

TIP SHEET FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

principal communicator

Keeping Kids Safe in Cyberspace

Children are spending more and more time on the Internet. Safety is the biggest concern many parents have as their children navigate cyberspace. What are the real risks to children? Here are some things of note as outlined by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):

■ **No such thing as privacy.** One of the first things to understand is that being online is the same as being in public. While using the Internet at home may feel safe and secure, there are very real privacy issues. Personal information can be obtained easily when children create “member profiles” with Internet service providers, on a web site or in a chat room.



■ **Inappropriate sites.** Pornography on the Internet is an area of concern for many parents. Kids can unexpectedly come across pornography. These sites generally are found while surfing the web by mistyping addresses, misleading names to web sites and links from other sites.

■ **Online solicitation.** Of even greater concern is that child molesters are contacting and luring children and teens with inappropriate intentions. One in five children and adolescents has been solicited over the Internet. In 2004, more than 700 kids were abducted by someone they met over the Internet. These contacts often are initiated through chat rooms or instant messaging, with contact continuing via e-mail.

■ **Cyber-bullying.** Another area of considerable concern is bullying. Kids are using e-mail and instant messages to intimidate or send unflattering messages to individuals or to others about these individuals. Likewise, embarrassing information, photos or stories about someone can be posted on web sites for others to see. In some cases, web sites have been created for this purpose. While reliable statistics on Internet bullying are not available, estimates range from 6% of U.S. kids having been bullied in this way in 2000 to as high as 25% more recently in Canada, Great Britain and New Zealand.

How can parents protect their children online?

■ Parents need to learn about computers, understanding that their children often know more about them than they do. Children should be supervised whenever using a computer, especially when on the Internet. It is best to keep computers in a public place in the house and never in a child's room where a door can be closed.

■ The time allowed for Internet use should be included in the two hours daily of screen time recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Software that enables detailed tracking of sites visited is available.

■ Parents also can consider filtering devices to control computer visits. These products can restrict Internet travels to chosen sites or can be used to block unwanted sites or materials. However, these do not replace parental involvement/supervision.

■ Older children and teens are likely to use computers outside home or even cell phones to connect to the Internet. Parents need to be sure their kids understand the possible dangers and practice the following basic safety rules:

- Keep identity private, don't share personal information.
- Never get together with someone you “meet” online.
- Talk to a parent or trusted adult if uncomfortable or frightened.
- If uncomfortable, don't respond.
- Never send any message you would not want to say face-to-face.

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