Do you know how to keep your kids safe online? Internet access is now so prevalent that parents cannot afford to ignore effects this may have on their children.

### Setting boundaries

- **Once you have visited their world,** you may like to engage in an open conversation. For example, you might say, ‘I've heard about the dangers of the Internet such as kids posting provocative photos, meeting strangers and spreading lies about each other. How true do you think this is?’ This is a less-threatening approach than probing about their activities online.

- **Other approaches emphasise the importance they place on Internet use:** “I can see that the Internet is an important way to communicate with your friends. I also want to make sure that you stay safe because I love you. I want to make sure you have time to do other things such as [insert example — sport, activities, time with family]. How can we find the balance between being on the computer and doing things offline?” Invite your adolescent to brainstorm solutions. They will likely surprise you with their knowledge of the rules and their problem-solving abilities.

- **Use a family Internet contract as a way of clearly laying out your expectations regarding their Internet use.** Require them that you don’t wish to remove this privilege from them but that you need to ensure that it is used appropriately because it could affect you (financially) and them (safety and wellbeing). Importantly, the plan should take into account the age and maturity of each member of the family. It’s ok to give older children more privileges, so long as they are stated clearly.

### Unhealthy Internet Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overuse of the Internet can compromise both sleep and healthy relationships with family and friends. This can lead to serious psychological issues. You should be concerned if your child frequently displays the following signs:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discourages time limits that have been clearly set out and agreed on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Prefers spending time online rather than with the rest of the family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Prefers spending time online rather than with friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Grudges suffer because of the amount of time he or she spends online.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Becomes withdrawn from others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Becomes secretive about Internet use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Seems preoccupied with being ‘on line’ when offline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Appears tired or fatigued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Becomes angry or rebellious when time limits are enforced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Feels depressed, moody or nervous when offline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Source: Centre for Internet Addiction Recovery, 2007

If you have addressed your child’s Internet use in a respectful and compassionate fashion and things still haven’t improved, it may be time to seek a professional.

### Getting help

Professional help from a registered psychologist or a child and adolescent psychologist can be very helpful. Check MySafeSpace profile settings to ensure they are private and only known friends are accepted into social networks.

### Think before you post

Adolescents need to respect their online presence as just as important as their offline friends in person. Adolescents often view online chatting as “off the record,” which can make comments they make online appear less serious. Hence the rule: “If you wouldn’t say it in person, don’t say it online.”

### Online harassment

**What is it?**

It is when your child may experience online harassment. Type of online harassment include impersonation, deception, spamming, security theft and posting photos or videos about the victim.

**A note to kids:**

**How to be a good cyber citizen**

1. Think before you post. How will others react to what you post about yourself and your friends?
2. Remember that what you upload is permanent. Keep this in mind when you send someone a text or reply to a rude message.
3. Resolve conflicts face-to-face instead of over the Internet.
4. Protect your privacy by protecting your password and avoid stating the name of your school.
5. Involving your parents in the cyber world; they’ll feel a lot better about trusting you to be it.
6. Don’t send messages when angry. You might regret what you sent when it’s too late.
7. Forward messages that you know will hurt someone else.
8. Report inappropriate or offensive messages.
9. Post photos of yourself that you wouldn’t want your parents or teachers to see.
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**Stressful Media and Communications in Australian Families. Australian Commission and Media Authority. 2007.**

**Source:** Media and Communications in Australian Families. Australian Commission and Media Authority. 2007.
internet use

Resources

Books
Real Wired Child: What parents need to know about kids online by Michael Carr-Gregg (2007)
Cyber.Rules: What you really need to know about the Internet. The essential guide for clinicians, educators and parents by Joanie Farley Gillispie and Jayne Gackenbach (2007)

Websites
www.cybersmartkids.com.au — for families
www.safekids.com/contract.htm — to download a family Internet contract
www.netalert.gov.au — for parent information

Your Child
Ask your resident cyber expert to give you a tour of their world. Important stops along the way: social networking sites, peer-2-peer sharing sites, live chats, YouTube and any website they frequent.

without their consent. This may extend to threatening or inappropriate messages via mobile phone, email or instant messaging.

Why does it occur?
Adolescents can be more brazen online due to the sense of anonymity they have on the Internet, which decreases their accountability. It is very easy to spread information by text messages, msn and posting on social networking profiles.

What can you do about it?
Above all, remain calm. Three important things to remember if your child is experiencing bullying:
1. Block the sender.
2. Save the evidence.
3. Don't respond. This will only aggravate the situation.
4. Report it to your Internet or mobile phone provider (see http://thewoodverdict.blogspot.com for instructions).
5. Don't remove all of the victim's Internet privileges as they may deny instances of online harassment to preserve access.

Some social networking sites such as MySpace have “report abuse” to track and remove offending information. If the material is harassing, defamatory or threatening, contact your local police station for further advice (see the Australian High Tech Crime Centre website www.ahtcc.gov.au). It may be possible to trace the source of the information and/or remove it. However, the information downloaded onto mobile phones and computers cannot be deleted or prevented from being spread to others.

Striking a balance

The Internet provides adolescents with exciting ways to learn, be entertained and connect to friends, but brings potential risks. As a parent, it’s easy to focus on these risks and jump to negative conclusions. A better approach is to discuss safety guidelines and boundaries and to build a trusting offline relationship with your adolescent. If you don’t get through offline, get yourself a MySpace account or send them a late-night text. That will get their attention!

* NetAlert Source: Attitude and Behaviour of Young People Online (2007). NetAlert
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