

Guidelines from www.getnetwise.org

Ages 2 - 4

This is the age of "lapware," when children start interacting with the computer in the presence of a parent or sibling. There are numerous activities and sites that are likely to be appropriate for this age group



Starting at about age 3, some children can benefit by having a bit more independence so that they can explore, experience discoveries, and make mistakes on their own. That doesn't mean that they should be given free access. It's probably best for parents to choose the Web sites they visit and not let them leave those sites on their own. You don't necessarily need to stand over them or sit with them the entire time that they're in a known safe site.

Ages 4 - 7

Children begin to explore on their own, but it's still important for parents to be in very close touch with their children as they explore the Net. When your child's at this age you should consider restricting her access only to sites that you have visited and feel are appropriate. For help with this matter, you can consider using a pre-screened Web sites as well as child-safe search engines. At this age it's important that kids experience positive results from sites that can enhance their discovery.

Ages 7 - 10

During these years, children should be encouraged to do a bit more exploring on their own, but that doesn't mean that the parents shouldn't be close at hand. For this age group, consider putting the computer in a kitchen area, family room, den, or other areas where the child has access to parents while using the computer. That way, they can be "independent" but not alone.

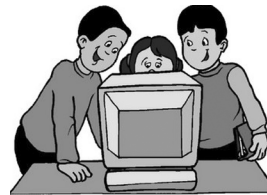
Limit time on the computer so doesn't take away from all other activities. One way to deal with this might be through the use of a software time-limiting tool



Ages 10-12

During this pre-teen period, many kids want to experience even more independence. Using the Internet to help with schoolwork is becoming more useful and, and they are discovering resources for their hobbies, sports activities, and other interests. This is also an age when you have to be concerned not just about what kids see and do on the Internet, but how long they are online. Set limits on how often and how long kids can be online, and be sure that they are engaged in other activities such as sports, music, and book-reading.

At about age 12 children begin to hone their abstract reasoning skills. It's important at this age to begin to emphasize the concept of credibility. Kids need to understand that not everything they see on the Internet is true or valuable, just as not all advice they get from their peers is valuable. A good way to illustrate this is for them to do a search for sites on subjects they know a lot about -- favorite athletes or musicians, subjects they love in school, etc.



Ages 12 - 14

This is the time when many kids become very social and when they are most likely to be interested in online chat. Go over the basic privacy rules with your kids to be sure they understand never to give out information about themselves or to get together with anyone they meet online without first checking with their parents. Also, emphasize the importance of never exchanging photographs with people they don't know. At this age they need to understand clearly the fact that people on the Internet may not be who they appear to be.

Don't be alarmed if they are interested in exploring sexual material. How you manage this, of course, depends on your own view of such material. It's important, however, to be aware that some of the materials they might find on the Internet are different—and more explicit—than some of the magazines that may have been around when you were that age. You may not need to be in the same room as your kids the entire time they're on the Net, but they do need to know that you and other family members can walk in and out of the room

at any time, and will ask them about what they are doing online. It may be a good idea to think about how you might react if you discover that your child has visited places on the Internet that you feel are inappropriate.

If you use filtering software, for example, you need to explain to them that you are doing it to protect them from material that you consider to be harmful. Just as you might not let them go to certain places in your community, you are exercising your parental right to keep them from surfing to certain types of places in cyberspace.

Ages 14 - 17

Your teen is beginning to mature physically, emotionally, and intellectually and is anxious to experience increasing independence from parents. To some extent that means loosening up on the reins, but by no means does it mean abandoning your parenting role. Teens are complicated in that they demand both independence and guidance at the same time.

Teens are also more likely to engage in risky behavior both online and offline. It is extremely important that teens understand that people they meet online (and offline) are not necessarily who they seem to be.

The greatest danger is that a teen will get together offline with someone she meets online. If she does meet someone she wants to get together with, it's important that she not go alone and that she meet that person in a public place.

It's important for parents to remember what it was like when they were teenagers. Set reasonable expectations and don't overreact if and when you find out that your teen has done something online that you don't approve of. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't take it seriously and exercise appropriate control and discipline, but pick your battles and try to look at the bigger picture.



Remember that your teen will soon be an adult and needs to know not just how to behave but how to exercise judgment, reaching her own conclusions on how to explore the Net and life in general in a safe and productive manner.

Trusting your teen

Becoming independent means earning trust. Parents have always had ways of checking the responsibility and maturity of their teens in granting them increasing independence: riding with them in the car and observing their safety habits, chatting with their friends, observing their behavior in a group of peers, talking with teachers and other parents. But the Internet presents special challenges for parents:

- **Kids often know more about the technology.**

They have the time, the aptitude, tips from their friends, and there is much appropriate content on the web that appeals to their interests. So what can a parent do?

If you are not comfortable navigating the web, let your teen each you. (This is easiest when your child is a pre-teen and wants to show off what he knows. But it's still possible in the teen years, if you ask her for help in trying to find websites you are interested in and encourage her to share some of her favorites.)

It's very helpful for you to know how to check the history on a browser. In Internet Explorer, the Go menu gives a short list of webpages that have been visited with the most recent at the top. You can get a longer list in the Window menu by scrolling down to History. You can set the size of the History menu under the Explorer menu by selecting Preferences. There is also the option of clearing the History, an action your child probably knows how to do. If he has been working on the Internet on many sites and there isn't much in the History menu, you will want to have a talk about why he would be clearing the History. [Different web browsers may use slightly different menus. All software now has very useful Help menus, now that you know some terms to search for.]

- **Computer activity is silent and hard to observe.**

Email and online chat are "invisible." You can't overhear, you don't see deliveries. Has your child discovered online gambling? Have she fallen for a fraudulent hoax? Is he spending too much time in chat rooms instead of doing the homework he should be doing? Popular Internet services like MSN and AOL now have more services to offer. Spam filters can help guard against porn and other junk mail. Both MSN and AOL offer parents activity reports on how long their child is online, websites they are visting, and who they are emailing and instant messaging. These features now give parents the opportunity to observe their child's level of responsibility as they can while riding in the car, to be reassured that their child is acting responsibly and is ready for more independence. Whatever Internet service you use, ask for information about Parent Control and Spam Filter options. Don't feel you are spying on your child. You need information, as you always have, to let your child earn your trust. The Internet can be as dangerous as driving a car or teen drinking. Parents need to be just as vigilant.

Resources for children & preteens

Kid-safe Search Engines

- Yahoo!igans! <http://yahooligans.yahoo.com>
- Surf Safely www.surfsafely.com
- Kidsgrid www.kidgrid.com
- Hazoo www.hazoo.com

Moderated chat rooms

- Ages 4-12 (moderated chat, games, and more)
www.kidscom.com
- Chatrooms for kids and teens
www.child.net

You can do a search for kid chat rooms on a variety of topics, from Christian to yo-yos. Just search for "moderated chat rooms" kids and the topic you are interested in. For younger kids, parents might want to check out the chat rooms first.

Good sources of pre-screened websites

- American Library Association
www.ala.org/ala/alsc/greatwebsites/greatwebsiteskids.htm
- Common Sense Media
www.common Sense Media.org/reviews/recommended_list.php?id=73&showthis=Website
- Science Websites
<http://scifun.chem.wisc.edu/recommendedwebsites/recommendedweb.htm>

Where to go for more information:

<http://kids.getnetwise.org/safetyguide/>

Kids and Computers

A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety



Minnesota Council of Teachers of English
www.mcte.org