

Internet Safety

"When Traveling the Information Superhighway, Keep Both Hands on the Wheel"

By John Kolberg

With virtually unlimited information resources and tools that enable students to communicate, solve problems, and publish the results of their work, the Internet is being used as a learning tool by more and more children every day.

As children travel farther and faster on the Information Superhighway, the potential risk of undesirable encounters increases and a shift is made from the physical neighborhood to the virtual one. Children are rarely in immediate danger on the Internet, unlike being in a city park or on the streets. And, with information technology, they can take part in increasing the safety of others.

It is not uncommon today for kids to know more about the Internet and computers than their parents. Rather than being hampered by this role reversal, parents can use their children's knowledge to discuss the need for safety on the net. Be open and inquisitive about your child's Internet habits. Ask them to show you what sites they like. Ask them to show you what sort of things signal danger to them in a chat room or web site. Often parents are surprised to find just how savvy their children are in recognizing danger on the Information Superhighway. By following some commonsense tips, users of all ages can enjoy this marvelous and exiting medium. The Internet is a wonderful place to learn and explore. But just like any roadway, safe driving on the Information Superhighway requires knowing the "Rules of the Road"



Safety Cops Say:

- Never tell someone your home address, phone number, or school name without your parent's permission first.
- Check with your parents or another adult you trust before going into a chat room.
- If something you read or see makes you uncomfortable, leave the site. Tell a parent or a teacher right away.
- If you receive unwanted, offensive, mean, threatening, or harassing e-mail, do not respond to it. Tell your parents or another adult right away.

- Never say you'll meet someone in person without asking your parent's permission first.
- Don't accept things from strangers (e-mail, files, photos, or Web page addresses)
- Know that You control the situation. If a bad guy is trying to trick you, know that you can outsmart him and tell your mom or dad. Save everything and give it to the police so they can investigate it and catch him.

Parents here are some things you can do:

- Retain the password for the master account if your account has multiple log-ons. This prevents your child from turning off the restrictions you have imposed.
- Place the computer in a central area of the home and make using the Internet a family activity.
- Don't allow your children to provide a user profile (their personal details) to any online service, including competitions and surveys.
- Children should never send a photograph of themselves to anyone, nor should they give out their real name or contact details.
- While there are products designed to protect kids from harmful sites, filtering software is no substitute for responsible, vigilant parenting.

Internet safety is the responsibility of both parents and kids alike. By following these simple rules, the Information Superhighway can be your avenue for learning and exploration.

To learn more about Internet safety visit www.safekids.com . The National Center for Victims of Crime (www.ncvc.org/) has a guide for victims of Internet stalking. GetNetWise (www.getnetwise.org/) also offers tips and advice for kids and families.