



Keeping Kids Safe Online

Get involved to make sure your child knows the risks, as well as the rewards, of the Internet.

By Scholastic Parents Staff



If your child is surfing the web, you need to be paddling right alongside him — or at least observing carefully from the shore. While the internet offers goodies galore (educational materials, fun games, and connections with people all over the world), it can also pose risks to your child's physical safety and emotional well-being.

Here's what is appealing — and what's dangerous — about several popular ways kids use the internet, along with suggested rules for keeping kids safe online. The bottom line: communicate with your child. Discuss what she's doing online and why. Set rules, and talk about them. Then keep talking, since your child can earn more rights and responsibilities as she grows. If she feels comfortable with these conversations, she will be more likely to let you know when she runs into an **online bully** or stumbles upon inappropriate content. While keeping kids safe, be a role model with your own Internet habits, since your child is likely to emulate your behavior.

Safety Standards

These basic rules apply to keeping kids safe online; visit [Commonsense.com](https://www.commonsense.org/) for age-by-age tips.

- **Limit usage.** Permit your child to have free online time (i.e.: 30 minutes right after school) to instant-message friends, play games, or visit social networking sites, but make it a rule that family time starts with dinner. After that, the computer is used for homework and it's an IM-free zone.
- **Keep kids in sight.** Have the computer centrally located. Your child is less likely to browse questionable content if she knows Mom or Dad (or her brother or sister) might walk by at any second. This helps you monitor time spent online, chosen activities, and resultant behavior.
- **Do your homework.** Check his browser history to know where your child goes online, and check the sites regularly. Use security tools and privacy features — whether offered by your browser or Internet service provider or purchased separately — for extra protection.

Kids' Favorites

Use this overview to understand what kids love to do online — and what risks go along with the rewards.

Communicating and social networking: Online communication consists primarily of email, instant messaging (IMs), chat rooms, and journals or web logs (blogs). On networking sites such as Facebook, kids (often, they must be 13 or older) can create web profiles, and then invite others to view and become online buddies. Your child may use these media to share gossip, exchange photos, make weekend plans, find out about missed assignments, connect over common interests, and express opinions.

What to know: One out of every five kids gets sexual solicitations online. Strangers, predators, and cyber-bullies all target children, and their work is simplified when screen names reveal age, gender, or hometown. If posts aren't marked as private, personal information can be displayed to an unrestricted audience of readers.

What to do:

- **Know who your child talks to online.** Review her buddy list: does she really know everyone, or are some buddies "friends of friends"? Have her remove anyone she hasn't met in person.
- **Tell him not to exchange personal information** like a phone number, address, best friend's name, or picture. No party invitations, revealing details, or meeting in person — ever.

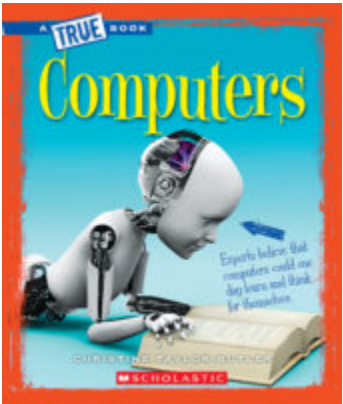
Web surfing: Kids can explore new interests, check to see if a library book is available, or find a recipe for the class party in valuable resources, such as online encyclopedias, newspapers, and periodicals.

What to know: Surfing the Web without restrictions can mean encountering pop-up ads, viruses, erroneous information, and inappropriate content. The ease of cutting and pasting means that **plagiarism** is a real concern. And time flies online! Kids can click from one site to another until bedtime (or beyond), if you let them.

What to do:

- **Set a code of conduct and time limits.** Keeping kids safe means setting guidelines about suitable language, content, and behavior. While it's important to direct your child to suitable websites, it's even more valuable to help her recognize the redeeming qualities of those sites, so she can surf safely on her own.
- **Critique content.** Help your child think critically about the content he reads and sees. Encourage him to check facts with multiple sources before including them in a school report. Try to distinguish between user-generated content and reputable institutions.

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