

## SAFE SURFING WITH KIDS

### **Net safety: The rules of the road**

The Internet's a powerful collection of information and an outstanding research tool, especially useful for students' homework. But there is danger as well, as a recent edition of *48 hours* and articles in *Consumer Reports* and *PC World* have made clear. Some sites are not appropriate for youngsters, and some people will try to seduce kids, if they can get to them.

How do you protect your kids from the 'Net's "dark side"?

### **Go online with your kids**

Tracy Woods, director of a national ISP, goes online with her children because, as she says, "it gives me a chance to learn about my kids while I learn with them." Woods keeps her children's computer next to hers and they go online together because "they're going to come across stuff they'll wonder about, and I'd rather create an environment in which they know they can ask me if they have questions."

Chat rooms are off limits because, as Woods puts it, "why would I encourage my kids to talk to strangers?"

Put your computer in a common area, such as the living room, so that you can supervise your children while online more easily.

### **Talk with your kids**

Talk with your kids about Internet safety and go online with them to take an Internet safety survey (some are listed below). It's important that your children understand what is "okay" behavior—their own and that of other people—as well as what kinds of behavior is unacceptable.

Before your kids go online, it's a good idea to talk with them about materials they might encounter. And help them find sites that might interest them (see the list provided below). Advise them to:

- Tell you when they encounter materials they don't think they should see
- Never give out personal information
- Never fill out online forms
- Never visit adult areas on the Web

You'd be surprised how many children believe it's acceptable to give personal information about their families in order to enter an online contest. To protect your privacy, it's in your best interest to discuss acceptable online behavior with your children.

### **Consider Installing Content-blocking Software**

Internet filters are not a substitute for talking with your kids but can offer an added layer of assurance. Sites such as Microsoft's SafeKids counsel that software filters are useful because not all parents can be with their children while they surf.

Basically, there are two types of filtering software: those that filter URL names and those that filter Web content. Because many Web sites that contain offensive materials may use URLs that are benign, Web content filters may be more useful to parents.

However, it's misguided to believe that the technology can or should correct its wrongs or ills—don't expect Internet content filtering software to catch everything that you might find "objectionable."

Filters, though, have critics, such as *Consumer Reports*, which did its second review of Internet content filters in March of 2001 (the first was in 1997). Consumer Reports noted in their review that many of the filters block access to useful sites, such as The Southern Poverty Law Center, among others.

Visit their Web site at [www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org) to review recommended software, but their bottom line is that filtering software is no substitute for parental supervision.

### ***Sites for Popular Software Filters***

Cyber Patrol (<http://www.cyberpatrol.com/>)

Cyber Patrol gives you tools to help shield your children from the darker side of the Internet.

CYBERSitter (<http://www.cybersitter.com/>)

CYBERSitter blocks and monitors access to unsuitable and objectionable material on the Internet.

FamilyCAM (<http://www.silverstone.net/>)

Password protected FamilyCAM lets parents monitor their children's computer and online whereabouts even when they can't be with them.

I am Big Brother (<http://www.iambigbrother.com/>)

This program monitors "both sides" of chat sessions, instant messages, e-mail and more while running hidden in the background.

### ***Fun Sites for Kids***

One way to make sure your kids are surfing safely is to surf with them. The following sites are some that we think you will enjoy surfing together:

- The Yuckiest Site on the Internet (<http://yucky.kids.discovery.com/>)
- Discovery Kids (<http://kids.discovery.com/>)
- Safe Kids ([www.SafeKids.com](http://www.SafeKids.com))
  - Have your kids take their Online Safety Quiz!
- Safe Teens ([www.SafeTeens.com](http://www.SafeTeens.com))