



# A Parent's Quick Guide to Internet & Social Website Safety

The Internet provides kids with interactive experiences that can be fun and educational, but it can also expose them to unsafe situations. Advances in technology have allowed for greater access and portability, consequently increasing time kids spend "plugged in" and blurring the lines between real life and the online experience. For example, if your child has been interacting with someone they met online, they may not consider that person a stranger. With the popularity of social websites, such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace,

Flickr etc., kids must be made aware that much of what they post can be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet, making them vulnerable to scams, cyberbullying and other predators. Here are some tips on how you can make your child's online experiences chatting, blogging, gaming, posting and browsing safer:

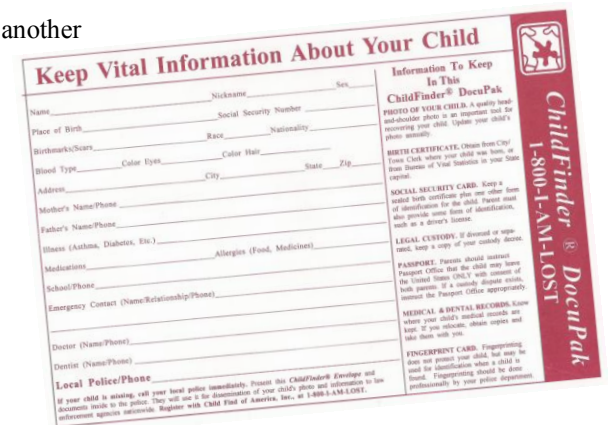
- Set House Rules, particularly about what social websites your kids can visit. You should evaluate these sites for age-appropriateness, privacy policies and rules of conduct. Encourage them to come to you if they encounter anything that makes them uncomfortable or anxious. Obtain the passwords of younger children and come to an agreement with older teens regarding passwords and their right to privacy.
- Reinforce the fact that although people we meet online may seem friendly and interesting, they are still strangers and should not be trusted.
- Kids must NEVER agree to meet with someone they've met online only. They must be encouraged to communicate only with people they have met in person. That cute 15 year old guy that your daughter "friended" on Facebook could be a 50 year old pedophile.
- Stalkers can use "status updates" that kids post concerning their whereabouts such as "I'm going to Swanson Park to shoot some hoops at 4pm then meeting Joe at Franco's Pizza at 6."
- Kids shouldn't give out or post real names, addresses, photos or phone numbers of themselves or their friends without parental permission. Also, their screen nicknames should not be provocative or suggestive.
- Use Parental Controls to block objectionable websites, but the best control is to have open communications and build trust with your children. Agree that they will immediately exit any website they may come across that is for "adults only" or includes hateful or inappropriate material.
- Kids should not respond to emails and texts from people they don't know.
- Everyone should be aware of the many ways to collect data on a person through the internet that may not seem obvious. Some websites allow you to join groups categorized by their schools. Seemingly innocuous photos people post can contain info like street names, mailbox numbers, school mascots, work places, license plates and other clues to identity.
- Talk to your kids about "cyberbullying," which is when one child or a group of children threaten or harass another child through the internet or cell phones. Cyberbullying has deadly results. Children must immediately tell a trusted adult if they ever feel they are being cyberbullied. Kids should be encouraged to treat others as they wish to be treated.



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