

The Internet - It's A Real World Out There!

It can be a tough job keeping up to date with kids these days. Just when we thought we were doing OK and could use E-mail, along comes Chat, Instant Messaging and Texting. Suddenly we have a whole new language and

new challenges for us parents, teachers and carers.

This guide will help you understand the online safety issues and gives practical help as you talk to children about their Internet use with these SMART Safety Tips.



But Kids Know More Than I Do!

Many adults can feel intimidated in using the Internet and are baffled by some of the terms and technology. While it is true that many children may have better technical skills than you, children still need advice and protection in using this new tool. After all, you can teach children the importance of wearing a seat belt in a car without understanding how the engine works!



So What Are The Dangers?

The Internet is like bringing a city into your living room: there are the exciting places for children to go and enjoy but also lots of places where you wouldn't want children to go unsupervised.

The main dangers for children can be grouped into:

Contact - Potentially from someone online who may wish to harm them. Children must re-learn the "stranger=danger" rule in a new context and never give out personal details or meet alone with anyone they've contacted via the Internet.

Content - Keep an eye on the material children are looking at and agree the ground rules about where children go and how they behave.

Commercialism - Aggressive online marketing which can invade a child's privacy. Encourage children not to fill out forms which ask for lots of personal details.

Can't I Just Use A Filter?

Filtering software can help to block a lot of inappropriate material but they are not 100% effective and are no substitute for good adult supervision. Internet use at school is generally filtered, monitored and safe. But many children use the net at friends' homes, Internet cafes, libraries and youth clubs where there may be no filters and little supervision.

It's therefore important to help educate children about how to behave online and discuss problems which they may have. It helps to keep the computer in a communal room - not tucked away in a bedroom.



What About Mobile Phones?

The issues about being careful online apply equally to mobile telephones. Already many mobiles and hand-held devices have Internet facilities on them. It is very important to encourage children not to give out their mobile numbers to strangers or people they cannot trust completely. Talk about the sort of text messages and pictures your children are receiving and sending.



Stick To The Positive

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST INTERNET DANGER?

THAT YOU'LL CONCENTRATE ON THE DANGERS AND FORGET THE BENEFITS.

Encourage children to stick to the fun and positive sites on the net that reinforce their interests. Just as you look out for good TV programmes for children, take the time to find the best and most useful websites for you and the children in your care.

