Helping Parents with Kids & Technology

Vicki Courtney, www.loggedinandturnedout.com

You might feel overwhelmed by the idea of trying to protect your kids from something as big, and perhaps unfamiliar, as the Internet. But there are real - and manageable - steps you can take to help your children stay safe online. This section offers parents background information on topics involving Internet guidance and safety - from understanding the internet to tips on screening and monitoring content, and more.

Remember:
Although there's no single answer and certainly no quick-fix solution, there's one critical element in the online protection game: the presence of a responsible parent or adult. In their Internet use, as in all areas of life, children need parents to guide them and to intervene when necessary. Even if you can't always be there to supervise your children's online activities, you can still teach them how to use the Internet wisely when they're on their own as well as monitor their activity.
Keep in mind that your efforts are likely to be more successful if you:

- Maintain an open dialogue with your child.
- Don't play the blame game, but instead encourage open, honest discussion about what a child has seen or done on the Web.
- Respect children's concerns or frustrations over your involvement in their surfing activities.
- Balance your concerns about exposure to inappropriate or harmful things on the Internet against the benefits gained from exposure to positive things on the Internet.

The Internet poses new challenges for parents because, unlike television and radio, the Internet:

- **Is interactive** – your child can interact with anyone else online from your home, school or library
- **Allows any user**, anywhere, to post any information, including materials that are inaccurate, misleading and inappropriate for children
- **Provides no restrictions** on advertising to children
- **Is not always anonymous** even when it feels like it is

Furthermore, your child probably knows more about computers and the Internet than you do.

What is the Internet?

The Internet is a worldwide network of smaller computer networks and individual computers, all linked together by coaxial cable, telephone lines or satellite links. The World Wide Web is just a part of the Internet, connected via hyperlinks. The Internet isn't owned by anyone. It isn't controlled by anyone and has no geographical boundaries. It isn't located anywhere. It is timeless and spaceless.

The Internet, or simply the Net, is the publicly accessible worldwide system of interconnected computer networks that transmit data by packet switching using a standardized Internet Protocol (IP). It is made up of thousands of smaller commercial, academic, domestic, and government networks. It carries various information and services, such as electronic mail, online chat, and the interlinked Web pages and other documents of the World Wide Web.

Contrary to some common usage, the Internet and the World Wide Web are not synonymous: the Internet is a collection of interconnected computer networks, linked by copper wires, fiber-optic cables, etc.; the Web is a collection of interconnected documents, linked by hyperlinks and URLs and accessible using the Internet.

 The World Wide Web is part of the internet. The Web consists of a huge collection of documents stored on computers around the world.

- A **Web Server** is a computer connected to the internet that makes web pages available to the world.
- A **Web Site** is a collection of web pages maintained by a college, university, government agency, company, organization, or individual.
- A **Web Page** is a document on the web. Web pages can include text, pictures, sound, and video.

The Internet currently made up of millions of individual computers and computer networks (peers). Once you have an Internet account, either through an Internet service provider, like MCI or AT&T (an ISP), or through an online provider, like America Online or CompuServe, you can connect to this network through your provider's "gateway" (their entrance ramp to the Internet).
Different parts of the Internet work differently, but they all use the same peer network and transmit information in the same way. All information travels around the Internet in small units, called "packets." When you send anything on the Internet bigger than the proverbial cyber "bread box", it's broken into several packets which are reassembled at the destination. As they work their way to their destination, the packets bounce separately from peer to peer, like pinballs, around the Internet. They are directed around the Internet by computer routers which determine the best and fastest route around the Internet for each packet.

Our air traffic controllers can learn from the routers. They are the real beauty of the Internet. Routers reroute information around any system problems or shutdowns. If the traffic is too

heavy in New York City, your information may arrive via Philadelphia with some packets arriving via Denver. It's simply a matter of finding the most efficient route. Physical distance means nothing in cyberspace.

Who invented it?

The Internet was developed in 1970 by ARPAnet, the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense. It was designed to allow the scientific community to communicate with each other and with the Department of Defense. It was specifically designed to survive a nuclear attack that would have cut off normal communications, like telephones, because it's self-healing. That means if one part is shutdown, the routers reroute traffic around the shutdown. It fixes itself.

How many people are on the Internet?

No one really knows for sure. Estimating how many people use the Internet has become as popular a pastime among Internet statisticians as predicting the weather, and just about as accurate. Anyway...it's estimated that in mid-1997 there were approximately 40 million people on the Internet, 30 million from the U.S. and 10 million internationally. And, it's growing exponentially. People in the know estimate that there were about 70 million people online in 1998 and It is also estimated that about 15 million of them were children, worldwide.

How do people around the world speak to each other on the Internet?

The computers and networks comprising the Internet all speak the same language, TCP/IP. People on the Internet, though, speak different languages. But, since the Internet originated in the United States, English is considered the official language of the Internet (except in France, where all web sites must be maintained in French as a primary language if the server that hosts the web site is located in France).

Although other languages are being used more often on the Internet, English still predominates, and is likely to continue to do so.

What's The World Wide Web?

"WWW" stands for the World Wide Web. When people talk about surfing the Net, they are really talking about surfing the Web. The Web is a section of the Internet where information is linked to other related information, allowing you to jump from one place to another. (Actually, you don't go anywhere, the information comes to you. It just feels like you're jumping around.) It is also rich with graphics and sound. Lately, with the introduction of new applications, like Flash, it has become interactive and more loaded with multimedia fun.

The Web is the most popular area of the Internet. It now accounts for more than 90% of all Internet usage. It's also the fastest growing segment of the Internet. From only 130 web sites in 1993, there are now millions of separate sites, Web pages and files, worldwide.

Prior to the Web, the Internet was merely text and programs; it contained no graphics or sound, no animations or videos. It was a place for academics, scientists and programmers.

How does the WWW work?

Using HTTP, the Web works through hyperlinks,...interconnected documents and multimedia applications (such as audio and video). Your Web browser, such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft's Explorer, is a software program that makes this all work. Like a spider web, where one thread is connected to many others, which are in turn connected to many more, you can click on one hyperlinked topic, and be whisked away to another connected place on the Web, anywhere in the world. (They work like footnotes which allow you to view the source or reference when you click on the linked text.) Being whisked from one site to another, using hyperlinks, is called "Web surfing."

Who invented the WWW?

The Web is still in its infancy, though. It was invented in 1989, when Tim Berners-Lee, while at CERN (the European Particle (atomic research) Physics Laboratory), in Geneva, Switzerland, introduced HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP). HTTP is the language that Web browsers use to help you move around the Web.

www.wiredsafety.org - the worldest largest online safety and help group

For more information about the internet, visit www.wiredsafety.org and Internet 101

Protecting Kids online

The interstate highway system. It has connected us and expanded our horizons in ways never imagined just decades ago. But it can be dangerous, claiming thousands of lives every year.

So when our children reach the age to drive on that Interstate system, we take definite measures to protect them from dangers.

In more recent years, our horizons have been expanded by another amazing system, the information superhighway, the Internet. That system, too, has brought some very real physical and emotional dangers.

But too often, when children reach the age to navigate that superhighway, those responsible for their care turn them loose without equipping them to avoid the dangers. We must accept the responsibility of Protecting our Children Online.

The information that follows is intended to assist parents and educators – virtually anyone, for that matter – in that important task.

The need for such resources is at an all time high. While 70% of the homes in are connected to the Internet, children have access to the Internet in virtually every public school today and in most public libraries. And as children's online time has increased every day so have the increased risks they face from harmful material and predators.

FACT: A Kaiser Family Foundation study revealed that over 90% of teens and young adults have spent time on the Internet at one point or another, with 49% going online at least once a day and 78% doing so at least a few times a week.