

15 Things You Can Do To Make Sure Your Child Has a Safer Internet Experience

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Best practices change based on the age of your children. But one thing is consistent no matter what their age and that is the importance of dialogue.

For the younger children – 12 and under:

- Create separate user accounts for each child on the home computer.
- Enable strict [content filtering](#) on the computer.
- Install anti-virus, malware software, etc.
- [Establish a select list of sites](#) they're allowed to visit. (We talk about the sites they want to visit, spend time on them together, and then I go through the sites and click through as deep as I can to understand the site content, culture, links, and ads, if they have them.) If I **think** they're okay, then they're added to the list.
- Enable [YouTube Safe Mode](#) on all web browsers (no matter what the age of user). Remember, *you have to enable the safe mode per child, per account set up.*
- Set time limits on computer use just as you would with TV or video games.
- Restrict online gaming (unless you play directly with your child and know the other people in real life.) *So that means no Xbox Live premium membership or playing games on the Wii connected to the Internet.*
- Use [Google SafeSearch](#) as their search engine (no matter what the age of the user)
- Use third party monitoring software that flags/detects any concerning phrases or words.
- Talk to your kids about what you learn/know is going on related to kids and technology (We talk about cyberbullying, sexting, kids being mean to others). Ask them what they think and what they would do so you can listen and learn. Then provide your advice. Practice role playing with your kids.
- Teach your kids what to do if someone isn't nice to them online: "don't respond, tell your mom, make a copy".
- Teach your kids about the importance of not sharing their personal information online. (last name, school, phone number combined with address)
- Talk to your children about the importance of being kind & respectful to others online.
- If your child has a cell phone, the rules are: open cell phone policy; phones stored at night. Add a service like "[Smart Limits](#)" from AT&T, which makes it easier for your children to follow your rules (i.e. you can turn the cell phone off at night, during class, etc.). Preferable cell phone for kids 12 and under = non-smart phone.
- If your child doesn't follow your rules, make sure there are consequences. Technology is a privilege, not a right. Have your children help pay for services such as their cell phone or memberships to special sites. They learn to

appreciate what they have.

Children ages 13 – 17:

Most of the same advice and guidelines apply, except:

- The list of select sites allowed to visit will expand. As kids get older, particularly in high school where they need to access lots of sites for homework, it's really hard to keep the list of sites to a select few. You'll know when your child's homework requires that access to information be increased.
- As the list of sites your teen is exposed to increases, check the browsing history and be sure to go five - 10 pages deep within the site. Often what's behind the home page is different. Know the content, culture and people your child is exposed to.
- Know your children's friends on the social network they belong to. It's important to delete anyone they don't know in real life.
- Know their password, log into their account. If applicable, be their "friend" on the network.
- Do not allow your child to provide websites with their personal information. This is usually requested by adult-intended networks like Facebook (i.e. first name + last name+ DOB + school+ cell phone + exact physical location + IM + email.) While a birth date and email may be needed to sign up, it shouldn't be displayed.
- Do not allow your child to use the applications that allow a third party to access all their information. Read those Terms of Use policies. Talk to your kids about why they shouldn't. Ask if they'd ever give their photos, friend contact information etc. out to strangers. They wouldn't. You wouldn't.
- [Disable Facebook Places](#) and [photo geo-tagging](#).
- Talk to your kids about the photos they post. Ask them what impression a photo they post gives another person that may or may not know them. It's a good way to open up dialogue and to help them think beyond the moment or tomorrow.
- Sign up for Google Alerts with your children's names.
- [Remove your family contact information](#) from sites like Spokeo, Pipl and Zaba Search.

Got kids 18 and older?

Your child is on the way to college and starting to live their own life. You will need to continue to support your family values through conversation and action. Ultimately, though, by this age they need the opportunity to be on their own on the Internet, but grounded in the up-bringing we've provided. That said, the dialogue continues.