

Protecting Children Online

What are the threats online?

Children are spending more of their time online than ever before. According to one study, 8-18 year-olds spend an average of 1.5 hours a day using a computer outside of school. As use of the Internet and online technologies becomes more ingrained into our everyday lives, it is important we ensure that our youth understand how to use these powerful tools and how to protect themselves from becoming cyber victims. Children of all ages face online risks, including the following:

- **Inappropriate Contact:** Children may come in contact with individuals with malicious intent, such as bullies and predators.
- **Inappropriate Content:** Children may be exposed to inappropriate content while online, such as violent or sexually explicit material.
- **Inappropriate Conduct:** Children have a sense of anonymity while online and may do things that they would not do when face to face with someone.
- **Identity Theft:** Because of the perceived sense of anonymity online, children may post personal or identifying information that can then be used by identity thieves.

How do I keep my children safe?

There are steps parents, educators and others who work with children can take to help keep children safe on-line:

- **Computer Location:** Keep your computer in a central and open location in your home.
- **Supervise Access:** Supervise computer access for children and monitor the types of sites visited. Consider using parental control tools on your home computer. These tools are provided by some Internet Service Providers or are available for purchase as a separate software package. You may be able to set some parental controls within your browser. As an example, in Internet Explorer click on **Tools** on your menu bar, select **Internet Options**, choose the **Content tab**, and click the **Enable** button under **Content Advisor**. (For other browsers, contact the vendor to determine what parental controls are included.)
- **Establish Rules:** Create guidelines for computer use. Include the amount of time that may be spent online and the type of sites that may be visited. Post these rules near the computer.

- **Personal Information:** Teach children not to post or share personal information such as their photograph, address, age or activity schedule. Create a safe screen name that does not reveal personal information about the child.
- **Web Filtering:** Use web filtering software that restricts access to inappropriate websites and content.
- **Communication:** Maintain an open line of communication. Encourage children to come to you if they felt threatened online.
- **Cyber Bullying:** Teach children not to respond to cyber bullies. Report incidents of cyber bullying to school administrators and local law enforcement when appropriate.