

Teen Safety on the Internet

More and more teenagers are logging on to the Internet every day. Although the Internet is a great source for research projects and other information, there are also **dangers involved with surfing the Web**.

For example, a study conducted in 2000 found that 25 percent of kids 10 to 17 years of age received unwanted pornographic material.

The Web allows you to be completely anonymous. Someone who says that he is a 15-year-old boy may actually be a 50-year-old man **pretending to be a teen for inappropriate reasons**. As a result, agreeing to meet in person with someone you met over the Internet is extremely dangerous, as this can result in sexual assault or even murder.

How to Stay Safe on the Internet

- **Never give out personal information**, such as your name, home address or phone number, the name of your school, pictures, credit card numbers or the names of your parents without permission from your parents.
- Do not meet in person with someone you met online.
- Do not give out your password to anyone.
- In chat rooms, use a name that is not gender-specific so you are less likely to receive pornographic material or other forms of harassment. If you do receive pornographic material, report it to your local police department.

E-mail Safety

- Do not open links or files from people you do not know.
- Never respond to e-mails with pornographic or other inappropriate material.
- Do not respond to advertisements -- this confirms that you have a working e-mail account, and you will only receive more junk e-mail.

Chat Rooms

Chat rooms can be particularly dangerous. Even when chat rooms are specifically for teens, participants are not necessarily all teens. Someone you meet in the chat room may actually be an adult **predator** who has made up an identity to hide his or her age.

Assessing a Web Site

- Look for an author, a way to contact the author or organization, and a title, and **make sure that the information has been recently updated**, particularly if it is about health issues.
- Assess the credibility of the organization or author to write on the specific topic.
- Check if the links are still working.
- Check the Web site address to see what the domain name includes: .com (commercial), .gov (government), .org (organization), .net (network), .edu (educational organization) or a two letter country code (country of origin). This can tell you whether the site's main goal is education or sales.
- See if the site seems biased or if it is trying to persuade you in a particular direction.

Blogging

Blog is short for Web log. Blogs allow people to write on many topics in somewhat of an **online diary**. However, blogs are not private like diaries. People of all ages all over the world can read your blog, even people who know you only through your writing.

Blogging can be a fun way to meet people with similar interests, connect with friends who live far away and develop your writing. Blogging can help teens communicate and develop their interests, but there are also dangers to blogging.

The **internet is anonymous**. Also, remember that the Internet is public domain that anyone can access, so it is **important to be take precautions when you blog**.

Facebook Online Website

Today, many teens participate in what is called "social networking" in which they communicate with people with similar interests and activities. Most people have heard of [MySpace](#). Another extremely popular online community is Facebook. Facebook calls itself, "A social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study, and live around them."

Facebook is the sixth most popular Web site in the United States. As of summer 2007, there are over thirty million users, with 150,000 new users signing up daily. One study shows that over 85 percent of college students use Facebook. Over half of Facebook users log in daily. What is it about Facebook that is so appealing to teens and young adults? **How does Facebook work?**

On Facebook, users have their own profile to which they can add photos, write notes on others' wall (the section on the profile for comments), find and add friends and join groups. When someone registers, they join a network, or multiple networks. Users can also create their own groups to connect to people with similar interests.

When someone logs in using their e-mail address and password, Facebook displays a customized home page that displays a News Feed, the recent history of the user's friends and their actions.

Safety

On Facebook, users can change their profile settings to create more privacy. There is the option of "hiding" a profile so that it does not show up in searches, as well making a profile only viewable to friends, or to people in their network. Users can also make parts of their profile viewable to specific people in what is called a Limited Profile.

Users can block someone completely with whom they do not want to have an association.

For the most part, Facebook can be a safe way to stay connected as long as teens take special care to control their privacy. **Here are some tips to follow while using Facebook. :**

- **Use the privacy settings Facebook offers.** The settings are there to keep you safe while still allowing you to connect with the people you want.
- **Only make your profile viewable to your friends, not everyone in your network.** There is no need for people you do not know who are in the same network to view your profile. If you are friends with someone, then they can see information about you.
- **Don't post your last name; just use your last initial.** People can search for you within a network, and if they know you, they will recognize you and do not need to see your last name.
- **Do not post anything inappropriate on your own profile or on someone else's profile.** Even if you use the privacy settings, it does not mean all of your friends do.
- **Delete inappropriate comments or wall posts on your profile.**
- **Only accept or add people as friends that you know in person.** Not everyone is the person they portray themselves as online.
- **Do not post your address, phone number or school schedule on your profile.**

Many parents are concerned that their children spend too much time on the computer. As a rule, teens should finish their homework before going online or logging into Facebook. The Website can be very distracting and can interfere with schoolwork.

Just remember: Facebook can be safe if teens [stay safe on the Internet](#) and use their good judgment.

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