

Children, the Internet and Computer Games

The Internet is an amazing invention. It is an attractive and fun new way of providing information, pictures and opportunities for learning. It offers educational games and programs, research information for school projects and business, the opportunity to communicate with people around the world, and the sharing of resources and ideas with people that have the same interest.

Most children at some stage will have some sort of contact with the Internet.

Many parents can feel they are being or are out of their depth compared to their children in grappling the Internet. As with other areas of their children's lives, parents have a responsibility to provide guidance and to set clear limits for them. Parents should know what their children access on the Internet.

What Parents Can Do

Learn more about the Internet (local libraries sometimes have free courses).

Become comfortable with the technology – you don't have to an expert.

Pay attention to what your children are doing. Keep track of what your children are doing by checking "bookmarks", "favourites" or "history" (accessible via the icons on the menu bar).

Check the sites your children might be revisiting. "Options" or "Preference" or "History" icons can provide a list of recently visited sites.

Help children of all ages to be critical viewers, to understand and talk about what they view and what it means. This is one of the best ways of reducing the risk of hurt to children.

Again, teach children, even from a very young age, to be critical. Help them to understand how advertising works. This is an effective way to reduce the impact on the whole family.

Teach your children never to give out their names or the names of friends or to fill in questionnaires.

The computer that is on-line should be in a family area, not behind closed doors.

If a child or young adult wishes to meet new on-line "friends" in person, supervise the meeting to ensure that they are who they say they are.

Encourage children to only use monitored chat lines designed for their own age group and to be themselves when on-line.

Talk to your child's school about their on-line policy – one that parents can also put into practice at home.

Encourage a careful approach to "information" found on the Internet. The

information comes from many resources and all is not reliable.

Children should never send images of themselves over the Internet as they may be used for other purposes.

Select a reliable service provider and discuss children's on-line safety with them.

Encourage children to use chat groups or news groups or send email messages only with your permission and under your supervision.

Block objectionable material by using "blocking software". This is a program that allows parents to control the information that is accessed by children whilst on the Internet. The software is inexpensive and available from most computer suppliers or straight from the provider's sites. While blocking software is an excellent idea for some age groups it is not foolproof and some computer aware children can still get around these programs.

Encourage your children to report such experiences to you and try to discuss these matters calmly with your child.

Forward a copy of any such messages to your service provider and ask for assistance.

Should you become aware of any child pornography on-line note any relevant details and report the matter to the Children's Commission, ph: 1800 688 275 or CrimeStoppers ph: 1800 333 000.

As the Internet can be addictive, always set a time limit (about one hour) and encourage other activities. Remember to enjoy the great outdoors!

Reminders

Most children at some stage will have contact with the Internet.

Remember that it is not the technology that is the problem, it is the way in which it can be used.

Parents can make a big difference in reducing the risks for their children by making sensible rules.

Learn more about the internet....become comfortable with this technology.

Teach your children to be selective and explain why it is important.

Common dangers of being on-line

There is a lot of unsuitable or adult information on the Internet.

Much of the information on the Internet is not accurate or reliable.

People may pretend to be someone they are not.

A child may provide personal information to strangers or arrange to meet new

friend they have made on the Internet without really knowing who they are.

Harassment can be distributed by email.

The Internet can become addictive.

The search engines on the Internet provided access to many sites on a given topic. Some of these sites contain information and/or images that could be harmful to children even when they are searching everyday topics.

Why should parents be concerned?

While there are over three million perfectly safe children's sites on the Internet, children can unexpectedly come across material of a sexual or violent nature, language that is rude and the selling of children's products by companies. Quite innocently you could bring up sites that do not relate to the topic you are looking for, or someone can send you images or messages that are not appropriate.

Computer Games

Becoming "hooked"

Often children can become "hooked" into the fast moving world of computer games. Excessive exposure to games can lead to a number of problems – such as poor eating habits, not mixing with others, poor communication, trouble with school work and keeping attention in class.

Some signs to look for are:

Cutting back on the time they are outside, being with friends, playing sports and doing other social activities.

Becoming withdrawn or difficult.

Eating their meals in front of the computer, staying up late to finish off a game; missing out on school, homework or other responsibilities.

Talking only and all the time about games and their computer while losing interest in other hobbies; copying karate moves and fantasising about computer characters.

Become upset and irrational when asked to turn it off; becoming aggressive withdrawn.

What parents can do about computer games

Monitor what your child buys or obtains by looking at the classification labels on the packaging.

Keep track of where the software is coming from – e.g the Internet, friends, software pirates.

Ask to join and have a go. Ask what games they are playing most often. Take note of reactions as children play the game. Do they become aggressive, frightened, upset?

Together, make very clear rules in the home about switch on and switch off times.

Sue Driscoll & Sue Roy, taken from Telopea School Newsletter.

Kids Links

Librarians On-line

www.act.gov.au/publiclibrary/services/findinfo/guidelines.htm

Homework Help

www.library.act.gov.au/homework

For ages 5-11yrs

Disney Online

www.disney.com

Children's Online Magazine

www.sunshine.aust.com/aus/teachers/V2/index.html

Questacon

www.questacon.edu.au

The Kid's Space

www.kids-space.org/

Online Development

www.liswa.wa.gov.au/liskidz.html

For ages 12-14

KidsCom

www.kidscom.com/

Cyberteens

www.cyberteens.com/ctmain.html

Discovery Kids

<http://kids.discovery.com/KIDS/home.html>

For ages 15-17

Australian Music WWW Site

www.amws.com.au/

Cybergirl

www.cybergrrl.com

Govt. Info for Young People

www.thesource.gov.au

For ages 2-4

ABC Children's Television

www.abc.net.au/children

Thomas the Tank Engine

www.thomasthetankengine.com

The 100 Acre Woods

www.worldkids.net/pooh/

Secure Networks

(payment required)

Kidz.net

www.kidz.net.au

(cost: \$99 yr)

KAHootz

www.kahootz.com.au

(cost: \$59.95 yr)