



Who's Watching?

Protecting Your Children Online Tipsheet

from "Who's Watching Charlottesville?"

October 1, 2008

Some Tips to Protect Your Kids Online

Quick Tips

If your child uses a social networking website such as Facebook or MySpace, make sure they're smart about it.

- Encourage kids to not to post contact info, which would make them vulnerable to unwanted contact or stalking. And they obviously shouldn't share anything which would reflect poorly on them. Remind them their online profile can hurt—or help—their chances when applying for schools, jobs, etc. Discuss what's appropriate—and what isn't.
- Encourage your kids to limit who can see what they post. Explore the privacy settings together. Most sites allow you to restrict viewing of your profile only to users in a certain network or to only your "friend" list.

Learn More

Kids' Safety Online
whoswatching
charlottesville.com/
kidsafety.html

Social Networking Websites
whoswatching
charlottesville.com/
social.html

- **Learn about the Internet.** The more you know about how the Web works, the better prepared you are to teach your children how to use social networking sites safely and how to identify online predators. Be open to learning about technology so you can keep up with your children and understand the what they face on the Internet.
- **Spend time with your children online.** Surf the 'net together and ask them to show you their favorite destinations. Be familiar with your child's online activities, and talk to them about the sites they visit and the programs they use.
- **Place the family computer in an open area.** Keeping the computer in a common room in the house is *much* safer than keeping it in your child's bedroom. It's a lot tougher for sex offenders and bullies to interact with your child when the computer screen is where you can see it.
- **Use tools like parental controls, content blocking, and monitoring software.** While you should certainly be mindful of your child's privacy, if you have reason to believe he or she is getting into an unsafe situation, it may be time to investigate these services. Parental control tools are provided by some Internet Service Providers or are available for purchase as separate software packages. These tools allow parents to restrict Websites a child can view from their home computer, or the type of information they can share. Still, *no program is a substitute for parental supervision.*
- **Create a user account for each family member.** Most operating systems (including Windows XP and Vista and Mac OS X) allow you to create different user accounts for each member of the family. You, as the household's computer "administrator," can give your child a user account with restricted "privileges."
- **Make certain your child or teen knows everyone in his or her email address book or Instant Messenger (IM) "Buddy" list.** Is everyone on the list someone you can trust? Online culture has blurred the meaning and definition of "friends." It's important that children and teens understand the difference.
- **Remember your home computer isn't the only one your child uses.** Find out what computer safeguards are utilized by your child's school, at the public library, and—this is particularly important—at the homes of your child's friends.
- **Beware of phone calls or mail deliveries from unfamiliar persons.** Predators often call or send gifts to their potential victims in the process of wooing them.
- **Teach "trust your gut."** Make sure your child or teen knows that if they feel uncomfortable or threatened by someone or something online, they should tell you or another trusted adult. Encourage your child to speak up.
- **Draw up an Internet Use Contract with your child or teen.** Agree to some clear, simple, easy-to-read house rules and post them on or near the computer monitor. This is a natural way to start a dialogue about online safety, too.
- **Talk to your kid.** Talk openly and frequently with your child about potential online dangers large and small: from sexual exploitation, stalking, and identity theft to bullying and spam. Explain how they can protect themselves.