

Cyber Savvy

You may wonder how you could ever exist without the Internet. We use the “net” for research, homework, downloading music, watching videos and pod casts, chatting with friends and playing games. Most people have positive experiences surfing on line and the benefits of learning your way around the information highway are clear. How many times have you “googled” something for school? Do you instant message your friends? Do you have a Myspace or Facebook page? Have you chatted online with anyone that lives in another part of the world? Millions of people exchange information about world events, hobbies and trends everyday. The internet is a great way to stay connected with your friends and explore your world but because there are no censors on the internet you should also be aware of the risks when you are online.

You may have heard stories about people who got into trouble in chat rooms. Because users can easily remain anonymous or unknown, chat rooms can attract people who have hidden plans. They may try to get information about you or your family-information that shouldn't be exposed. Like chat rooms there are some risks anytime you use the internet whether instant messaging, e-mailing or surfing web sites or bulletin boards. There are some tips you can use to make sure that you and your information will be safe.

Surfing Rules

1. Privacy Please

The first rule is to remain anonymous anytime you are online. This means that you do **NOT** reveal or give any information that could identify who you are. Keep your identity private. The following are examples of private information that you should not give out:

- Full name
- Home address
- Phone number
- Social security number
- Passwords
- Credit card numbers
- School name
- Names of family members or friends
- Photographs posted publicly

Most trustworthy people and companies would never ask for this type of information online so think of it as a **Red Flag** or warning if someone does. If you have your own credit card, before you buy something online ask an adult to look at the site to make sure it is secure and safe to use.

Use a Pseudonym

Use a pseudo-huh? One smart way to remain anonymous is to make up a name or pseudonym to hide your identity. When you create an e-mail address or screen name think of a nickname that will make it difficult for someone to know who you are or whether you are female or male. Try to use a combination of letters and numbers. In chat rooms, use a nickname that's different from your screen name. That way, if you ever find yourself in a conversation that makes you feel uncomfortable, you can exit without having to worry that someone knows your screen name and can track you down by e-mail.

2. Never arrange face to face meetings

It's easy for people to pretend to be something they're not when you can't see or talk to them in person. It can be exciting to meet new people on line in chat rooms or through friends' lists on Myspace. Over time they may not even feel like strangers anymore. However, it's wise to keep these relationships in the virtual world. If you want to meet someone you've met online take a parent or adult with you and arrange to meet in a busy public place.

3. Never respond to online:

- Abuse
- Hostility
- Threats
- Harassment
- Anything that makes you feel uncomfortable
- Sexual or nude photos or material

Most of the time people experience no problems using the internet and if you use caution you can discourage others from making you a target. If you ever get involved in a chat room conversation or receive an e-mail that makes you feel uncomfortable or in danger for **Any** reason exit and tell a parent or adult right away.

What is Cyber bullying?

It's not just strangers who can make you feel uncomfortable online. Cyber bullying is a word used to describe cruel or bullying messages sent to you online. They could be from former friends or other people you know. They can be irritating and, in some cases, even frightening. You should ignore these messages rather than answer them. Cyber bullies, just like other bullies, may be angry or troubled people looking for attention or a reaction from you. Fortunately, most people never experience cyber bullying. If you get this type of threatening message and ignoring it doesn't make it go away, ask for help from someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counselor or other adult, especially if the messages contain threats.

You can report events that have made you feel uncomfortable or have been threatening or abusive to The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The form to fill out is found at www.cybertipline.com

Spam Away

Spam or unwanted advertisements and pesky or offensive notes are an online annoyance that can be avoided by following these tips:

- Use virus protection software
- Do not open messages from unknown senders-Delete
- Block or filter e-mails
- Ask for help from a service provider or parent to block unwanted e-mail