

Teen Safety on the Internet

The Internet is a fun way to "meet" new friends, get information, and learn about the world. It is important that you use caution and avoid potential problems so you can safely enjoy being online. Here are some tips to avoid such problems:

- Do not enter "adults only" sites. They may contain offensive or sexual material that is not intended for people your age. Choose safe sites for young people instead.
- If someone you don't know well contacts you through email or chat, be careful. If they say or do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, leave that area and do not respond to their messages.. Remember, people you meet in cyberspace might not be who they seem to be.
- Avoid giving out your name, address, phone number or any private information (such as the name of your school) to anyone you don't trust or know personally. They might use that information to find out who you are.
- Never give anyone else your password. No matter why they say they need it or who they say they are, they don't. If someone asks you for your password, report them to your online service provider or your parents. If you think someone knows your password, change it.
- Protect your privacy. Surfing the 'net seems anonymous, but Web sites you visit may gather your e-mail address or other information, or record which sites you've visited in a "cookie" which they or another site can retrieve later, without your knowledge or consent. Learn about the privacy and security features of your Web browser, and use them. For example, you may want to get a warning if a site tries to give you a cookie, or you may decide to disable cookies altogether. You can customize your Web browser's e-mail settings to use a pseudonym instead of your real name, and a blank or false e-mail address. If you want to give someone your real name or e-mail address, you can give it to them in your message.
- Be cautious about revealing any information that could identify you. For example, if you give someone your listed phone number, they can get your real name and street address.
- When you're online in any kind of a public forum, you're out in public and anyone can read whatever you post. If you send e-mail, for example, your identity and your electronic address may be visible to the other people reading the message.
- Never get together with someone you've met online. Remember, you never really know if people you meet online are who they say they are. You might put yourself in danger by meeting them even if you think you know the person and trust them. If you do feel it's appropriate to meet with someone, talk to your parents first. Have your parents talk with the parents of the other person beforehand, and both of you should bring your parents along on the first meeting. Never go to the meeting by yourself. Arrange to meet in a public place, like a coffee shop or mall. Pick somewhere public and neutral where you feel comfortable and that you are familiar with. If you're traveling to visit them in their town or neighborhood, you should pick a place you're comfortable with when you arrive. Remember that when you meet someone you've chatted with online, you're really meeting them for the first time. When you're online you don't

have non-verbal cues, such as voice inflection or body language, to guide your judgment of their honesty or intentions.

- If you're harassed online or victimized by someone you've met, let your parents know. If you get a message that is mean or in any way makes you feel uncomfortable, don't respond to it. Instead, show the message to your parents, a trusted adult to see if there is anything you can do to make it stop. Sending a response often just encourages the person to send more.

Let your parents help you decide which areas of the Internet are safe and appropriate for you.

Adapted from http://www.lambda.org/online_safety_tips_for_teens.htm