

children & the Internet



The Internet is an amazing invention. It is an attractive and fun new way of providing information, dazzling pictures and incredible opportunities for learning. Some benefits of being connected to the Internet include access to educational games and programs, research information for school projects, communication with people from around the world and share resources and ideas with people of similar interests. Most children at some stage will have some sort of contact with the Internet.

What is the Internet?

The Internet is a massive network of computers from around the world all connected by cable and satellite.

When you're on the Internet, through your computer you can receive text, images, video and even sound.



It's a bit like a telephone with pictures. Being on the Internet is called being 'on-line' and playing on the Internet is called 'surfing' the net.

The main features of the Internet:

- Chat lines where one person can talk (by typing text) to another or to a group of people.
- On-line video means that you can view activities in other places as they happen.
- On-line video chat is like a chat line but with pictures and voice.
- E-mail is an electronic form of sending a letter or document to another person. It is sent very quickly and is cheap. The e-mail system is very widely used.
- World wide web is a massive collection of pages of information, pictures and games that can be accessed by any computer that is on-line.
- Newsgroups join people with common interests to share ideas and resources on the chosen topic.

Common dangers of being on-line

As there are no regulations or controls on the content that is placed on the Internet, there are many things you would not like your children to be involved with. Here are some examples.

- There is a lot of unsuitable or adult information on the Internet.
- Much of the information on the Internet is not accurate or reliable.
- People may pretend to be someone they are not.
- A child may provide personal information to strangers or arrange to meet new friends they have made on the Internet without really knowing who they are.
- Advertising, with bright colourful images, puts pressure on children to purchase goods on-line.
- E-mail can be misused to harass other people.
- The Internet can become addictive.
- The Internet may allow children to access inappropriate images.

What parents can do

- Teach children of all ages to be critical viewers, to understand and talk about what they view and what it means. This is one of the best ways of reducing the risk of hurt to children.
- Learn more about the Internet (local libraries sometimes have free courses).
- The computer that is on-line should be in a family area, not behind closed doors.
- Teach your children never to give out their name or the names of friends, or fill in questionnaires. Children should never send images of themselves over the net as they may be used for other purposes.
- Encourage children to only use monitored chat lines designed for their own age group and to be themselves when on-line.
- If a child or young adult wishes to meet new on-line 'friends' in person, supervise the meeting to ensure that they are who they say they are.
- Block objectionable material by using 'blocking software'.
- Talk to your children's school about their on-line policy - one parents can also put into practice at home.
- Select a reliable service provider and discuss children's on-line safety with them. Forward copies of any questionable messages to your service provider and ask for assistance.
- Become comfortable with the technology - you don't have to become an expert.
- Pay attention to what your children are doing. Keep track of what is going on by checking 'Bookmarks', 'Favourites' or 'History'. 'Options' or 'Preference' or 'History' menus and icons can provide a list of recently visited sites.

- Never respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, or threatening. Encourage your children to report such experiences to you and try to discuss these matters calmly with your child.
- Should you become aware of any child pornography on-line, note any relevant details and report the matter to the Commission for Children and Young People, tel: 1800 688 275 or Crime Stoppers, tel: 1800 333 000. Both are free calls.
- Don't let your children engage in on-line shopping.
- As the Internet can be addictive always set a time limit (about one hour) and encourage other activities. Remember to enjoy the great outdoors.
- Encourage a careful approach to 'information' found on the Internet. Information on the Internet comes from many sources and not all of it is reliable.

What is 'blocking software'?

Software is the name for the programs that you use for your computer. For example, the browser that runs the world wide web is software.

Blocking software is a program that will allow parents to control the information that is accessed by children whilst on the Internet. The software is inexpensive and available from most computer suppliers or straight from the provider's sites.

The software can block harmful and violent material, sexually explicit material and chat lines. While the blocking software is an excellent idea for some age groups it is not foolproof and some computer-aware children can still get around these programs. This software goes hand in hand with parent supervision.

Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
- Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
- Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
- Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
- Women's Infocline **1800 177 577**
- *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
- *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information

Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

Adapted from information contained in the Parent Easy Guide Series © Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 2000.

Published by the Department of Communities. For reorders phone 3224 4225 if in the Brisbane metropolitan area or 1800 637 711 if outside the metropolitan area.

Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



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