



Parent's Guide to Online Safety

We all know that the Internet can be a fun place and a useful resource for teens. But it is also full of risks and dangers. No one person can ensure teen online safety. However, parents play the biggest role in keeping teens safe online. Parents must be willing to elicit the support and advice of other parents, educators, online safety specialists, and teens themselves to be successful. It takes a village to raise a child. It takes the concerted efforts of all of us, working together, to make sure teens are safe online.

Every parent should have an online safety plan for their teens. Below are some suggestions on how you should go about developing one for you and your teens.

1. Consider Your Teen's Maturity Level.

Is your teen ready? Children mature at different rates and have different levels of responsibility. Parents know best whether their children are ready to use the Internet without parental guidance. Parents should consider whether their teen is mature enough to understand the various risks that exist online and whether they are responsible enough to follow the [suggested guidelines](#) <link to Teen safety page> for online teens. If not, parents must take every effort to make sure their children do not use the Internet without parental guidance.

Prevent access to inappropriate websites. There are some websites that teens just should not use. Teens should not be allowed to use websites that contain mature content. Similarly, teens should not be allowed to use websites that facilitate communication with older adults. Parents should take efforts to prevent their children from accessing inappropriate websites by using the various [parental tools](#) <link to <http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/>> that are available.

2. Teach Your Teen To Be Safe Online

Visit online safety websites. Take a look at what the many websites that offer good online safety tips for teens have to say.

Here is a list of some of the popular online safety websites:

[BlogSafety.com](#) <link to www.blogsafety.com>

[ChildrensPartnership.org](#) <link to www.childrenspartnership.org>

[Common Sense Media](#) <link to www.common sense media.org>

[Child Safety Network](#) <link to www.csn.org>

[Cyber Angels](#) <link to www.cyberangels.org>

[Family Tech Talk](#) <link to www.familytechtalk.com>

[FBI](#) <link to www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm>

[Get Net Wise](#) <link to www.getnetwise.com>

[InternetSafety.com](#) <link to www.internetsafety.com>

[iSafe America](#) <link to www.isafe.org>

[Kids Online Resources](#) <link to www.kidsolr.com>

[Microsoft Security At Home](#) <link to www.microsoft.com/athome/security>

[National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) <link to www.missingkids.com>

[Net Family News](http://www.netfamilynews.org) <link to www.netfamilynews.org>
[Net Smartz Kids](http://www.netsmartzkids.org) <link to www.netsmartzkids.org>
[Safe Kids](http://www.safekids.com) <link to www.safekids.com>
[Safe Teens](http://www.safeteens.com) <link to www.safeteens.com>
[Stay Safe](http://www.staysafe.org) <link to www.staysafe.org>
[Stop Cyberbullying](http://www.stopcyberbullying.com) <link to www.stopcyberbullying.com>
[Teen Angels](http://www.teenangels.org) <link to www.teenangels.org>
[Web Wise Kids](http://www.webwisekids.org) <link to www.webwisekids.org>
[Wired Kids](http://www.wiredkids.org) <link to www.wiredkids.org>
[Wired Safety](http://www.wiredsafety.org) <link to www.wiredsafety.org>
[Wired Teens](http://www.wiredteens.org) <link to www.wiredteens.org>
[Wired with Wisdom](http://www.wiredwithwisdom.org) <link to www.wiredwithwisdom.org>
[Yahooligans! Parents' Guide](http://www.yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/) <link to www.yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/>

Communicate with your teen about online safety. Online safety begins at home. Parents should teach and continually reinforce to their children the importance of being safe online. Parents should educate their children about the various risks that exist online and teach them [how to be safe online](http://www.tagged.com/safety_full.html) <http://www.tagged.com/safety_full.html>.

Make the Internet a family affair. Use the Internet with your children. Ask them to show you the websites they use. Have them login to their accounts at various websites and instant messenger services. Ask them to teach you about things you don't understand. Point out safety concerns as they arise. Explain to them that you are not trying to invade their privacy, you are just trying to make sure they are being safe online.

Ask your teens what they are doing online. Many parents express concern because they don't know how their teens are using the Internet but haven't taken the first step in finding out: asking. Parents should ask their children what they are doing online, *directly and routinely*. Here are some suggested questions to ask to start the conversation:

What are you doing online?

Where do you access the Internet? At school? At home? At friends' homes?
Elsewhere?

How do you access the Internet? Whose computers do you use? Do you use web-enabled mobile phones?

How much time do you spend online? How often do you use the Internet?

With whom do you use the Internet? By yourself? With teachers? Friends? Adults?

For what do you use the Internet? What websites do you visit regularly? What websites have you visited recently? What are your favorite websites?

Do you communicate with people online? Who? Have you met new people online?

Who? Have you been contacted by adults online? Who?

Do you have personal web pages? Where?

At what websites do you have accounts? What usernames do you use?

What email addresses do you children use? Do you have any others?

What instant messenger services do you use? What are your screen names? Do you have any others?

Do you ever put personal information online? Pictures? Where? How do you protect this information?

Have you come across inappropriate content online? When? What did you see? Where did you see it? How did you come across it? What did you do when you saw it?

Has anyone communicated with you online in an inappropriate manner? When? What happened? Where did it happen? What did you do?

Do you know how to be safe online? What would you do if they were contacted by a stranger online?

Remember: these questions should only be used as a means to start an ongoing dialogue with your teen about online safety. The goal is to make sure you fully understand how your teen is using the Internet so you can take appropriate measures. No matter what your child says, try not to overreact. Take some time and consider what your children have told you before taking serious action.

3. Monitor your teen's internet use.

Watch your teens when they're using the Internet.

- Put your home computer in an open space.
- Check frequently to see what websites your teens are using. (Look at the browser's history and cache of websites if necessary.) If you see your teen close a window as you approach, ask why.
- Review email messages your teen has sent and received.
- Review active instant messenger conversations.
- Look at photos and other files saved on your teen's computer.
- Consider [parental tools](http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/) <link to <http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/>> that will allow you to monitor your teen's Internet usage when you're not present.

Explore the websites your teens use. Your teen should not be using websites that allow communication between users that do not have the following minimum safeguards:

- Control over who is admitted into your teen's network of friends.
- The ability to block certain users from sending messages to your teen.
- A means of reporting inappropriate content and users to a user safety department.
- The ability to remove content previously posted by your teen.
- The ability to completely delete your teen's account.

Keep your passwords secret. As a parent, you should maintain secure administrator access to each computer in your home and with your Internet service provider. Also, remember that some of the websites you visit may not be appropriate for your children. Be sure to keep your login and passwords secret and change them frequently. This includes access to your email accounts.

Talk to the parents of your teen's friends about Internet use. Your children may be using the Internet at their friends' homes. Talk with the parents of your teen's friends to understand how they approach online safety. Prohibit your teen from visiting any friend whose parents do not take appropriate measures.

Know school policies regarding Internet use. Your teens are likely using the Internet at school. Talk openly with teachers and school administrators regarding how they handle online safety. Also, understand how your teen's Internet use at home may affect school policy. Many schools hold teens accountable for their actions online whether done at school or elsewhere.

Establish rules regarding Internet use. Determine appropriate Internet use guidelines for your child. Communicate and enforce them. (Some parents find actual written [Internet use agreements](http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/toolscontracts) <link to <http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/toolscontracts>> to be helpful.) Make sure the rules you establish are reasonable based on your teen's age and maturity. Assess your teen's compliance with your rules on a regular basis.

Get tech-savvy. Your teen may know more about computers and the Internet than you do. Don't be intimidated. Read up on the latest technology developments, especially those that teens have embraced. Talk with other parents to learn what they know about

the Internet. Ask your kids to teach you what they know about computers and the Internet. Do not underestimate your teen's knowledge of computers.

Know and use available tools. There is a wide variety of [software and tools](http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/) available to help you keep your teens safe online. Generally, these tools fall under three main categories: (1) tools that block and/or filter inappropriate websites and content; (2) tools that monitor your teen's online activity; and (3) tools that block your teen from posting personal information online.

Check with your Internet service provider (ISP) to determine what Internet safety features it offers. Many ISPs also offer software and tools for parents seeking additional protection for their children.

Click [here](http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/) for a list of popular software and tools for parents seeking to protect their teens online.

5. Report inappropriate activity.

If you discover that your teen has experienced inappropriate online activity, or if you have concerns about your teen's use of Tagged, contact Tagged's Safety Squad (safetysquad@tagged.com) immediately.

If you believe your teen has experienced criminal action, do not hesitate to contact your local authorities. A crime online is still a crime and law enforcement personnel have sophisticated tools used to investigate online crimes.

Click [here](http://kids.getnetwise.org/trouble/contact) to find additional authorities and groups you should also consider contacting.