's Internet use.

10. Remember that the positive aspects of the Internet outweigh the negatives.

The Internet is an excellent educational and recreational resource for children. There are millions of age appropriate sites for younger children. Encourage your children to use such sites and to avoid registering for sites and services with adult content and behaviours. Help your child read the Terms & Conditions of Service for any site which they wish to join and to comply with the age restrictions of the site. Help your child apply all the privacy and security settings on the site. Encourage your child to be critically aware and explore the Internet to its full potential.

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