

Parents Guide to Supervising a Child's Online and Internet Experience

The Board of Education is committed to providing a wide range of opportunities for registered students who are using District facilities and/or equipment to access electronic media. Access to information through the Internet offers a wide variety of resources for users, and the Board encourages and supports the responsible use of computers and the Internet to provide appropriate learning opportunities for students.

The Internet is a wonderful world of new opportunity for children. It is a colossal dynamic library filled with information, programs, art, material, and new opportunities to meet people. It is the opportunity to expand minds and experiences, and to develop skills necessary for the future. However, this new environment creates a risk that your child may be exposed to undesirable material and people. There are numerous sites providing sexually explicit information, violent content, technical information on how to build things such as bombs, and hate speech. Other sites and individuals seek to gather information from children that you may feel uncomfortable providing. These individuals might intend harm or might seek to gather market research and attempting to advertise products to your child. The purpose of this FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) is to provide parents with suggestions that will empower them to effectively supervise their child's experience on the Internet.

What is the Internet?

The Internet is a global, decentralized network of computers taking advantage of common protocols permitting the transfer of information. No individual, company or government controls the Internet. The most frequently used areas of the Internet are the World Wide Web, e-mail, USENET newsgroups, FTP, and the IRC.

The **World Wide Web** is the multimedia area of the Internet. A WWW page can look like a magazine page. WWW browsers permit users to view text, photographs, and video. Individuals can also access audio, data, and programs. WWW sites can be found by typing a few key words into a search engine and, within seconds, receiving a list of sites containing those words. Punch in the word "COMPUTERS" and you will get a list of the "COMPUTER RELATED" web pages.

FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol. FTP sites are directories of files of all types. These files can be in any form and can be found with search engines. The difference from the WWW is that FTP is not multi media; the files must be downloaded and then viewed or used through the appropriate software programs.

E-mail is an electronic mail system in which different users can exchange messages. The content of the mail exchanged can take all forms. Although normally text, messages can be pictures or sound files.

The **USENET** is a bulletin board area of the Internet. Individuals can post messages and receive responses. The messages will remain on the bulletin board for a limited period of time, such as two weeks. Individuals search for the most appropriate bulletin board for the subject desired. At this site will be hundreds of messages about that subject. These messages can be text, programs, sound files, or pictures.

The **IRC** is composed of "real-time" live chat rooms. Each room has a name that may relate to the subject matter discussed. A user can usually find an IRC chat room on virtually *any* subject.

Supervising Your Child

Most parents complain that their children are more computer literate than they are (they point out that they are still attempting to figure out how to program their VCRs). They cannot comprehend how they can possibly supervise their child's experience on the Internet. What follows is a list of suggestions that should help. Not all of these suggestions may be acceptable to you. Which suggestions you use will depend in part in your belief in your child's right to privacy and ability to make mature decisions. This FAQ provides parents with an ability to make choices.

Parent must always remember the investment that they have made, both in the computer and in their child. If they commit the time necessary for such a significant investment, parents can make their child's experience both positive, productive, and educational.

1. **Keep the family computer in a family room.** Place it where you can watch and participate in your child's activities.
2. **Spend time with your child both online and off line.** If online material is offensive to you, take the time to teach your child your values. Explain to your child why you believe the material is wrong and the harm you believe that it might cause.
3. **Purchase a filtering software program.** There are a number of programs that filter and block access to adult Internet sites. You can use these programs to assist in your supervision of your child.
 - Cybersitter <http://www.solidoak.com>
 - Cyber Patrol <http://www.cyberpatrol.com>
 - Net Nanny <http://www.netnanny.com/netnanny/>
 - Safesurf <http://www.safesurf.com/>
 - Surfwatch <http://www.surfwatch.com/>

Another option is Bess, the Internet Retriever <http://bess.net/>

4. **Monitor your credit card bill.** Many adult Internet sites require credit cards in order to gain access. If your credit card is used, you should have a record of it.
5. **Inquire into child accounts.** Some online services have special accounts especially geared for children, with restricted access to chat rooms and the Internet.
6. **Tell your child not to play with strangers.** The Internet version of this means never tell a stranger personal information. Teach your child to never give out your address, your phone number, or any personal information.

Some individuals desire to harm children. Others seek to gather market research. They might entice children to their site with graphics and games. These sites can be packed with advertisements. They may reward children for providing personal information, their likes and dislikes, and information concerning their friends. They may e-mail your child with more advertisements, request more information, and request that they return to their advertisement laden sites.

Some services set up user profiles when setting up accounts. This information can be accessed by the public through commands such as **WHO IS**. Be careful when setting up accounts that the information provided will not be publicly available.

7. **Introduce new friends to mom and dad *first*.** If your child has made an online friend and would like to get to know that person better, ask your child to introduce the friend to you first. Many quality relationships can be formed in this new environment if the proper precautions are taken.
8. **Use a Nickname** . When entering chat rooms, bulletin boards and other public rooms, encourage your child to pick out and use a favorite nickname distinct from their real name. This is a regular practice on the IRC and permits a nice level of anonymity, allowing users to learn more about each other only when and if they and their parents are ready. Remember that others will be less than honest about their identity as well.
9. **Report suspicious activity.** Some conduct is illegal in both the real and the virtual world. If someone is stalking or harassing your child, keep copies and records of the messages and let the authorities know. You may also wish to notify the systems administrator of both your service and the service from which the message was transmitted.

The Internet is a wonderful new opportunity for children. As with everything, the quality of a child's experience will be directly related to a parent's investment in that experience. If you take the time, you can make that experience positive and productive.