

Kids: Be a Good Cyber Citizen!



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NATIONAL CRIME
PREVENTION COUNCIL

National Crime Prevention Council

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You've heard the expression "surfing the Internet." In many ways, spending time on the Internet is more like driving a car than riding a wave. Like a car, the computer is a complex machine that needs your care and attention in order to perform well. It can take you places on your own; some of these places are familiar to you and some are not. And whether you're behind the wheel or at the keyboard, your personal safety and the safety of those around you depend on your willingness to use common sense, behave courteously, and obey the law.

In other words, driving a car and exploring the Internet mean the same thing: freedom and responsibility.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR COMPUTER

Protect your computer from viruses that could destroy your files and make it difficult or impossible to use. If your computer becomes infected, you might pass these viruses on to other computer users without realizing it.

- If your computer doesn't have anti-virus software, install it and keep it up-to-date.
- Don't open an email from someone you don't know. It might contain a virus.
- If you open an email by mistake, don't click on links or download files that came with it.
- Don't pass along joke emails or chain letters, as they may contain viruses.
- Use hard-to-guess passwords, and keep them secret—even from your friends.
- Make sure that your family has installed a firewall to keep your computer safe from hackers.
- If your computer operating system allows file sharing, disable it. File sharing could be used by others to infect your computer with a virus or to look at the files on your computer.
- Disconnect your computer when you're not on the Internet.
- Help your family by backing up your computer files onto CDs or diskettes.

FOLLOW THE RULES OF THE ROAD

The best tool you have for screening what you find on the Internet is your brain. If you come across websites that are pornographic, full of hate literature, or have excessively violent content, move on. Here are a few reminders for safe traveling on the Internet:

- Never give out your name, address, telephone number, password, school name, parents' names, pictures of yourself, parents' credit card numbers, Social Security number, or any other personal information to others online.
- Never agree to meet face to face with someone you've met online without discussing it with your parents. If your parents decide that it's okay to meet your "cyber-friend," arrange to meet in a familiar public place and take an adult with you.
- Never enter an area that charges for services without first getting your parents' permission.
- If you receive pornographic material or threatening email, save the offensive material, tell your parents, and contact your Internet service provider and your local law enforcement agency.
- Beware of emails that are trying to sell you something. It is probably best not to respond to them. If you do, you are confirming that you have a valid email address and the sender will continue to email you with offers.
- If you have your parent's permission to order something over the Internet, go directly to the company's website. Never link to it from an email.

RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

Some things you do on the computer may seem okay to you, but they are actually crimes. Even if these cyber crimes are never prosecuted, your actions can have a serious financial and emotional cost to your victims. Remember, if you harass or threaten another person on the Internet, you are no different from the bully on the playground. The U.S. Department of Justice describes three ways computers are used to commit crimes:

- The computer as a target (using a computer to attack other computers): If you hack into school computer networks to view or change grades, shut down or deface websites, or create or send computer viruses, you are committing a crime.
- The computer as a weapon (using a computer to commit a crime): If you use email and chat programs as harassment by saying things to other kids that you would never say face to face, steal passwords in order to read other people's emails, or send emails in their name, you are committing a crime.
- The computer as an accessory (using a computer to store illegal files or information): If you download and share copyrighted music, games, and other software without the permission of the owner or plagiarize copyrighted information and pass it off as your own, you are committing a crime.

If you have any questions about what is legal or illegal behavior on the Internet, talk to your teacher, parent, or other caregiver. You can also visit the U.S. Department of Justice website, www.cybercrime.gov/rules/kidinternet.htm, for more information about good cyber citizenship.