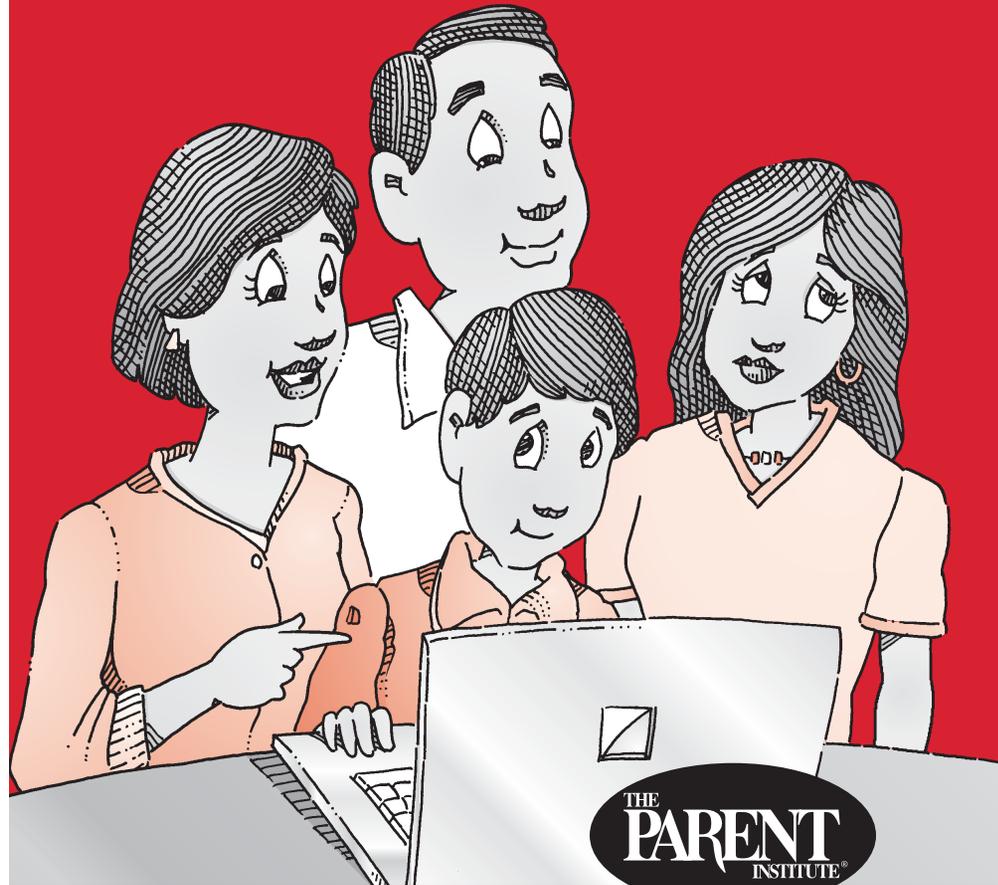


Los Angeles Unified School District



# Internet Safety

## & Responsibility for Students



A Guide for Parents



**Y**ou may love it, hate it or fear it, but the Internet is one thing you can't ignore. For better or worse, the Internet—with its endless possibilities and dangers—is here to stay. Your child is using it—and you need to take it seriously!

Millions of kids in all age groups are online every day—at home, at school, at friends' homes, at the library, on their phones—and many are creating online content. With hundreds of networking sites available, kids aren't just using the Internet, they're *contributing* to it—sometimes posting personal information online.

As a parent, you want to keep your child safe online. How can you do this while still letting him\* benefit from the power of the Internet? Read this booklet to find out. You'll discover tips and ideas for navigating through cyberspace safely. You'll also find definitions to help you make sense of all the confusing "net lingo" your child knows so well.

But remember: Although this booklet can help you teach your child about Internet safety, it's no substitute for good communication between you and your child, or for clear, consistent rules regarding computer and cell phone use.



*\*Note: Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We alternate using "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.*

Los Angeles Unified School District



## Quiz

### How savvy are you when it comes to Internet safety?

Take this quiz to find out how much you know—or don't know—about your child's well-being online.

- 1. The best place to keep our home computer is:**
  - a. In the family room.
  - b. In my child's bedroom.
  - c. In my home office.
- 2. The best way to keep my child safe online is:**
  - a. By insisting she use the Internet in a public place like the library.
  - b. By not letting her use the Internet alone.
  - c. By supervising her Internet usage and posting clear rules about computer use near the monitor.
- 3. Kid-friendly chat rooms are completely safe.**
  - a. True
  - b. False
- 4. Which of these is the riskiest screen name for my child to have?**
  - a. SweetLilGrrl
  - b. Kristi\_nyc1998
  - c. TeddyBearLvr
- 5. How many kids would you guess are sexually solicited online during a one-year period?**
  - a. 1 in 5,000
  - b. 1 in 500
  - c. 1 in 5

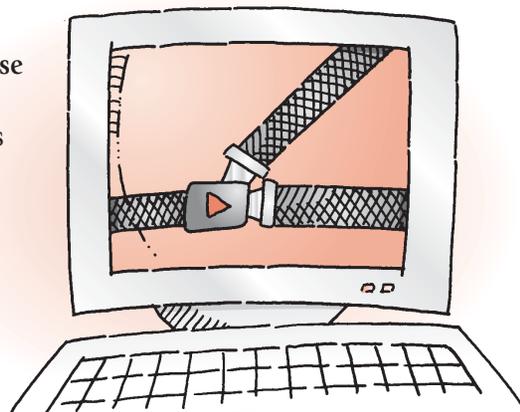
*(See answers on page 12.)*

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## Keeping Your Child Safe Online

**N**o matter how old your child is, some Internet rules always apply. These include:

- No computer in your child's bedroom. Keep it out in the open.
- No posting of any personal information online.
- No choosing email addresses or **screen names** that are provocative or reveal your child's identity.
- No arranging face-to-face meetings with online "friends."



If your child is in elementary school, other appropriate rules include:

- No random online searching. Visit parent-approved sites only.
- No **uploading** or **downloading** files without permission.
- No clicking on **pop-up** ads or visiting adult **chat rooms**.
- No Facebook® or other social-networking accounts with age restrictions.
- No secrets. If your child sees something upsetting, he must tell you.

If your child is in middle or high school, your rules should center on:

- Consistency. Continue reinforcing basic safety rules.
- Honesty. Let your child know that you expect him to be truthful about what he's doing online and to report trouble.
- Respect. Understand his natural curiosity and desire for independence. Don't ban the computer forever if he slips up once.

**Screen name:** The nickname by which a user is identified online.

**Uploading:** Sending data from one computer or mobile device to another, or from a computer to an Internet site.

**Downloading:** Retrieving material from a website or another computer.

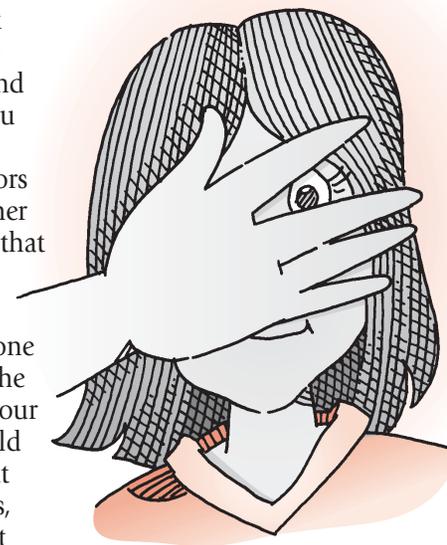
**Pop-up:** A random ad that appears on the screen while the user is online.

**Chat room:** A place on the Internet where users communicate in real time by typing messages to one another. Also called an "online forum."

## Using Parental-Control Programs

**F**ilters can help you limit your child's exposure to Internet pornography and other disturbing material. You may also wish to install **filtering software** that monitors her actions online or limits her computer usage. (See "Tools that Can Help" on page 12.)

However, none of these program is foolproof, and none will teach your child to use the Internet responsibly. That's your job—which is why you should talk to your child often about staying safe online. As always, you are your child's first, best and most influential teacher.



## A Note about Cell Phones

**T**hink cell phones are just phones? Think again. Today's cell phones are mini computers. They're called "smart phones" for a reason. Most have Internet capability and can send **instant messages**, **text messages**, pictures and email. In light of that, many of this booklet's safety tips apply to your child's cell phone use, too.

**Filtering software:** Programs parents can install to screen Internet content and block access to inappropriate sites.

**Instant message (IM)/Chat:** An application that lets users send and receive online text messages nearly in real time. It also notifies users when friends have logged on or off.

**Text message:** A short, typed message sent from one cell phone to another.

## A Closer Look at:

# Chatting, Messaging & Social-Networking

## What are chatting and messaging?

**Chatting** and instant messaging (IM) are ways kids communicate with each other online. Think of it as “talking” by typing on the computer or phone. Many online games for children allow users to “chat” with one another. With most chat programs and online games, users identify themselves by screen names and communicate with friends on a contacts or buddy list. Communication happens almost instantly—which explains the flurry of typing you hear when your child uses the computer or cell phone.

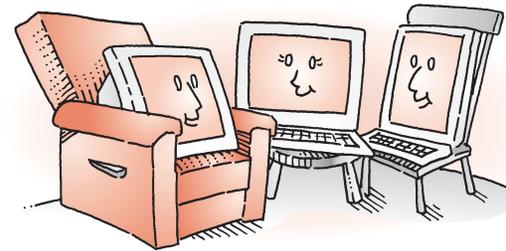
Some applications, such as Skype®, also allow for video chatting through web cameras. In this case, users can speak face-to-face.

Kids often use abbreviations when chatting—both to speed up their typing and to keep parents in the dark. (To decipher what they’re saying, see “Know the Shorthand” on page 12.)

If you do allow your child to use a chat or IM program (or the chat feature in online games), be sure he:

- **Chooses a screen name** that keeps his identity secret.
- **Communicates only** with friends you know. Occasionally, ask who he’s talking to.
- **Understands that his messages** are not truly private. Anything typed into a chat or IM program can be copied and pasted into an email or onto a social-networking site.

Avoid reading your child’s chats or IMs over his shoulder. Chatting is just like talking on the phone—remember the lengths you went to as a child to have “privacy” while talking to your friends.



## What goes on in chat rooms?

If your child is overly protective of his chatting or is online more than he hangs out with friends in person, you may want to inquire further about his chatting activities. Chatting or IM programs are so easily downloaded that “everyone” has them. Many popular online games for kids contain chat and instant message features as well.

Unfortunately, children and pedophiles seek out these online games and chat rooms for the same reason: Where better to meet an ever-changing group of kids?

If you permit your child to chat online, insist that he:

- **Choose a nonspecific**, gender-neutral screen name.
- **Never reveal identifying details** about himself.
- **Stick with kid-friendly chat rooms.** Remember, this is no guarantee that other users aren’t adults merely posing as kids.
- **Report abusive posts** to the chat room moderator, if possible.
- **Be wary of fellow chatters** who appear “too nice.”

Talk with your child. With whom is he chatting? What kinds of topics are they discussing? Remember: Keep the computer where you can observe your child’s online activities!

## What is texting?

Texting (or text messaging) is an even more popular way to communicate. Kids “talk” by typing short messages to one another on their cell phones. They can also send photos or short videos—and these can be easily forwarded by the recipient to others.

A disturbing trend called “sexting” involves sending sexually explicit or provocative photos via cell phone—often leading to serious consequences!

Remind your child that even if she *thinks* she can trust the recipient, there’s no guarantee that person won’t share her information with others.

Also make sure your child complies with the school policy regarding cell phone use. Inappropriate use (such as using a cell phone for cheating or bullying) could result in serious consequences for you and your child.

## What are social-networking sites?

It's no exaggeration: Social-networking sites, such as Facebook®, have changed the way kids connect. Through these free sites, users can **blog**, post messages, photos or videos, play games and chat. These sites allow kids to communicate easily with friends and help them feel like part of a community.

There are risks, however. The dangers of social-networking sites include:

- **Talking online with pedophiles** and other criminals posing as peers.
- **Being lured into face-to-face** meetings with dangerous people.
- **Being exposed to sexually** explicit or violent material.
- **Bullying from other users.**

If you've decided to let your child join social-networking sites, help her stay safe while she's logged on. (And even if you've banned such sites at home, be aware that she may have access to them on her cell phone, at a friend's house or the library.)

Be sure your child:

- **Keeps information** such as her birth year or hometown off her profile.
- **Applies privacy settings** that make her profile or photos visible only to friends you both know.
- **Joins only sites that are appropriate** for her age group.
- **Adds you as a friend.**

Remember: Nothing is erased for good on the Internet. Search engines never forget! A good rule of thumb is to tell your child not to put anything online that she'd be embarrassed for her grandparents to see.

You may want to make a habit of typing your child's full name into a search engine. If she isn't using the privacy settings on social media sites properly, you and others may be able to view her entire profile. But before you fly off the handle, be sure that the person is your child. Since everyone uses the same Internet, it's not surprising to find others with the same name.

**Blog/blogging:** A "web log" or journal that users post online. Bloggers usually update their sites often, and these sites may contain photos, music, videos and links. Blogging is the act of creating/maintaining a blog.



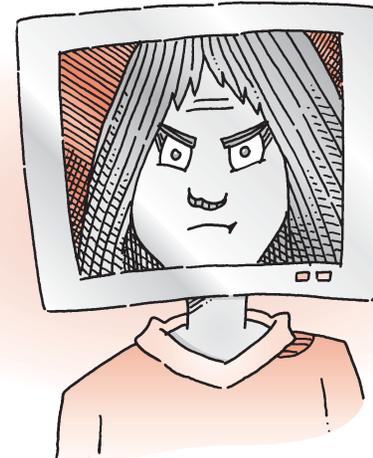
## Cyberbullies

**B**ullying has moved from the schoolyard and the classroom to computers and cell phones. Today, some kids set up websites dedicated solely to making fun of others. They write mean comments on the victim's social networking pages. They post cruel and sometimes altered pictures. They trick other kids into revealing personal and often sensitive or embarrassing information, then forward it to others. Whether through social-networking, chat, IM, text messages, email or pictures—**cyberbullying** is a real concern!

Cyberbullying hurts children just as much as traditional bullying does. If you notice your child becoming sad or withdrawn, or using the computer much less than she used to, ask her what's going on.

To help your child with this distressing situation:

- **Make sure the computer is always located** where you can monitor what your child is doing online.
- **Let her know she can talk to you** if she receives a message from a cyberbully.
- **Tell your child never, ever to respond**—even to a text message. Responding to a cyberbully only encourages the bully.
- **Keep a record.** Save any messages from a cyberbully. Print copies of everything the bully posts online or sends to your child.
- **Alert your child's school** to the problem.
- **Contact the police** if your child is threatened and you fear for her safety.



**Cyberbullying:** A form of bullying in which cruel or harassing messages and pictures are sent or posted online.

## File Sharing

Also known as peer-to-peer (P2P) programs, **file sharing** programs let users swap files via the Internet. Among teens, these programs are often used to share music, pictures and videos.



The pitfalls of file sharing may include:

- **Illegality.** Sharing certain files may violate copyright laws.
- **Exposure to pornography** or other disturbing material.
- **Making all of a computer's files** (even private ones) available to others by mistake.
- **Exposure to viruses** or **spyware**.

To ensure that your child shares files safely, make sure she:

- **Never uploads** or downloads materials illegally.
- **Reads the fine print** when setting up a file-sharing program.
- **Shares files only** with people she knows and trusts.

## Gaming

Online games are sophisticated, fun and often free, so it's no wonder kids enjoy them. But they have their drawbacks, too. Some games, for instance, contain sexual or violent content or profanity, and too much game-playing may impact your child's schoolwork. Many games are interactive and actually allow your child to talk to complete strangers.

To keep your child out of gaming-related trouble, be sure you:

- **Know what she's playing.** If something is inappropriate, either forbid it or block it (with **software** or through your **ISP**).
- **Enforce time limits.** Don't let her play until her eyes glaze over.

**File sharing:** Accessing another computer's files (music, video, etc.) from your computer or allowing another user to access your files.

**Virus:** An often destructive program that enters your computer via email or the Internet.

**Spyware:** Programs that "spy" on your Internet-usage habits and report those data to a company or organization.

**Software:** A catch-all name for computer programs.

**ISP (Internet Service Provider):** A company that provides Internet access.

## School-Related Research



Not all Internet sites are dangerous to your child's well-being. However, some sites are full of questionable content—a big problem if your child is doing online research for school.

To keep your child from being duped by less-than-reputable sites, teach him to use reliable, kid-friendly search engines such as Yahoo!igans!® Awesome Library, KidsClick!® and FirstGov for Kids. Also encourage him to ask himself whether a site:

- **Is selling** something.
- **Seems "off"** (is full of typos or strange grammar, for example).

When doing online research, make sure your child follows school guidelines. Remind him to:

- **Cite his sources.** He should include the author's name (if available), along with the site's name and **URL**.
- **Use multiple sources** and citations.
- **Note the date** he downloads information. This may help him find it later in the site's archives.
- **Print out the data.** Online information is often here today and gone tomorrow, so paper copies are a must.
- **Be careful when using wikis.** Although Wikipedia (a well-known Internet encyclopedia) is generally reliable, it is not always credible. Other wikis may not be reliable either. If your child cites information from a wiki, he should verify it through other sources.
- **Be careful not to plagiarize.** Remind him that plagiarism is cheating and is a serious offense with serious consequences.



**URL (Uniform Resource Locator):** A website's address.

**Wiki:** A site that allows users to add, edit or remove content.



## What to Do If You Think Your Child is in Danger

If you believe your child is in real danger from someone she's encountered online, you must act quickly. Here's what to do to keep your child safe:

- **If it's a dire situation** (for example, she's received an immediate threat or has left home to meet a stranger), call 911.
- **If it's less urgent**, notify your local police department.
- **If appropriate**, (for example, you see signs of cheating, cyberbullying, potential drug trafficking, potential violence, etc.) contact the school.

Take a hard look at your child's Internet use. You may want to change (or delete) her email address, IM screen name and any online profiles.

## Take a Pledge

Commit to staying safe and responsible online! Together with your child, review and sign this pledge. Post it near your computer.



1. I promise NOT to post personal information—like my full name or address—anywhere online.
2. I promise to tell a parent IMMEDIATELY if I come across anything scary or threatening online.
3. I promise NOT to post inappropriate pictures of myself or my family and friends online.
4. I promise to CLOSE the browser right away if I see pornography.
5. I promise NEVER to respond to mean or threatening messages.
6. I promise NEVER to set up a face-to-face meeting with someone I meet online.
7. I promise to abide by the SCHOOL POLICIES on computer and cell phone use.

Child \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Resources

The Parent Institute maintains a list of current resources to help you guide your child toward safe and responsible use of the Internet.

- **Tools that Can Help**

<http://www.parent-institute.com/internetsafety/tools.pdf>

- **Know the Shorthand**

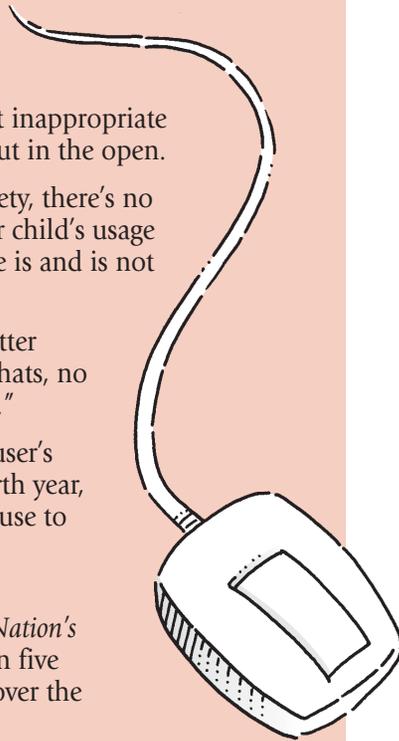
<http://www.parent-institute.com/internetsafety/shorthand.pdf>

- **Glossary of Internet Terms**

<http://www.parent-institute.com/internetsafety/glossary.pdf>

### Answers to the quiz:

- 1-a Your child is less likely to visit inappropriate sites if the computer is kept out in the open.
- 2-c When it comes to Internet safety, there's no substitute for supervising your child's usage and letting her know what she is and is not allowed to do online.
- 3-b While kids' chat rooms are better monitored than many adult chats, no chat room is "completely safe."
- 4-b This screen name reveals the user's first name, hometown and birth year, all of which a predator could use to track her down.
- 5-c A study published in *Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth* showed that one child in five was sexually solicited online over the course of a year.



**Remember—you're the adult and you're in charge!**  
**You are the one with years of life experience. It is your responsibility to monitor your child's use of the Internet. It's not just a good idea—it is your responsibility!**



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