

Protecting on the Children INTERNET

by U.S. Senator, Patrick Leahy of Vermont

<http://leahy.senate.gov>

The Internet contains vast resources for children. Educational, research and entertainment opportunities that previous generations have only dreamed about are available with the click of a mouse. I use the Internet daily and know that while the Internet has a lot of useful and entertaining information, it also has a lot of useless and inappropriate material.

This site is primarily for parents and educators looking for guidelines about instructions to give your children when they explore the Internet, to protect them from inappropriate material and contacts. Just as in the real world, reasonable steps can be taken to safeguard your child, starting with talking to your children.

Introduction

For a lot of adults, protecting children on the Internet is an intimidating and confusing task. The Internet is a new technology, and the terminology can be baffling, to say nothing of its actual use. To make things worse, it often seems that the very children we are trying to protect have a better understanding of the technology and how to use it than those trying to protect them do.

While there is no way that we can make you an instant master of the Internet, fully conversant with all the latest technology and lingo, we can help explain some of the terms you might have heard, and some of the concepts that you might not be familiar with.

Bookmarks

Your web browser comes with a list of Web sites that can be accessed at the click of a button. This list can be added to or edited by the user. These sites are considered "bookmarked" for your convenience. Keeping commonly used sites in your bookmark file, rather than typing them in, makes it less likely that you will end up at another site accidentally.

Chat Rooms

Chat rooms are not really rooms, instead they are locations on the Internet where a user may connect, and type a message, and anyone else connected to the same "room" can see the message, and may type their own. Many chat rooms have a theme of some sort that defines the topic of conversation that goes on in them, such as politics, gardening and the like. Most chat rooms use a technology called IRC.

Client-Server

The simplest way to understand these terms is that a Client is a program on your computer that connects to a Server, which is on another computer. Your web browser program is an example of a client, while a computer you post your web page on is a Server.

Cyber

Cyber is a term coined from science fiction that has come to mean almost anything involving computers. Generally, it is simply added before a term to make it sound more modern and stylish.

FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions. Almost everything online has a list of FAQ (referred to as the FAQ), which consists of the most common questions about a topic, as well as the answers.

Filtering

Filtering is a process by which certain content is kept from the user's computer. The most common use of this technology is in blocking access to web sites, but it can also be used to filter out unwelcome e-mail. Filtering is usually by some criteria, such as an address or certain key words which activate the filter.

Handle

A handle is another term for a pseudonym, specifically one used online. A handle is a key part of developing an online persona, and is much safer than using your real name. Since a handle is often the main thing other people online will see about you, a handle should be chosen carefully.

IRC

Internet Relay Chat. This is a technical mechanic for many online chats. It usually requires downloading a chat "client". The term is generally synonymous with online chat.

MUDs

Multi User Dungeons. MUDS, MUSHes, MOOs, MUXes and many other strange things that start with M work on the same principal as chat rooms, except the environment is larger, so the "rooms" might all be connected as parts of a house, or city, or even an entire world, and once a person logs in, they may move around from location to location. Most MUDs are designed as games, so that in addition to the chat aspect, there is also an underlying game mechanic. For example, a MUD may use a cave network as its setting, and players may cooperate or compete to kill creatures in the caves. Games like Ultima Online are considered the next generation of this technology.

Typo Sites

There are numerous sites on the Web which have URL's (addresses) very similar to more well known sites, and do their business off typographical errors. For example, Amazon.com is a well known online bookstore, but if you accidentally enter the address as Amazom.com you get a bookstore, but not the one you were looking for. Some of the sites which use this method may have questionable content.

URL

Uniform Resource Locator. This is the technical term for a web address, such as <http://leahy.senate.gov>

Risks

The two greatest concerns for anyone interested in children's welfare on the Internet are protecting children from inappropriate material and protecting them from inappropriate contact with people they may meet online.

Content

It's no secret that not all of the material on the Internet is appropriate for children. What is appropriate for a particular child is a decision that should be left to that child's parents and responsible guardians.

While most inappropriate sites are easy to spot and avoid, less scrupulous sites take advantage of likely typographical errors on the part of the computer user to send them to another site entirely. Making a simple mistake, such as typing .com instead of .gov in the URL of a site and you may end up looking at a pornographic site rather than the site of a government office.

Naturally, the most effective way to keep children away from these sites is supervision. Unfortunately, no one can watch everything a child does online all the time. A useful tool in those circumstances is filtering software. Filtering software searches a site for a certain type of content, and if it finds it, keeps the computer from being able to access it. A number of companies offer filtering software including:

- [Cyberpatrol](http://www.cyberpatrol.com/) - <http://www.cyberpatrol.com/>
- [Cybersitter](http://www.cybersitter.com/) - <http://www.cybersitter.com/>
- [Family Connect](http://www.familyconnect.com/) - <http://www.familyconnect.com/>
- [MoM](http://www.avswweb.com/mom/index.html) - <http://www.avswweb.com/mom/index.html>
- [Netnanny](http://www.netnanny.com/) - <http://www.netnanny.com/>
- [Surfwatch](http://www1.surfwatch.com/home) - <http://www1.surfwatch.com/home>
- [X-Stop](http://www.xstop.com/) - <http://www.xstop.com/>

Inappropriate Contact on the Net

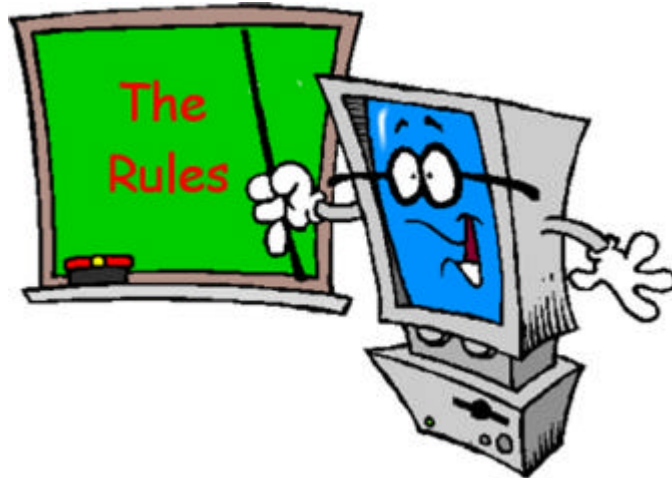
Another side of the Internet is its promise of instant communication with anyone, anywhere in the world, by e-mail, chat, instant messaging or other means. For the most part this is a great thing, offering chances to share ideas and meet people in ways that would not otherwise be possible.

The ease of use and anonymity of the Internet may allow children to be in contact with persons whom parents would not approve. While this is a real danger, it is also one most easily countered with education. It is critical to make sure that children understand that people may not be what they present themselves to be on the Net. There are other steps that can help, and I recommend the rules for internet use outlined by the Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Guidelines

Keep the following guidelines in mind for children who go on the Internet:

1. **Never** give out identifying information in a public message, such as one posted to a chat room or bulletin board, and be sure you are dealing with someone you know and trust before giving out such information via e-mail.
2. Consider using a pseudonym or unlisting your child's name if your Internet service provider (ISP) allows it.
3. Get to know the services available from the ISP your child uses. Find out what types of information your ISP offers, and whether there are ways for parents to block access to objectionable material.
4. **Never** allow a child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with another computer user without parental permission, and then only in a public area, with a parent present.
5. **Never** respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you uncomfortable. Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages.
6. If you or your child receives a message that is harassing, sexual in nature or threatening, forward it to your ISP, and ask for their assistance.
7. Make it clear to your child that they can tell you about any material they find that makes them feel uncomfortable.
8. Talk to your children about these rules, and make sure they understand why they are important. Consider signing an **Agreement to Abide by the Rules** and posting it by the computer.



Agreement to Abide by the Rules:

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children offers the following list of appropriate rules for children, and suggests that parents ask their children to agree to abide by them.

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parent's work address/telephone number, or the name of my school without my parent's permission.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I meet online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place, and I bring a parent along.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
- I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do, I will tell my parents right away so they can contact the online service.
- I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

Online Resources

Filtering Software

Many parents and teachers find filtering software a very useful first step in protecting children from inappropriate material they may find online. Filtering software restricts access to certain online sites based on criteria, such as the use of words like "XXX" or "pornography". This is a selection of some of the filtering programs available:

- [Cyberpatrol](http://www.cyberpatrol.com/) - <http://www.cyberpatrol.com/>
- [Cybersitter](http://www.cybersitter.com/) - <http://www.cybersitter.com/>
- [Family Connect](http://www.familyconnect.com/) - <http://www.familyconnect.com/>
- [MoM](http://www.avsworld.com/mom/index.html) - <http://www.avsworld.com/mom/index.html>
- [Netnanny](http://www.netnanny.com/) - <http://www.netnanny.com/>
- [Surfwatch](http://www1.surfwatch.com/home) - <http://www1.surfwatch.com/home>
- [X-Stop](http://www.xstop.com/) - <http://www.xstop.com/>

Online Service Providers

Online service providers such as America Online, CompuServe and Prodigy all offer assistance to their subscribers, ranging from guidelines for Internet use to free filtering software. If you subscribe to an online service, check to see what they offer. In addition, there are a number of kid's networks which offer access to only a portion of the Internet, or to a completely isolated intranet designed with kids in mind.

Other Sites

A number of other sites exist offering help and information on protecting kids on the Internet. I hope you find them useful and informative.

- [National Parent Information network](http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/index.html) - <http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/index.html>
- [Parent Soup: Online Guide](http://www.parentsoup.com/onlineguide) - <http://www.parentsoup.com/onlineguide>
- [Child Safety on the Information Highway](http://www.4j.lane.edu/safety) - <http://www.4j.lane.edu/safety>

- Yahoo also maintains an extensive list of links for kids -
<http://www.yahooligans.com/>

You!

The most important thing to remember is that the best resource for keeping children safe on the Internet is not to be found in software or on the Internet, but in you. There is no substitute for supervision and participation with kids on the Internet.

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