Everything you ever wanted

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The Internet has become our society's most useful tool, as well as one of its most threatening. Parents and teachers sometimes have a hard time keeping track of the effect of emerging technologies on children. Kids can use the Internet to do research, play games, send e-mails, and have live chats. It has become the world's largest community, and like any other, it presents certain dangers and risks.

Every year, more and more children from across the country head on-line. Although the Internet is an information tool that can educate and entertain there are also major safety concerns. Parents should take the time to educate themselves and their children about Internet safety.

The fact is, parents and leaders should and must take a role in their child/youth's Internet activities. Surfing the net is similar to any other activity. The Internet presents risks and dangers, just like riding a bike. There are several things parents can do to make the Internet safer for their children. A few years ago, the Internet was just beginning and teenagers and adults made up the majority of surfers, but now the age when users start has dropped, which means that younger kids can be found online.

Occasionally, youth may be asked to go online to do research for Scouting. Here's when leaders should think about giving their youth an in-depth talk about Internet safety.

When children are first starting out, it's important for adults to talk to them.

Here are a couple of things parents and leaders can do to encourage safe Internet use:

o Set basic rules: decide how long your kids can be online, what sites they can visit or what types of activities they can engage in.
o Emphasize trust: teach them that not everyone can be trusted and things like age, addresses and phone numbers cannot be given out.
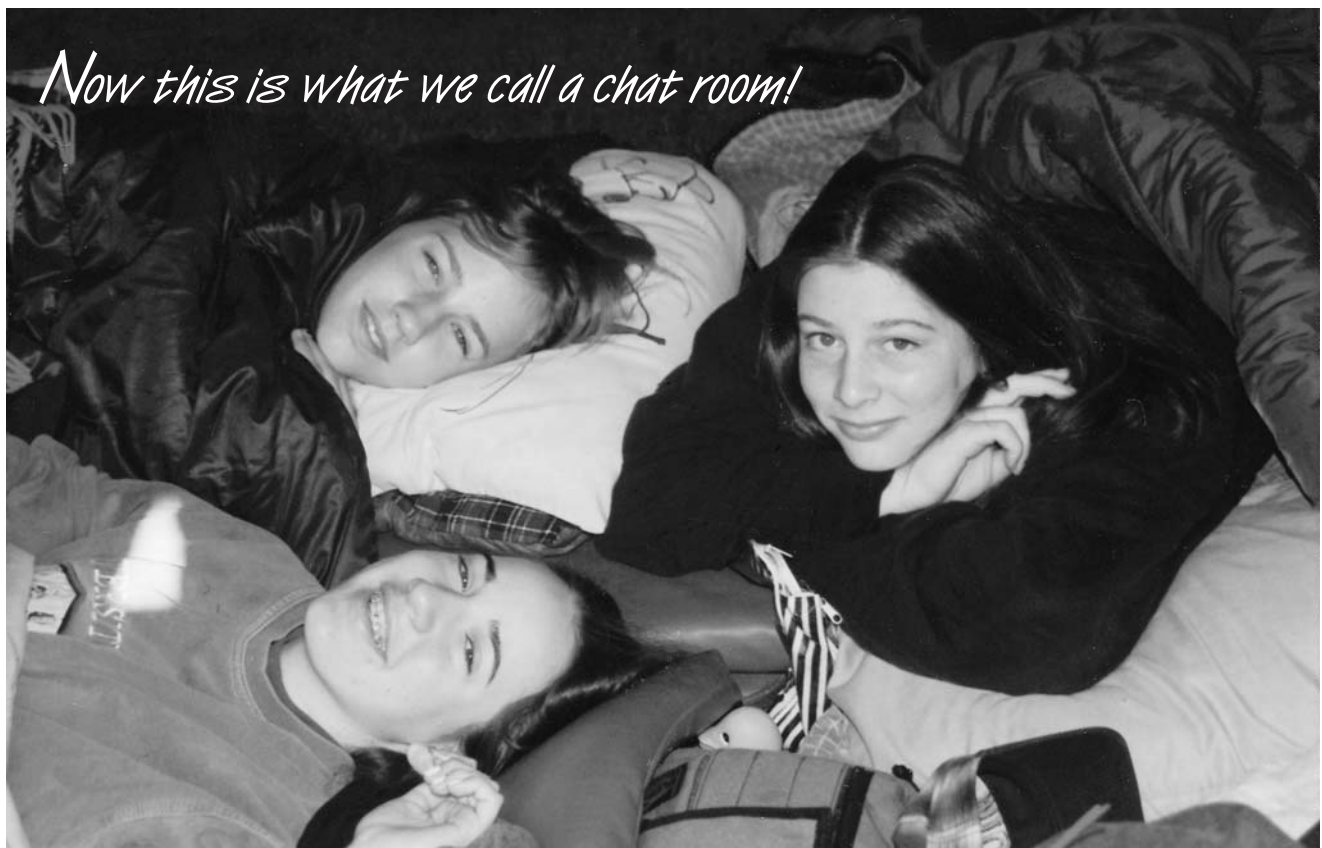o Show and tell: have kids show you what they enjoy doing on-line early on and discuss their In-

Now this is what we call a chat room!

ternet experiences with them (start this young so it continues when they get older).

o Computer location: put the computer in a family room such as the den or the kitchen. It's recommended that you don't put the computer in your child's bedroom so that you have a better awareness of their activities.

o Encourage questioning: a lot of things online are not as they seem and this anonymous world can be full of lies and manipulation. Motivate your children to doubt and scrutinize things online.

o Keep things in perspective: remind your kids that although the Internet has plenty of dangers lurking, there is plenty of useful and helpful information out there for them.

As Media Awareness Network education specialist Cathy Wing says, "Kids use the Internet mainly for entertainment purposes. They play games, instant message...and quite often they start losing track of time". The key is to have a set of rules on what they can do and cannot do and enforce these rules. Using the Internet is just like any other household activity such as watching TV. There have to be limits and these limits must be set by parents.

When you're dealing with teens, the tables turn and managing Internet use is a little different. Instead of supervising the young person's activities, the goal is to establish an open line of communication. As Mrs. Wing adds, you need "good supervision when they're young, and good communication when they're old". Monitoring a youth's Internet activities is simply not going to happen. Youth do not need to be babied; they need to see that you trust them.

All of the guidelines above apply but teenagers do not want, and often do not need, their parents looking over their shoulders. A dialogue with your teens about what they're doing online should be fine.

Parents may lack knowledge about their child's activities in a certain respect: the tools that their children are using online. The Internet is more than a simple computer tool.

We've included the basic Internet tools kids are using today.

Instant Messengers

ICQ, MSN, Yahoo! and several other companies provide instant messengers which allow kids to communicate in real time with friends and strangers around the world. Basically, if your children are using the program, everyone else on their list who's online will be able to instantly talk to them one on one. Most kids talk to their school friends using this software but many also talk to strangers. The key here is to be aware of who's on your child's contact list.

Chatrooms

Chatrooms are found everywhere online and range from moderated rooms to rooms where anything can be discussed. Children and youth tend to go in unmoderated "teen" rooms. Often, chatroom conversations lack substance and are a waste of time. The pivotal idea here is to make sure that your kids are participating in worthwhile chats. There are filtered and monitored chats on a daily basis dealing with specific topics. These are the more useful chats in which to participate.

Message Boards and Online Communities

Message boards and online communities are geared towards reaching people with a common interest. You can find communities catering to health, education, hobbies, musical interests, celebrities, and much more. This venue typically attracts people of all ages and backgrounds, but the conversations are usually limited to the topic of the boards.

Online Diaries

Diaries are one of the newest and hippest additions to the Internet. They allow you to share your online log with the world. Other people can read your diary entries and leave messages for you. The concern here is that some people share their entire personal life on the Internet. Sure, it's nice to get some support when you've had a bad day, but support from an online message is very different from the personal support of friends or fam-

USEFUL LINKS

Tucows
http://www.tucows.com/parent95.html

RCMP web safety page
http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/html/websafety_e.htm

Cyber Patrol's CyberGuide
A search site that features sites that have been viewed by professionals and deemed appropriate for kids from the ages 6-16+. This site can also be used in combination with Cyber Patrol filtering software.
http://www.cyberpatrol.com/

Web guide for kids (kids version of yahoo)
http://www.yahooligans.yahoo.com/

Check these sites today!

Web Aware
http://www.bewebaware.ca

ily. The other concern is that too much personal information will be disclosed such as home town, school, friends' names, family information and addresses. It's recommended that you be very wary of this Internet tool.

The Internet is a valuable tool to Canadian adults, youth, and children. It has plenty of useful information and many online services that are of major benefit. There are, however, plenty of risks, like any other activity, that go along with this product. If children and youth use the Internet properly with parental supervision and/or communication, the Internet proves to be a valuable information tool. There is just a need for more precautions and awareness. It will make the Internet a safer place for all.

Supervision and Prevention Means Safe Surfing For Your Kids

Most kids are using computers to surf the Internet these days but their parents may not always be aware of where they are going and what they're looking at. Parents and leaders are left with the dilemma of allowing the Internet to be fun and educational but, at the same time, safe.

To help parents and leaders deal with this issue, there are many software packages on the market designed to 'filter' or 'block' certain Internet sites that may not be appropriate for children to view, as well as unwanted emails and chat rooms. Parents and leaders have to use their own judgement in using these kinds of programs, basing the allowed privileges on the age of the child and their maturity level.

Children under the age of about eight years should not be left to surf the net by themselves. A parent or guardian should be sitting with the child, and engaging in activities on the web as well, just like if the parent was reading a story or playing any other game with them. This way, you will know exactly what your child is exposed to while they are surfing.

Remember, you can always talk to a leader you trust.

Photo: Scouts Canada Archives

Here are a few tips to keep kids safe when they're surfing the Internet.

1) **Have an adult nearby.**
   Make sure that your parents, a teacher, a leader or another trusted adult are close by so you can ask them questions or ask for help when you need it.

2) **Use a nickname**
   NEVER tell your real name to anyone on the Internet. Make up a special cyberspace nickname: be creative!

3) **Don't share personal information**
   Never share personal information without permission from a parent. Don't tell anyone your age, your address, your phone number or where you go to school. Your passwords for web sites and e-mail are also secret. Never tell your passwords to anyone, not even your best friend.

4) **Don't send pictures**
   Don't send a digital picture of yourself to anyone on the Internet. Tell your parents, teacher or leader if someone wants to send a picture to you.

5) **Check before you download**
   Downloaded files or programs can sometimes contain viruses or other things that can harm your computer. Check with an adult before you download anything.

6) **Always be polite**
   Don't be cruel to your CyberFriends. Never use bad words or say mean things. Don't tell rumors or lies about other people. If someone sends you nasty messages, tell your parents or teachers. It's best to avoid chain letters and leave conversations when people are being rude.

7) **Don't buy or accept gifts**
   Never buy a toy, a game, a book or anything else without your parents' approval. Don't enter a contest or join a club without permission. Never let anyone send you a free prize or gift.

8) **Don't meet or call**
   If someone asks to meet you in person, say NO and tell your parents right away. The person you are chatting with may not be telling the truth; you could be talking to an adult who is pretending to be a kid.

9) **Tell an adult right away**
   If you see anything on your computer - such as a message or a picture - that makes you feel bad or uncomfortable, tell a trusted adult right away.

10) **If you're not sure, ask**
    You never know what you are going to run into on the Internet. If you are not sure how to deal with a certain situation, it's best to ask an adult.

If you are just getting your child or youth started on the Internet, try reading "A Parents Guide to the Online World" in the deal.org "Parents and Teachers" sections for advice and tips on instant messages, chat rooms, online diaries, message boards and online communities.

If a child is old enough to be on the Internet by themselves but you are still worried that they might stumble upon some material that is not suitable for them, you can buy, or even test, a free trial version of a software "filter". Some of these programs allow parents to make sure their child is only visiting certain pages by setting up a list of pre-approved sites. If it's listed, the child gets to go there. If it's not listed, the page is blocked. There are also address checks and chat blocks.

Some of the most common "net nannies" are: CYBERsitter, Cyber Patrol, Net Nanny, BESS, SurfWatch, SmartFilter, X-Stop, NetRated, I-Gear, SafeSurf and WebSENSE.

Keep in mind that some of these programs have a tendency to block out certain information, for example, on the anatomy of the body, which may be useful for your child during projects. Nonetheless, the advantages of these programs still outweigh their disadvantages and they can definitely be useful tools. The key here is prevention, which is exactly what these programs offer. ⋏

– Deal.org is a program now six years in the making. Initiated in 1997 by Cpl. Patrice Poitevin, the program was created in an attempt to provide information and create awareness of drugs and drug-related issues. As the program grew and evolved, the focus shifted and new projects were created to help youth learn about a wider variety of issues, as well as to encourage young people to get involved and to make a difference within their community (www.deal.org). This link can be found at www.scouts.ca under Scouts/Issues.