

Web safety and your child

The use of electronic media – mobile phones, personal computers, video games, interactive television screens – is an increasing feature of modern life. It is too simplistic to say that it is either all bad or all good. A balanced approach to the use of technology is the sensible one.



The internet can open up a whole world of possibilities for your child. Through the internet your child can visit all the worlds art galleries, find out what they need at a click of a button, watch a science experiment, monitor the progress of an expedition or follow their favourite team. However, it's through the internet that your child could talk to complete strangers, watch material which is offensive, buy and sell without your knowledge, and form unhealthy preoccupations.

Children and adults use electronic media differently. Adults use the internet mainly for research and for e-mail. They are more likely to use it for short periods and on their own. Children use the internet for longer periods of time, in social groups and for networking, sharing music and on-line gaming.

A very high percentage of teenagers create their own web pages and are involved in Instant Messaging. IM allows them to chat in real time, exchange pictures and files and talk to each other confidentially. A high % of teenagers report using IM to discuss topics and say things which they would not do in person. It's an environment which can be seductive and which can lead a child into sharing information which is better kept quiet.

To ensure that parents don't stumble into this world, the more internet savvy teens share a private language of coded warnings. This code constantly changes but here are some examples for you to think about:

A/S/L = Age, Sex, Location
BF/GF = Boyfriend, Girlfriend
BRB = Be Right Back
NIFOC = Naked In Front of Computer
PAW = Parents are Watching
(Webcam)
PIR = Parents in Room
POR = Parents over Shoulder
LMIRL = Lets Meet In Real Life

PRON = Porn

It can be an intimidating experience for a parent whose technical skills lag behind those of their child. However your child remains your child. What your child most often needs is guidance. What your child most often lacks is wisdom.

So here are some simple guidelines which help instil some electronic wisdom in your child.

- **SAFE and SURE** – don't give out your name, address, mobile phone no., school name or password to people online.
- **ASK ABOUT**– only accept e-mails or open files from people you know and sources you trust so always ask the question: where's this from?
- **GREET don't MEET** – don't arrange to meet anyone contacted on the internet. Find out who people you meet on-line are by getting a parent or other adult to check them out
- **KEEP it to YOURSELF** – never complete an on-line form or give your real name without checking out with a parent or carer
- **SAY NO TO SPAM** – never download files from sources you don't recognise even if they are free and look interesting. Spam is a common source of viruses.
- **LEAVE IT** - Leave a chatroom the moment anything worries you. Save any conversations that you think could prove someone has been bullying or harassing you.

Take the guidelines and make them into a written agreement which you both sign. Add something you both agree is responsible about the time and duration of computer use. Place it by the computer so that it can be seen easily. Refer to this contract in the event of any falling out over internet usage!