

Nov 24, 2009

10 Tips to Keep Kids Safe Online

Media watchdogs, educators, and parents alike are concerned about the amount of time that children are spending online, their abundant usage of instant messaging (IM), and how the new technologies can and will affect their educational and social development.

What appears to be the consensus is that children of all ages are very receptive to new technologies—they are the biggest users of IM, either through messaging services or text messaging on cell phones.

These new communication technologies are being touted as the newest evolution in communication: language continually evolves and so does the way we communicate. IM, text messaging, and computer communication are the newest incarnations and deserve recognition as the latest ways that humans communicate.

However, there is some concern that IM use among young children may hamper proper language development—that children should not learn abbreviated forms before they learn essential skills like spelling, grammar usage, and punctuation. The new technologies may present new communication methods, but they can also present new hazards to children while online—spending too much time online may make children (and adults) susceptible to online predation.

Here are 10 tips to help ensure Internet safety for every age.

1. Keep online profiles simple, and don't reveal too much: first name but last initial, city but not address, grade but not what school attended, etc.
2. Use a screen name instead of a real name—develop a name to use when online, like *cat_girl06* or *likesfido21*.
3. Use kid-friendly search engines or browsers. They have built-in parental controls and cool designs that children like.
4. Install your Internet provider's parental-control features—this can restrict the sites that can be accessed, and prevents salacious pop-ups.
5. When using an IM, change the preferences to contacts-only or invite-only—this way only get messages from people in the contact list will appear, and no outsiders can make contact.
6. If necessary purchase parental add-ons that can log all online activities.
7. Make your default page a kid-friendly one, such as *Yahooligans*.
8. When surfing around for fun, only follow links from trusted sites.
9. Limit online time. Agree with all computer users in your house to a set computer schedule.
10. Always act online as though someone might be watching!