

Keep your kids safe online

Children are naturally trusting, and this trait can make them vulnerable online. Keeping your kids cyber-safe requires education, open communication and regular monitoring. Teach them about what you do to ensure your own safety on the Internet. Make them aware of the dangers of chatting online to strangers, the need to verify the origins of emails, and what to do if they think they've accidentally downloaded a virus.

Keeping children safe online doesn't always have to be about control and restrictions. Reward them with extra online hours for doing positive things, too – like running their own security scans or changing passwords regularly.

There are a number of software programs available that filter, block or otherwise control which sites your children can access. If you prefer to prevent all unsupervised browsing, you can install programs that automatically 'forget' access passwords until Mum or Dad are around to allow online access. Apps can be fun for kids, but make sure you know which ones they're using and that they're aware of the spyware dangers of downloading apps from dubious sources.

Cyberbullying is an increasing problem for children of all ages, and can be hurtful to a child's self-esteem. Teach your children never to post anything they wouldn't post if their parents were standing right behind them, and educate them about the principles of online kindness, etiquette and courtesy so they can carry good habits into adulthood. If your child becomes a cyberbullying victim, there are a number of online resources available to help both you and your child learn about how to deal with this issue.

Like adults, children should avoid clicking on unknown email attachments and sharing their passwords. Long, run-together sentences are the easiest passwords for children to remember, and are more secure than shorter ones (like birthdays or pet nicknames).

One should always log out after they're finished with a computer (at home, at school or anywhere else) so no one can access their personal information or browsing history.

Predatory individuals will often pretend to be someone of a different age or gender in order to infiltrate a child's world. Children must be taught to connect only with people they know, and to advise their parents immediately if they're at all uncomfortable with the way an online conversation is going. Instruct them about what is and isn't acceptable when sharing photos online.

Explain to your kids that social media is not a popularity contest: it's the quality of their online friends that matters, not the quantity. And though your children (especially older ones) may not like it, you have both the right and a parental obligation to monitor their posts and online activity for their own safety. If necessary, this parental access can be a prerequisite for allowing them to go online. As they get older, you can loosen the reins as appropriate.

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