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Resources for Parents

1. [Netsmartz.org](#) is a wonderful resource. Visit their article about [Online Risks](#). Parents may also want to check out their [Internet Safety Pledges](#) which can be used to create a contract between you and your child regarding their online behavior.

2. Though pedophiles on the Internet pose real dangers to our children, the risks of

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Parenting today is challenging. Just as there is no longer any "down time" for kids who may be wired 24/7 to peer influences and pressures by cell phones and the internet, there is no longer any "down time" for parents. A child who is comfortably tucked into bed or sitting behind a screen in the living room can be out surfing the Internet streets exploring, taking risks or trying to make new friends using new, cool and imperfect communications tools. These tools can, at times, put them at risk for bullying, harassment, identity theft, or worse.



The incredible benefits of the new technologies (and there are many) can be lost in the hands of impulsive, risk-taking and over-excited youth. Facebook, for example, a wonderful tool for social networking, can be misused and exploited by young teens looking for attention and "friends" or by advertisers or scamsters looking for quick money from impulsive and inexperienced teens. Consider this... we have no qualms about setting age limits for children around alcohol, driving cars or sexuality. The risks around these issues seem obvious, and considerable, when in the hands of youth who may be impulsive, easily influenced or manipulated. Today

a child being contacted by a pedophile are extremely small. This [Christian Advice web page](#) does a good job of distilling FBI recommendations for parents to recognize behaviors in their children that may indicate they are in an unhealthy relationship with an adult online. Some of these tips are good advice in general.

3. Parry Aftab, Director of [WiredSafety.org](#), offers suggestions for [teaching children about online risks](#).

4. [SafetyClicks.com](#) has many worthwhile articles to help parents understand the issues their children face online and set limits and boundaries:

- a) [When should you start the online safety conversation?](#)
- b) [House rules for online safety.](#)
- c) [Video Sharing: 5 Questions to Ask.](#)
- d) [Serious consequences of posting pictures.](#)
- e) [Playing it safe on social sites.](#)

we are directed by the websites themselves offering guidelines for age limits such as age 13 for YouTube. (children get around these limits by lying about their birth date)

Perhaps some day when there is more understanding and research around these new technologies we will see the development of common age limits for the use of texting, sites like YouTube, Social networking sites or Instant messaging. Today, however, parents are left to do their best and make their own informed decisions for the best interests of their children. These challenges for parents are the topic for this month's newsletter.

As always, we welcome your comments. Our telephone number for Children Online is 413-214-1225.

For detailed strategies or recommendations for different areas of technology, please [visit our website](#) to see past newsletters on Cell Phones, social networking sites, instant messaging, or gaming.

Best wishes,
Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman

Contact Marje or Doug via email at marjem@childrenonline.org or dougf@childrenonline.org for information about our programs or consulting services.

Parenting Challenges in the New Age of Technology

Trying to keep up with today's technology can be overwhelming. Parents and teachers are left scrambling as they race to better understand the technology children are using. Every year children and teens explore new online gadgets, gimmicks, games and websites. Just this year, for example, large numbers of teens began using cell phones to send naked or partially nude pictures to one another (a phenomenon called "sexting") while others began experimenting with live broadcasting sites to act out their own reality television shows in live time from their bedrooms using a webcam. Adults can feel overwhelmed by the unexpected uses of new technologies by children and teens.

Take a deep breath. In truth, for children and teens, much of what they do is not about the technology they are using. It is

f) [Who's looking at you?](#)

5. The folks at [Enough.org](#) have posted an excellent list of ["Rules 'n Tools" for parents on Internet safety](#) and accompanied by interesting statistics. They also offer many [age-based guidelines](#) for children and teens. Visit their navigational bar for many more worthwhile resources.

6. The [National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children](#) makes the argument that children are at risk because most parents don't use readily available built-in software protection tools.

7. Sexting: This [Boston Herald article](#), "[The Serious Consequences of Sexting](#)", speaks to the issues and consequences teens face from this behavior and why many teens may engage in it without considering how hurtful and humiliating it is.

about seeking attention, forming and sustaining relationships, taking risks and having fun. Parents and teachers have been dealing with those behaviors for centuries. Parents often call us feeling scared, frustrated and overwhelmed as they try to react to their child's use of technology. We recommend looking beyond the new gadget, website or technological tool and take a look at the activity their child is engaging in while using technology. Parents don't need to panic in the face of new gadgets but need to realize that the technology is another forum for their kids to reach out to others, form identities, and push boundaries. Take a look at the issue facing your child (or student) and make decisions about setting boundaries and rules based on their developmental level. Our job as parents and teachers is to set limits according to developmental levels throughout our children's lives. Gates, for example, stop toddlers from exploring a kitchen. We hold hands with the 5-year-old when crossing streets and we follow our 10-year-old to the park when she rides her bike for the first time. Try to view technology in the same way. If your 10-year-old is broadcasting herself live from her bedroom, ask yourself if she is ready to face the risks of making herself public online where anyone who watches may contact her. Our recommendation is that the 10-year-old is not ready to face the many risks that lurk beyond their screen. If your 16-year-old is sending provocative pictures via his cell phone, ask yourself if he understands the impact on others, as well as the consequences of "sexting." Does your teen realize that he may be breaking child pornography laws? Does your teen know that others who receive the pictures are likely to continue forwarding them or that these pictures can be used to embarrass and humiliate him?

Being a parent today with so much new technology is challenging. It is very hard to stay vigilant, understand all the risks and warn our kids about potential dangers, especially when the landscape keeps shifting. However, keep in mind that we have been loving, guiding and nurturing our kids since they were infants. We are the keepers of our family's values. When faced with new and unknown influences, such as built-in cell phone cameras or laptop webcams, tell your children that you need to better understand the risks and issues regarding those influences before they use them. Then consider how well prepared your

About Children Online

Children Online offers innovative and comprehensive workshops on Internet safety and online education to students, parents, faculty and administrators. Our approach, unique in the field of Internet safety, combines a thorough understanding of Internet technologies, child development and counseling, to focus on the impact of the internet on the social, emotional and language development of young people.

Doug Fodeman and Marje Monroe, experts in technology, counseling and education, work together to provide invaluable research and tools for parents and schools with practical real-life solutions to the issues faced by young people online. Since 1997, Marje and Doug have spoken to thousands of students, teachers and parents. They have several publications in the area of Internet safety and offer a free online newsletter. More

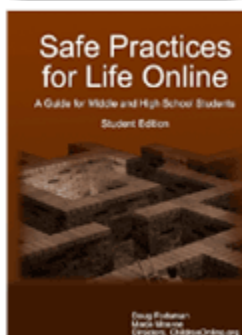
child is for dealing with the issues or whether or not they are developmentally healthy for your child to use. Should your 7-year-old, for example, be allowed chat with others on Club penguin? The answer to that question may be based on your assessment about whether your 7-year-old is able to discriminate between "friends" online and others who may treat her badly. Can your 7-year-old be thoughtful, make decisions before acting and be nice online while playing a game? Is your 7-year-old ready for the curt and hurtful language that is common in online communications? Probably not, but parents have to be the final judge on what their own child can handle. Saying "no" to a child may not be what they want to hear but it is our job as parents to set limits.

At a school we recently visited, a group of sixth grade parents grew upset and anxious upon learning that some of their children's classmates had begun using Facebook. And though some parents were outraged and worried, others felt that this was the way of the world and it was OK to let them explore it. Parents must obviously make their own decisions about what is best for their child. We ask parents to consider age 16 as our recommendation for children using Facebook. This is due to the fact that children and teens are targeted with marketing scams, exposed to risks of identity theft because they don't understand the value of personal information and are easily manipulated by people who don't have their best interests in mind. With information and understanding, parents must make their own informed decisions about setting boundaries and assessing risks. Different families have different rules. But fundamentally, all parents create rules to help their children grow up in healthy and developmentally appropriate ways. Online, without our intervention or involvement, there are no rules or boundaries. Our children are free to explore to the limits of their tolerance or until they are met with unexpected and damaging circumstances.

We have all been parenting our kids for years and have a history of imparting values, making difficult decisions and setting limits for them. While translating these skills to the ever-changing sea of technology can be daunting, take a deep breath. Talk to your kids, ask questions, research the issues involved and be a presence in their online world. Just as you decided when the pacifier should be thrown out, make a

detailed information can be found at ChildrenOnline.org.

Check out our newest book in both a teachers edition and student edition:



decision about the use of technology and don't assume that just because they can use it, they should. When we raise our kids in homes where we listen, impart values, make clear and consistent rules and love them, our kids grow up with fewer risks in their lives. Take heart, a deep breath and make decisions. You have been doing that well for years.

Our Recommendations

These recommendations appeared in our last newsletter. Given this month's topic, we felt they were worth repeating.

1. Do not allow any chatting functions for children under age 9. Allowing chatting access to these sites at a younger age encourages and trains kids to consider the Internet to be fun and the easiest source for finding friends or communicating.
2. Spend time going over the sites alone and then with your children. Create rules and structures before your child begins playing on the sites.
3. Maintain a healthy balance in your child's play to include more time for friends, family or isolated off line play. While the kids may complain about limited time online, encourage group sports, family events, and manipulative games such as Lego's or puzzles.
4. Consider putting keylogging software on the family computer that tracks all activity online when the child is young. With this software in place the child grows up understanding the monitoring that parents have over their exploration of the Internet. It is always easier to take away boundaries than to put boundaries in place that did not exist earlier. [See our [May, 2008 Newsletter for Parental Control Software information](#)]
5. Include values and ethics when talking about the Internet. Encourage children to be the same online as they are in person and to be kind and respectful. A great deal of the language and communication online is harassing, mean and inappropriate. It is especially important for families and schools to encourage children to be kind, respectful and appropriate when online.
6. Encourage children to talk to an adult whenever they feel frightened or uncomfortable about something they encounter online. Research shows that children rarely talk to adults when frightened or scared online. The children often worry that their families will "take away the computer" if they report a problem. Talk to you child; explain your worries and your willingness to work with them to keep them safe.
7. Teach your child to avoid providing personal information when asked in pop-ups or advertising.

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