

## **Five Things You Can Do Today to *Internet Protect Your Kids***

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In just a few short years, the Internet has gone from a school luxury to a social necessity for kids. There are 24 million kids, ages 12 to 17 in the U.S. and 87% of them use the Internet regularly – with 44% of *them* going online *every day*. While you don't have to be completely computer savvy to Internet protect your kids, you should do some basic homework providing you with the tools to keep your kids from experiencing the dark side of today's technology. To help you get started, here are five things you can do today to Internet protect your kids:

**1. Utilize Filtering.** Consider purchasing Internet filtering software, or selecting an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that offers server-based filtering. See if the web browser or computer your child uses has parental control features. If so, take the time to set them up. Most email programs have some sort of spam filtering. Be sure to use this as well. This may not prevent all spam from getting to your child's inbox, but it will make a big difference.

**2. Set Internet Ground Rules with Your Family.** A good place to start is to require all computer use to be in a "public" area in your home. This can combat the temptation that can accompany computer use in a private area of the home, such as a bedroom. Before allowing your kids to go online, they should be given clear guidelines on what is acceptable Internet activity, i.e. what to visit, who they are allowed to contact and how long they are permitted to stay online. Parents must set and enforce the rules in order for them to be effective. The most effective way adults can shape a child's Internet behavior is to engage them in focused, research-driven projects and supervise their projects. Whatever ground rules you decide upon, post them on or near the computer as a clear reminder.

**3. Don't Allow Your Child to Reveal Personal Information Online.** Many websites ask for personal information that may be shared publicly without your knowledge, or can be used maliciously by sexual predators. Don't allow your child to ever give out his or her name, address, or other personal information on the Internet.

**4. Don't Allow Kids to Add New Contacts to "Friend" or "Buddy" Lists Without Your Permission.** It's not unlikely that over time, your children will want to add additional "friends" or "buddies" to their social networking or instant messaging lists. Also, understand that it's likely that your children will receive requests from people they don't know to be added to these lists. Set an expectation that no person can be added to these lists without your permission.

**5. Teach Your Kids to Report Inappropriate Online Communications to You.** It's likely that sooner or later your child will receive some sort of inappropriate online communication. For example, these could take the form of a spam email that includes pornographic images, or a website blog posting where your child is the target of cyberbullying. Teach your kids to notify you right away should this happen. Report suggestive messages or pornographic email messages to your ISP. For more information on protecting your child against cyberbullying, see my tip sheet, "How to Protect Your Kids from Cyberbullies" on the HomeWord.com website.

**For a detailed look at keeping your kids safe online, order Roger Marsh and Stephen Arterburn's book, *Internet Protect Your Kids*. To do so, [click here](#).**

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