



ONLINE SAFETY TIPS FOR TEENS

Using the Internet is a great way to find information on current events, your favorite hobby, and topics you're researching for school. The Internet also provides a new way to meet people with interests similar to yours. However, when meeting a new "friend" online it is important to remember that people are not always as they seem. As a teen, you most likely feel self-sufficient and capable of identifying danger. However, teens often become victims of Internet abuse—even more so than kids. That does not mean that teens are targeted more often than kids, but that they are sometimes more susceptible to becoming victims. This susceptibility most likely stems from lapses in judgment and common sense that you should always apply while online.

The following are online tips for teens:

Uncomfortable Situations

While surfing the Web, reading the news, or chatting, there is a good chance that you could run into material that might make you feel uncomfortable. When surfing the Web or reading the news, the simple solution is to stop and leave that particular site or newsgroup.

In a chat room, if someone sends you a message that makes you feel uncomfortable, you are under no obligation to continue chatting with that person. If repeated messages are sent, then you can always leave the chat area and report that person to the service administrator and your parents. If you don't feel comfortable informing the administrator, ask your parents for help.

Physical Danger

The largest risk that you can take online is posting information about who you are and/or where you can be located. Be careful of what you write while online and to whom you write. When you are chatting, you cannot see who is reading your messages; you know only what they tell you, which may be false. Think of chatting as saying something out loud in a crowded room.

Financial Danger

The Internet is continuously growing with Internet-only businesses; some are legitimate businesses, but others are not. Giving out any financial information over the Internet can expose you to many types of risk. Be sure to discuss all Internet purchases with a parent.

Harassment

In chat rooms, people often intentionally say uncomfortable things specifically to harass people. If you get one of these messages, do not take it personally and do not reply. Replies just encourage the person who is sending the messages. While some messages may just be annoying, others may be criminal. If you receive messages or images that are obscene, lewd, filthy, or indecent with the purpose of annoying, offending, abusing, threatening, or harassing you, report it to your Internet Service Provider (ISP), to your police department or sheriff's office, and to your parents.

Accountability for Your Behavior

While online, you should avoid doing things that might hurt people or get yourself into trouble. Do not annoy, harass, offend, abuse, or threaten others while online.

Don't Meet Internet Friends

People online can be whoever they want to be, and they are under no obligation to tell the truth about who they are. If you want to meet with someone, discuss it with your parents first and never meet anyone alone.

Stay Informed

Find out what your friends from school are doing online and ask about their experiences. Sometimes information about the Internet travels faster by word of mouth than on the Net itself.

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