

ALWAYS USE PROTECTION

A TEEN'S GUIDE TO SAFE COMPUTING

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Apress®

Always Use Protection: A Teen's Guide to Safe Computing

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ISBN (pbk): 1-59059-326-X

Printed and bound in the United States of America 12345678910

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Distributed to the book trade in the United States by Springer-Verlag New York, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY, 10010 and outside the United States by Springer-Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Tiergartenstr. 17, 69112 Heidelberg, Germany.

In the United States: phone 1-800-SPRINGER, email orders@springer-ny.com, or visit <http://www.springer-ny.com>. Outside the United States: fax +49 6221 345229, email orders@springer.de, or visit <http://www.springer.de>.

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Introduction

Does your computer sometimes crash for no reason—or act strangely? Are you seeing unexpected lag or sudden dropouts when playing online games? Has your Internet connection gotten slower? Are mysterious pop-up windows appearing at strange times? Have you discovered that someone has impersonated you on an instant messenger program without your knowledge? Are you OK with strangers (or friends or family members) knowing everything you do on your computer? Have you ever wondered which of those amazing e-mail offers are actually true?

This book was inspired by a call I recently received from my nephew. For some reason, his computer desktop was just vanishing at random times—usually a few minutes after turning on his system. It turned out his computer had been infected with a nasty program called a *computer virus*.

Now my nephew is smart. He knows not to download and run programs unless he knows where they come from. He knows what a virus is. Yet, to my surprise, he didn't have an up-to-date virus protection program on his computer.

The next week I helped a friend of his out whose computer was attacked by another program called a *Trojan*—I'll tell you more about that in the book.

It turns out that teens actually have more sophisticated security needs than most adults. It's not enough for you to know about firewalls—you need to know how to keep one up while playing online games. You're much more likely than most adults to be using Kazaa or other peer-to-peer file services, and you're much more likely to be downloading files. The kinds of identity theft you are likely to experience are very different from those experienced by your parents. And because in many families teens know more about computers than their parents, it can sometimes be difficult to find help when problems occur.

This book covers all of these issues and more. It's a book about computer security—the first one ever written for teens and young adults. It goes far beyond the usual “beware the dangers of chat rooms” warnings to teach you

everything you need to know to protect your computer, your privacy, and yourself.

Even if you are a beginner now, by the time you finish this book, you'll know more about computer security than almost everyone you know. You'll know how to clean viruses off a system (and maybe even get paid for it). You'll learn how antivirus tools and firewalls work—**and how they can fail!** You'll know how to play online games without opening your system to attack by outsiders. You'll know how to surf the web and shop without leaving traces for advertisers (and others) to follow. You'll even know about cyberterrorism, and how you can help prevent it.

And best of all, you'll be able to help your friends and family members clean up and secure their systems. Because let's face it—they probably need all the help they can get.

What Isn't in This Book

No book can satisfy all the people all the time. And computer security is a vast subject, so some things will be left out, and others may disagree on what I've chosen to emphasize. So here's a bit about my philosophy in writing this book, and the things that I'm assuming as I write it:

- I'm going to assume that you know the basics about using your computer. I'm not going to waste your time with pages explaining what a computer is, how to use a web browser, or how to run a program from the Start menu. Most of you are already routinely using your computer for a variety of tasks. So if you're a real computer beginner, you might want to get a more introductory book before going for this one.
- There are so many different web pages, viruses, virus scanners, firewalls, routers, scams, versions of Windows and browsers, and so on, that detailed instructions on how to deal with each of them is impossible to include without turning this book into a massive encyclopedia. Not only that, but threats and technology evolve, so discussing particular viruses and scams and applications is pointless. Instead, I'm going to try to take you behind the scenes to understand the nature of the threats and how they work. That knowledge, with a bit of common sense, should be enough for you to apply the knowledge to your particular computer and environment.
- There are books out there for parents that teach them how to monitor their kids online. This isn't one of them. This book is written for you to help you take responsibility for protecting your own computer, privacy, and yourself.