



Protecting Children Online

WHAT ARE THE THREATS ONLINE?

Children are spending more of their time online than ever before. According to one study, 8- to 18-year-olds spend an average of 1.5 hours per day using computers outside of school¹. As use of the Internet and online technologies becomes more ingrained into our everyday lives, it is important that we ensure that our youth understand how to use these powerful tools and how to protect themselves from becoming victims. Children of all ages face online risks, including the following:

- **Inappropriate Contact:** Children may come in contact with individuals with malicious intent, such as bullies and predators.
- **Inappropriate Content:** Children may be exposed to inappropriate content while online, such as violent or sexually explicit material.
- **Inappropriate Conduct:** Children have a sense of anonymity while online and may do things that they would not do when face-to-face with someone.
- **Identify Theft:** Because of the perceived sense of anonymity online, children may post personal or identifying information that can then be used by identity thieves.

HOW DO I KEEP MY CHILDREN SAFE?

Parents, educators, and anyone else works with children should use the following guidelines to help keep children safe on-line:

- **Computer Location:** Keep your computer in a central and open location in your home.
- **Supervise Access:** Supervise computer access for children, and monitor the types of sites visited. Consider using parental control tools on your home computer. These tools are provided by some internet service providers or are available for purchase as a separate software package. You may be able to set some parental controls within your internet browser. For example, in Internet Explorer, click on *Tools* on your menu bar, select *Internet Options*, choose the *Content* tab, and then click the *Enable* button under the *Content Advisor* heading. For other browsers, contact the vendor to determine what parental controls are included.
- **Establish Rules:** Create guidelines for computer use. Include the amount of time that may be spent online and the type of sites that may be visited. Post these rules near the computer.
- **Personal Information:** Teach children not to post or share personal information such as their photograph, address, phone number, age, or activity schedule. Create a safe screen name that does not reveal personal information about the child.
- **Web Filtering:** Use web filtering software that restricts access to inappropriate websites and content.

¹ "Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds" www.kff.org/entmedia/mh012010pkg.cfm

- **Communication:** Maintain an open line of communication. Encourage children to come to you if they feel threatened online.
- **Cyberbullying:** Teach children not to respond to cyberbullies. Report incidents of cyberbullying to school administrators and local law enforcement when appropriate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information on protecting children online, please visit:

- NET CETERA: Chatting with Kids About Being Online – www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec04.pdf
- iKEEPSafe Internet Safety Coalition – www.ikeepsafe.org/PRC
- StaySafeOnline – www.staysafeonline.org/content/protect-your-children-online
- GetNetWise – kids.getnetwise.org/safetyguide
- Netsmartz – www.netsmartz.org/index.aspx

For previous issues of the Monthly Cyber Security Tips Newsletter, please visit www.dir.state.tx.us/security/reading.

For more information on Internet security, please visit the SecureTexas website at www.dir.state.tx.us/securetexas.

SecureTexas provides up-to-date technology security information as well as tips to help you strengthen your part of Texas' technology infrastructure. Report serious information security incidents as quickly as possible to your agency's Information Security Officer and to DIR's 24/7 Computer Security Incident Notification hotline: (512) 350-3282.

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