SAFETY NET
Protecting Innocence Online

safer media for a safer society

Premier CHRISTIAN MEDIA

❯ 10 steps to keeping your child safer on the internet

by Miranda Suit from Safermedia

The internet is a wonderful resource for children but can also be a dangerous place, either because of other users or due to the sex, violence and bad language that it is so easy to find online. Evidence is mounting of harm to children from explicit material, but with the right information and support, parents can do a lot to minimise their children's exposure to the dangers.

1 Apply filters and safeguards to the internet in your home

- Ask your ISP (Internet Service Provider) what filters they can offer – to cover as many separate accounts and internet-enabled devices as possible in your household, e.g. PC, laptop, tablet, games console, TV.
- You may want to consult a helpful website for advice about other filters, e.g.http://kids.getnetwise.org/tools/
- Set filters on search engines, e.g. Google's SafeSearch and Internet Explorer's content advisor.
- Set YouTube Safety Mode.
- On iPod touch install a child-safe browser, and monitor their use.

2 Apply filters and safeguards to mobile phones

- Consider blocking the internet completely on young children's phones.
- Ask your mobile operator to activate the block on 'adult' material on your child's phone.
- If the phone is 'Bluetooth enabled', switching it off is safer as it makes the phone 'invisible' to other Bluetooth users. Turn off any location feature.
- Remember that public Wi-fi is not usually filtered.
- Know which mobile apps your children might be downloading.

3 Teach your child to be careful and thoughtful online

- Help your child set privacy settings on social networking sites like Facebook to stop strangers viewing their details. Be aware of what they are doing and check their website history (easier if you have your own FB account).
- Warn them that they shouldn't be friends with just anyone who asks, or arrange to meet up with someone they met online. Tell them never to give out their personal information.
- Explain to your child the pitfalls of 'sexting', (the sending of explicit intimate/sexual images by young teens of themselves and others which is increasingly common).
- Talk about why this is necessary and reassure them that they can always ask you for help without being told off.
- Encourage children to look out for siblings and friends, but be aware that even older children can be vulnerable and will need monitoring themselves.
- Ask them to tell you if they come across anything that is dangerous or worries them (bullying, explicit content, grooming, racist comments, anorexia or suicide sites).
- Show older children how to report such material.
- Try to keep your monitoring age-appropriate - as children grow older, you will want to encourage some independence, and discuss and explain more.

4 Protection online will be most effective if you are consistent, start young and manage your child's exposure across all media

- **C** is for **Cutting** your child's exposure to the media (reducing explicit content and time spent with the media).
- **A** is for **Assessing** what media you want your child to see and what you want to ban, keeping up to date with what's on, what's available, what's cool and talking to your children about it. **Be positive about good media!**
- **R** is for **Replacing** too much screen media with more physical exercise, hobbies, reading, walks.
- **E** is for **Extending** your concern to wider society. That means talking to other parents and working with them, and making sure the Regulators and Government know how you feel.

5 Restrict the time that your child spends alone with a screen

- Keep PCs, laptops, TVs and games consoles in communal areas – maybe in the living room or kitchen.
- Definitely NOT in the bedroom.
- Bring any mobile phones downstairs/out of the bedroom when your child is in bed.
- Set time limits on their use.

6 Reduce your child's screen time to protect vital brain development

Take the experts' advice:

Under 3s   no screen time at all (i.e. TVs, PCs, games consoles, DVDs, etc.)

Up to 18 yrs   from 15 minutes a day for 4 yr olds to a maximum of 2 hours a day of 'leisure' time at a screen (this does not include schoolwork)

- Help children choose how they will use their leisure screen time each day.
- Give your time to introduce them to more offline games, reading, exercise and hobbies.
- Read your children a story at bedtime, or indeed at any time, to encourage a love of reading and imagination as well as helping increase their attention span.

7 Make use of existing guidelines and regulators for all media

They may not reflect your own views completely, but are a good starting point:

- TV's 9pm watershed (although this can be circumvented by TV on demand).
- Film, DVD and videogame age classifications from the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) and PEGI (Pan European Game Information).
- Parental warnings on CDs.
- Facebook is supposed to be for 13s and over only.
- Most news programmes are for adults, and the reporting of violent events can disturb children, so turn the news off if necessary.
- If you ever have to turn something off in a hurry, talk to your child and reassure them about anything they have seen.
- **Make good use of www.parentport.org.uk** – by far the easiest place to register any concerns you have about media that could harm children. Parentport links you automatically to all the regulators for TV, film, radio, adverts, a videogame, or a magazine.
- Be positive, consistent and bold. You CAN keep your child safer from media harm and also help raise standards for other children.

8 Addictive or obsessive use of the internet and other media

- Be aware that Increasing numbers of children are showing signs of unhealthy media use, e.g. addictive or obsessive use of violent videogames, pornography, self-harm websites.
- If you have concerns about your child, don't ignore them, talk to your child and if necessary speak to your GP and/or seek counselling. It does work.

9 Speak out for better regulation

Effective regulation can make a parent's job easier, so make good use of our democracy:

- Write to your MP about your media and internet concerns.
- Support charities and organisations such as Safermedia and Safetynet which lobby for safer media.
- Spread the word and take part in their activities.
- NB: Go to Safetynet and Safermedia websites to find out their current focus www.safetynet.org.uk and www.safermedia.org.uk

10 Obey God, pray for your child and talk to them

- Act on Proverbs 22:6 and apply it to the media: 'Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.' Use the influence God has given you.
- Don't leave all your child's sex education to the media and their school. Make sure you share your own views on sex and relationships, even if you struggle for words sometimes.
- Pray for your children. You cannot be with them for every media encounter but their Heavenly Father is always at their side, watching over them.
- Talk to your child, explain things to them, encourage them and make sure they know that they can ask for your help without getting into trouble.
- Set a good example yourself. Do you spend far too much time in front of a screen? Do you avoid physical exercise? Do you have a problem with porn yourself? You must protect your own mind too and get help if you need it.
- Be positive about good media and the benefits it can bring!

'I'm delighted to endorse the initiative of SafetyNet. Given the rise in screen time among young people, we need to ensure that it's having the best effect possible by maximising the clear opportunities but at the same time by reducing the risks. The Ten Point plan is an excellent start.' **Professor Baroness Greenfield CBE**

⟩⟩ Useful Resources

www.childnet.com/safety/factsheets.aspx_
Factsheets on mobile phone safety, internet addiction, posting photos on the internet, chatting online, searching online and spam emails.

www.vodafone.com/parents
Vodaphone Digital Parenting Guide 2012 that you can download.

www.getsafeonline.org
GetSafe Online.

www.candp-s.com/familysafety
Family Safety: Computer and People Support.

http://www.askaboutgames.com/
A new resource website from the gaming industry for parents, based on changes to PEGI.

www.ceop.police.uk and www.thinkuknow.co.uk
Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP).

www.lovewise.org.uk
Resources for teaching sex education at home, at school and at church.

This document is available as a downloadable resource at www.safetynet.org.uk