



Is there a stranger in your home?



INTERNET

Article by
Melissa Norfolk
Accredited professional speaker

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As a parent you work hard to protect your children. You warn them about 'stranger danger' and arm them with safety tips to protect them throughout their lives. But keeping your child safe has now become a little more challenging. Each time your computer is connected to the Internet, danger could come flooding right into your home.

The Internet is an important and useful source of information and entertainment. Simply banning your child from using the Internet can alienate them from the many benefits the Internet brings. Instead you need to make sure that you are informed about the possible dangers of Internet use, set some guidelines for your children when they use the Internet and investigate Internet filtering software.

WHO IS OUT THERE?

The Internet has many places where online predators like to hide. Most commonly they appear to lurk in chat rooms, use instant messaging services and message boards. They will often pretend to be another child. These people also surf the Internet looking for personal websites that contain photos and personal information about children. While setting up a personal website is a great idea, you should remove any personally identifiable information such as name, address, phone number and any information relating to your child's school. This includes school photos and photos with them dressed in school uniform. Choose the photos that you place on your website carefully.

IN SIGHT – IN MIND...

It is a good idea to make sure that any computer which is connected to the Internet is placed in a shared family space, not in your child's bedroom. This makes it easier for you to keep an eye on them and makes it easier for your child to communicate with you about anything they may view which makes them feel uncomfortable.

HOUSE RULES

Before setting rules or guidelines about using the Internet, explain to your children why you need to set them. Let them know that you are not being an ogre and that you are concerned for their safety.

Some good guidelines are:

- Never give out any personal information. This includes: name, address, phone number, any family information, where your child goes to school or where they play sport.
- Don't share your photo or your family's photo with anyone online.
- In relation to email that your child receives, advise them not to open any attachment from strangers or other people they have met online. These attachments could contain pornographic images or computer viruses.
- People online may not be who they say they are. Never meet someone in person who you have met online.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Encourage your child to discuss what they have been doing online and maybe, occasionally, join them during their online activities. Ask them if they have made any friends online and who they are. You should be as interested in their online friends as their offline friends.



It may be useful to make up a list of Internet guidelines and display them in a prominent position, preferably near the computer.

Remember that your children will have access to the Internet away from home, at schools, friends' houses and libraries. By allowing children to make informed decisions about the content they access, and by developing a sense of trust at home, your children will be in a good position to use the Internet in a responsible way when they are away from home.

INTERNET FILTERING SOFTWARE

While supervision is possibly your best defence against Internet predators, it is not possible or practical to be 'hanging over' your child's shoulder every second they are on the Internet. Internet filtering software allows you to set controls over the information that your child sends or views. Some software even allows you to set time limits on how long your child can surf the Net.

Some of the best known software currently available to assist you in reducing your child's exposure to Internet danger includes:

- Net Nanny
- CYBERSitter
- Cyber Patrol
- Cyber Sentinel

You should also check to see if your Internet Service Provider (ISP) is family friendly. A family-friendly ISP must adhere to the Internet Industry Association (IIA) codes of practice. Family-friendly ISP's can be recognised by a lady bird logo on their website. These ISP's offer information and online tools to assist both parents and children to use the Internet in a fun, yet safe way.

Internet expert and accredited professional speaker, Melissa Norfolk, speaks to business, school and community groups about effective use of the internet, finding what you need online, Internet safety and online marketing.

For more information visit www.technologypresentations.com.au or phone 03 9432 4423.