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**Internet Safety for Kids**

# **Introduction:**

The internet has evolved into a global network, transforming communication, information access, and daily life. While it has opened up a world of information and connectivity, the issue of internet safety for kids has emerged as a critical concern. This essay explores the historical evolution, current issues, legislative responses, and preventive measures associated with ensuring internet safety for kids. In this era of information, the internet's significance is undeniable, but safeguarding our kids demands a thorough understanding of its effects and the implementation of preventive solutions.

**Historical Perspective:**

As the internet evolved, so did the threats to children. In the 1990s, kids gained online access, leading to concerns about predators. The 2000s saw the rise of social media and cyberbullying. The 2010s focused on data privacy issues through legislation. The 2020s presented unique challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating the adoption of remote learning and leading to a significant increase in children's screen time. According to the Pew Research Center, 95% of adolescents have access to a smartphone, with 45% reporting that they are online "almost constantly" (Turner, 2023). Almost half of them have a computer in their bedrooms, according to the 2016 Children’s Internet Usage Study conducted by the Center for Cyber Safety and Education.

**Current Challenges:**

In today's interconnected world, nearly every American child and teen has access to the internet, where they engage in online games and smartphone interactions akin to traditional playground activities. However, this digital community, while offering numerous opportunities for learning and socializing, also presents inherent risks and dangers that demand parental attention.  Children present additional challenges because of their natural characteristics: innocence, curiosity, desire for independence, and fear of punishment (CISA, 2023).

Online threats to children encompass a range of concerning issues that demand heightened awareness. Firstly, cyberbullying stands out as a pervasive danger conducted through various electronic channels, and poses emotional and psychological risks, with girls often targeted as victims and boys admitting to engaging in such behavior. More than 36% of kids age 12–17 have been cyberbullied at some point in their life, and nearly 15% have bullied someone else online (Edwards, 2023). Secondly, the risk of online predators looms large, as adults exploit the internet to entice children for sexual or abusive exploitation. Online predators present another significant threat, particularly to children. Because the nature of the internet is so anonymous, it is easy for people to misrepresent themselves and manipulate or trick other users (CISA, 2023). The alarming statistics reveal a predominant vulnerability among girls, constituting the majority of child victims, while the majority of online predators are male. Equally concerning is the revelation that 98% of these predators have never physically met their child targets, underscoring the deceptive nature of online interactions.

Additionally, exposure to inappropriate content remains a prevalent threat, with over half of tweens encountering violent content and explicit language or images. Over 55% of [tweens](https://www.safewise.com/resources/internet-safety-for-teens/) (kids age 10–12) have been exposed to violent content on the internet, and nearly 60% have come across sexually explicit words or images (Edwards, 2023). This exposure can have a harmful impact on impressionable children. Beyond these risks, issues like dangerous or inappropriate websites, malware downloads, online frauds, and scams contribute to the complex landscape of online dangers for children.

**Legislation for Kids Internet Safety:**

Legislation for kids' internet safety plays a crucial role in establishing guidelines and safeguards to protect children in the digital realm. One significant example is the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in the United States, which focuses on ensuring online services and websites obtain parental consent before collecting personal information from children under the age of 13. Congress has [resurrected the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)](https://www.blackburn.senate.gov/services/files/D89FC49B-0714-4124-B8B1-4F35A85F5E02), a bill that would increase surveillance and restrict access to information in the name of protecting children online (Kelley, 2023). Additionally, these laws often emphasize educational programs to promote digital literacy and awareness among children, empowering them to navigate the online world responsibly. Provisions against cyberbullying, age verification measures, and the implementation of parental controls are common elements in such legislation, aiming to create a safer online environment for children.

Immediately report suspected online enticement or sexual exploitation of a child by calling 911, contacting the FBI at [tips.fbi.gov](http://tips.fbi.gov/), or filing a report with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-843-5678 or [report.cybertip.org](http://report.cybertip.org/) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). If your child faces threats or encounters illegal activities online, report it immediately to local or federal law enforcement. Call your local police for threats directed at your child personally. For specific online threats or crimes, contact the nearest FBI office. If your child is approached by an online predator or comes across an illegal website targeting children and teens, you can report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children’s website at CyberTipline.com (Turner, 2023). It is important for both parents and kids to understand the threats and swiftly report them to the appropriate law agency which ensures timely intervention and investigation.

**Strategies for Parents Ensuring Child Internet Safety:**

Parents play a crucial role in safeguarding their children's online experiences, necessitating the adoption of proactive measures to mitigate potential risks. Protecting a child from these dangers requires understanding them, which can be complicated. For parents, dealing with things they aren't used to adds another challenge. Besides the difficulty of getting used to new technologies, there's also the problem of finding time to try out a new service after a busy day, week, or month of work and parenting (Edwards, 2023). Initially, parents must acquaint themselves with various online threats, spanning from cyberbullying to exposure to inappropriate content. It's essential to acknowledge that seemingly innocuous activities, like gaming or researching school projects, can inadvertently result in detrimental consequences, such as unintentionally deleting essential program files or encountering malicious websites. Open communication is paramount; parents should consistently engage in conversations with their children about cyberbullying, acceptable online communication, and the significance of sharing any discomfort they might experience (Turner, 2023). By fostering an environment where children feel secure discussing their online encounters, parents establish a foundation for trust and understanding.

Additionally, parents should vigilantly monitor their children's online activities. Instructing children to avoid sharing personal information online and emphasizing the permanence of posted images, while also teaching them about body safety and setting boundaries in both the physical and virtual worlds (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). Placing the computer in a communal area facilitates easy supervision, and utilizing shared email accounts and parental control software adds extra layers of oversight. Regularly inspecting browser history, activating privacy features, and being aware of passwords are practical steps to stay well-informed. Recognizing alterations in a child's behavior that could indicate cyberbullying or contact with online predators is vital. In the event of online targeting, parents should promptly reassure their child, sever communication with the predator, alter online credentials, document evidence, and report the activity to authorities. In cases involving exposure to inappropriate content, parents should remain composed, identify the source, block access, and sustain open communication to guide their child through any distressing feelings. The overarching goal is to actively engage with children, provide education about online risks, and cultivate an environment that promotes responsible internet use.

**Preventive Measures from Kids for Internet Safety:**

Children significantly contribute to internet safety by following essential guidelines. Firstly, they need to choose online platforms wisely, guided by parents and teachers to ensure age-appropriate selections. Emphasizing honesty and respecting age restrictions discourages misrepresentation and establishes a foundation for responsible digital interactions. Critical to online safety is password protection. Children should understand the importance of secure passwords, sharing them only with parents to maintain control over their online accounts (Ben-Joseph, 2022). This practice minimizes unauthorized access risks, empowering children to actively participate in securing their digital presence.

Children should be cautious about sharing personal details, such as addresses or phone numbers, and seek parental guidance when uncertain about the appropriateness of sharing specific information (Ben-Joseph, 2022). It's important to understand that once content is posted online, it becomes permanent, even if deletion attempts are made. If you wouldn't want your entire class to be aware of something, refrain from sharing it online, including with close friends. Practice kindness in online interactions, acknowledging that there's a real person with feelings behind every screen name (Ben-Joseph, 2022). If you come across strange or inappropriate behavior online, promptly inform your parent. Be discerning about online friendships, as some platforms may facilitate connections with unfamiliar individuals. Never agree to meet someone you meet online (Edwards, 2023). It's crucial to recognize the distinction between online and real-life friends, and never agree to meet an online friend in person or share personal information, as some individuals may pretend to be kids but are adults with potentially harmful intentions.

**Summary:**

In conclusion, ensuring the online safety of our kids requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Parents are crucial in providing digital education, fostering transparent communication, and actively supervising online activities. At the same time, it is essential to educate children about responsible online behavior and the importance of protecting their privacy. Legislative actions, exemplified by initiatives like COPPA, and the active involvement of law enforcement, mark significant progress in establishing legal frameworks for holding online platforms accountable. Hence, to deal with the always-changing dangers on the internet, parents, kids, and law enforcement agencies need to keep working together.

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