A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety

With the prevalence of online activity on computers, smartphones, and other devices, it's crucial that people understand the dangers associated with these activities and know how to stay safe on the Internet. Children are using the Internet with increased frequency, so kids must also understand the basics of Internet safety to avoid potentially dangerous situations. From the pitfalls of extended screen time to using social media responsibly to avoiding cyberbullying situations, educate children about safe Internet use.

Parental Controls

While it's important to have candid discussions with kids about their use of the Internet on computers and mobile devices, parental controls offer an additional layer of protection to help maintain security. Most computers offer parental controls that are a part of the operating system, which enable parents to set limits on the amount of time they can be used, programs that can be used, and websites that can be visited. Internet browsers also offer parental control settings that you can use to filter websites you don't want your children to visit. Parents can set restrictions based on the content of the websites, and these websites will then not load without a password entered into the browser.

Setting Rules

Making family rules about computer and Internet use ensures that children understand limitations and expectations. Many parents institute time limits for kids' computer use each day as well as rules about how and when kids can use electronic devices. Setting up a family computer that sits in a common area is an effective way to make sure that children's computer time is supervised. Some parents make rules about social media websites, email accounts, and the friends that kids interact with online. If rule infractions occur, parents need to make sure that there are consequences.

Reducing Screen Time

The American Academy of Pediatrics has instituted recommendations for the way children use electronics. Realizing the prevalence of electronic screens in virtually every area of life, the AAP has revised former specific recommendations about the amount of screen time that children have. New recommendations encourage parents to prioritize overall health and active play for kids with designated areas of the home that are screen-free. These screen-free areas may be the dining room, bedrooms, and a study area. The AAP recommends that children not have computing devices in their bedrooms, and kids should also avoid using electronics for the final hour before bedtime to promote restful sleep.

Cyberbullying Issues

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that occurs on the Internet. A cyberbully may engage in negative behavior toward victims by text message, email, online chat, or interactions on a social media website. Cyberbullying may involve threatening messages or public humiliation on the Internet by making fun of someone or embarrassing a victim. Cyberbullying could also involve hacking into a victim's email account to pose as the victim, and cyberbullies often attack others anonymously. Cyberbullying can be a devastating situation for a victim.

Social Media

Social media websites offer people platforms for interacting with others online. People often use social media to stay in touch with family and friends; however, there are other ways to use social media as well. With the prevalence of teens using the Internet, a high percentage are active with social media. Parents need to establish guidelines for children's social media use and teach them about potential risks and dangers. Parents should instruct children about privacy on the Internet and social media, cautioning them against sharing personal information such as addresses and telephone numbers online. Children should also be encouraged not to interact with people online that they do not know in person. Because personal photos and videos can compromise privacy and security, many parents make a rule that children must check with them before uploading anything to the Internet. It's also wise for parents to be active on social media to remain aware of their children's online activities. Periodic checking of children's social media accounts is also a prudent practice to maintain Internet safety.

- Why Is Internet Safety Important?
- Media Use for 5-to-18-Year-Olds Should Reflect Personal Balance
- Protecting Your Child Online: A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety
- A Safety Net for the Internet: A Parent's Guide
- Protect Kids on the Internet
- Internet Safety Tips for Kids (PDF)
- Internet Safety - Arizona Attorney General
- Internet, Mobile Phones, and Texting Safety Tips for Kids (PDF)
- Internet Safety - CIA
- Six Tips for Keeping Teens Safe on Social Media
- How to Disable Location on Your Mobile Device
- Social Networking Sites: A Parent's Guide (PDF)
- Protect Yourself From Cyberbullying
- What Is Cyberbullying?
- Talk to Your Kids
- Safety Tips
- Internet Safety for Kids
- Social Media Safety