# Becoming Cyber-Savvy:

# An Internet Guide for Parents

OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention
Office of Justice Programs ◆ U.S. Department of Justice

EDC Education
Development
Center, Inc.

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# Becoming Cyber-Savvy: An Internet Guide for Parents

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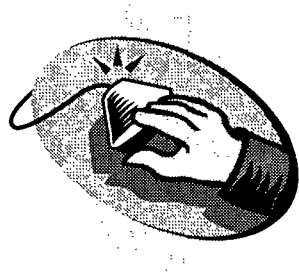
# Introduction

Do you know . . .

*. . . what the Internet is? . . . what the World Wide Web is?*

*. . . what a chat room is? . . . what instant messages are?*

**Do you know what your children do when they're online?**

The Internet is at once exciting, vital, and mysterious. At the click of a mouse, computer users of all ages can access an almost limitless array of information or talk to people in every corner of the world. Yet, as with most opportunities in life, there is risk. On their journeys along the "information superhighway," Internet users may be exposed to undesirable content or situations.

Children may be especially vulnerable to these risks. More than 10 million children are already online, and industry experts say there will be 45 million children online by the year 2002. In its first year of operation, the "CyberTipline," managed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, logged more than 9,000 reports of suspicious online activities, including images of child pornography and attempts to engage children in sexual relationships.

In many homes, children are far more cyber-savvy than their parents. Parents are unsure how to supervise and protect their children online. Does this sound familiar to you?

The key to promoting your children's safety online is educating yourself. There are things you can do to help your children enjoy all the benefits of the Internet without falling prey to the risks. This handbook, and the accompanying videotape, draws from the experience of parents, children, and law enforcement experts to help you guide your children safely as they travel through cyberspace.

*For more information, contact your local police department or*
**The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children**
**1-800-843-5678**
**www.missingkids.com/cybertip**

# Summary of Key Points

## Disclosing Information

✓ **Children feel safe when they are online.**

They know not to identify themselves by giving their name, address, or age.

At the same time, they may inadvertently give clues that can lead to their identities. They may mention the name of their school or a friend, a local sports team or shopping mall, or community events. Over time, someone could gather these clues, do a little research, and find out who these children are.

Also, some Internet service providers (ISPs) keep "member profiles" that are available to everyone who registers with their service. These profiles may contain a great deal of identifying information. But cyber-savvy kids know the profiles are not mandatory, and many kids intentionally enter false information.

*Check with your ISP to see if member information is made available to other users. If so, remove your child's identifying information or choose another ISP.*

✓ **People online may not be who they say they are.**

The 15-year-old baseball fan may in fact be a 51-year-old computer programmer or ballet instructor. Conversely, the 21-year-old fashion model may really be a 12-year-old child. Whether an adult poses as a child, or a child poses as an adult, there is potential for trouble.
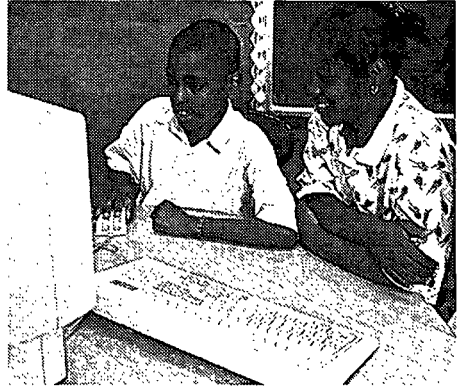
*Remind your children that no matter how much their online "buddies" seem like best friends they are still strangers. Also, caution your children against pretending to be someone they're not.*

## Going Places

✓ **Children go to chat rooms when they're bored, have no one to talk to, have few friends who are online, and because they can be fun.**

Chat rooms are very popular among teens—about 80% of teens who answered a *Newsweek* telephone poll said they use the Internet for things like e-mail and chat rooms. Although chat rooms usually have names that indicate special interests (such as movies or popular music groups), the actual content can include anything. Sexual predators often visit chat rooms to strike up relationships with unsuspecting children.

*Encourage your children to use the Internet to visit interesting websites and to correspond with people they know. But expect that, sooner or later, children will experiment. Reinforce the guiding rule of Internet use: "Don't talk to strangers."*

✓ **Almost any search of the Internet can lead to pornography or other undesirable content.**

Even the most innocent, legitimate topics can somehow be related, or linked, to something offensive.

*Ask your children to show you how they use the Internet. See for yourself the results of searches for typical homework assignments. Ask your children's teachers how they help their students use the Internet safely.*

## Monitoring Use

✓ **Do not assume that your older teen requires no supervision on the Internet.**

72% of the Internet-related missing children cases known to the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children involved children 15 or over.

*Be alert to changes in your children's behavior. Do they spend long hours on the computer? Do they spend less time with their friends? Do they receive mail or telephone calls from people you don't know?*

✓ **Blocking and filtering programs may help you control your children's access to certain kinds of information.**

Blocking and filtering tools may limit your children's access to many useful websites as well as undesirable ones. Remember, too, that your children probably use other computers—at school, in the library, at friends' homes—that may not be equipped with blocking or filtering tools.

*Even if you choose to install one of these programs, explain to your children the concerns you have and your expectations that they will use the Internet wisely—no matter where they are.*
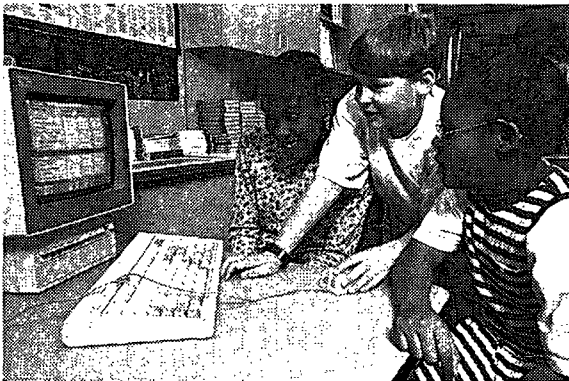
✓ **Rules help children feel safe.**

*Keep the computer in a common area of the home. Set limits on when your children may use the computer and for how long. Once you have set the rules, enforce them!*

## Staying Connected

✓ **Children need privacy, too.**

You probably don't listen to your children's telephone conversations or read their personal mail. Why should you need to see their e-mail correspondence? Unless you've seen dramatic negative changes in their behavior, it's not fair to assume your children are doing "something bad" if they won't let you see the computer screen.

*By setting reasonable rules for computer and Internet use and talking with your children about your concerns and expectations, you should be able to trust that they are using the computer safely.*

✓ **Be available to help your children if the need arises.**

Children should know that their parents will help them find solutions to problems. Remember that your children are growing in many ways and may take a wrong turn now and then.

*Let your children know that you will listen when they are concerned, and work with them to solve the problem. Solutions may be as simple as changing a user name or moving an account to another Internet service provider.*

***If you believe your child is in danger, call your local police.***

## Keeping Your Perspective

✓ **There have always been opportunities for children to take risks.**

The Internet is different because it brings these opportunities into your home. Children no longer need to "borrow" an adult's magazine collection to see pornography. Sex offenders no longer need to approach children in playgrounds or shopping malls. But the same rules apply, with certain modifications.

*Don't talk to strangers—but remember that the person in the chat room who seems to share your interests and understand your problems is still a stranger.*

*If you've gone somewhere that feels wrong or unsafe—LEAVE. Whether it's an adult movie theater or a pornographic website,* **you don't have to go there.**

✓ **Keeping children safe on the Internet is a community concern.**

Children use computers in many locations—in their own homes and in schools, libraries, community centers, and their friends' homes. Internet safety must be a shared concern.

*Parents, educators, and community leaders have a responsibility to understand how children use the Internet and to find ways to ensure their safety online.*
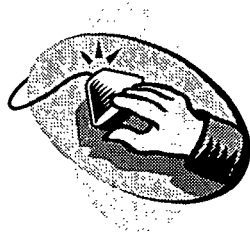
# Glossary of Terms

*Address.* The unique location, or name of a computer host, of a site on the Internet (for example, a webpage; see "URL"), a specific file location, or an electronic mail user.

*Blocking Software.* Special programs that attempt to prevent access to certain sites on the Internet.

*Bookmark.* A record of an address stored in your browser that allows you to access sites directly by clicking on an icon.

*Browser.* A software program, such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft's Internet Explorer, that enables you to find, see, and hear material on the World Wide Web.

*Bulletin Board System (BBS).* A central computer, or set of computers, accessed via modem that enables you to carry on discussions with people who may or may not be connected to the computer at the same time. Most BBSs offer files, programs, and other information that you can download to your own computer.

*Chat Room.* Also called discussion groups. They allow you to communicate with others in "real time." A user enters a chat room, types a message, and sends it, and it is displayed to other users in the room, or can be limited to just one other user.

*Commercial Online Service (COS).* General term for online services, such as America Online, Earthlink, Microsoft Network, and Prodigy. These services have lots of information attractively organized and may also offer access to the Internet.

*Cookies.* A piece of information unique to you that your browser saves and sends back to a Web server when you visit a website. Cookies contain information such as log-in or registration information, online "shopping cart" information (your online buying patterns in a certain retail site), user preferences, what site you came from last, etc.

*Cyberspace.* A term generally used to describe the range of information services available on the Internet.

*Download.* To copy a file from one computer system to another over a modem.

*E-Mail (Electronic Mail).* A way of sending messages, usually text, from one computer to another.

*Flaming.* Directing insulting or derogatory comments at someone through e-mail, newsgroups, or chat rooms.

*Freenet.* A community network that provides free online access, usually to local residents, and often includes its own forums and news.

*Hardware.* The nuts, bolts, and wires of computer equipment and the actual computer and related machines.

*Home Page.* The site that is the starting point for your browser on the World Wide Web or a particular main page for a group or organization's website.

*HTML (Hypertext Markup Language).* The coding language used to create all webpages. Text documents must be converted to HTML in order to be readable on the Web.

*Hyperlink.* An easy method of accessing information by choosing highlighted words in text on the screen. The link will take you to related documents or sites.

*Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP).* A standard that provides instructions for moving text, images, sound, video, and other multimedia files across the Internet from one webpage to another.

*Instant Message.* A chat-like technology on an online service that notifies a user when a friend is online, allowing for simultaneous communication (like talking on the phone, only with text).

*Internet.* A worldwide collection of computer networks, connected by cables and satellites, that allows people to find and use information and communicate with others.

*ISP (Internet Service Provider).* A generic term for any company that can connect you directly to the Internet (as compared to COS).

*Modem.* A device that allows computers to communicate with each other over telephone lines or other delivery systems.

*Newbie.* Somebody new to the Net.

*Net, The.* A colloquial term often used to refer to the entirety of cyberspace, the Internet, commercial services, Usenet, etc.

*Netiquette.* The rules of cyberspace civility such as not typing a message in capital letters, which is equivalent to shouting.

*Newsgroups.* The name for discussion groups on Usenet.

*Online Service.* A company such as America Online (AOL) or Prodigy that provides its members access to the Internet through its own special user interface as well as additional services such as chat rooms, children's areas, travel planning, and financial management.

*Posting.* The process of sending a message to a newsgroup, BBS, or other public message area. The message itself is called a post.

*Profile.* Information provided to an ISP that may be accessed by other users of the same ISP. Typical profile information includes name, age, date of birth, address, interests, hobbies, clubs, secondary e-mail accounts, and phone numbers. Some profiles can even include photographs.

*Search Engine.* A program that performs keyword searches for information on the Internet.

**Spamming.** Inappropriate use of a mailing list by sending the same unsolicited message to a large number of people.

**URL (Uniform Resource Locator).** The World Wide Web address of a site on the Internet. For example, the address for the White House is http://www.whitehouse.gov.

**Usenet Newsgroups.** A system of thousands of special interest groups to which readers can "post" and read messages. These messages are then distributed to other computers on the network. Usenet registers newsgroups, which are available through ISPs.

**Userld (User ID).** The unique name given to a user on a system for her/his account.

**Virus.** A piece of programming code that causes some unexpected and usually undesirable event, such as lost or damaged files. Viruses can be transmitted by downloading from another diskette or be present on the diskette programs.

**Website.** A location on the World Wide Web that incorporates graphics, sounds, and links to other sites. Websites are identified by an online address.

**WWW (World Wide Web).** A hypertext-based navigation system that allows you to browse through a variety of linked Internet resources organized by colorful, graphics-oriented home pages. Also known as the Web.

## Sources:

Aftab, Parry. *A Parents' Guide to the Internet*. SC Press, Inc., 1997.

Lazarus, Wendy & Laurie Lipper. *The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway*. The Children's Partnership, September 1996.

*Parents Guide to the Internet*. U.S. Department of Education, November 1997.

# Resources*

## Online Information

JuniorNet is a commercial-free online service for children ages 3–12. It does not allow access to the larger Internet.
www.juniornet.com

GetNetWise is a coalition that wants Internet users to be just "one click away" from the resources they need to make informed decisions about their family's use of the Internet. Some information available to families includes: Online Safety Guide, Tools for Families, Reporting Trouble, and Web Sites for Kids.
www.getnetwise.org

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
699 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3175
703-274-3900
703-274-2220 (fax)
hotline: 1-800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678)
www.missingkids.org

## Books/Manuals

Aftab, P. (1997). *A Parents' Guide to the Internet.*

Dixon, P. (1996). *The Dummies Guide to Family Computing: Take Charge Computing for Teens and Parents.*
Framingham, MA: IDG Books Worldwide.

*The resources listed here are not endorsements.*

Lazarus, W. & Lipper, L. (1996). *The Parents' Guide to the Information Super-highway: Rules and Tools for Families Online.* Santa Monica, CA: The Children's Partnership. www.childrenspartnership.org

*Leadership and Technology: What School Board Members Need to Know.* (1995). Annapolis Junction, MD: National School Boards Association.

*Making the Net Work for You: How to Get the Most Out of Going Online.* (1996). Silver Spring, MD: Interactive Services Association and National Consumers League.

Marsh, M. (1995). *Everything You Need to Know (But Were Afraid to Ask Kids) About the Information Highway.* Palo Alto, CA: Computer Learning Foundation.

Mohta, V. (1996). *The Dummies Guide to Family Computing: The World Wide Web for Kids and Parents.* Framingham, MA: IDG Books Worldwide.

Polly, J.A. (1997). *The Internet Kids & Family Yellow Pages.* Berkeley, CA: Osbourne McGraw-Hill.

Wolff, M. *Kids Rule the Net: The Only Guide to the Internet Written by Kids.* Wolf New Media.

## Brochures/Booklets

American Library Association. *The Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids.* Chicago, IL: ALA Public Information Office. (800-545-2433 x2148). Free online at www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites.

Childnet International. (1997). *Global Information Networks—The Agenda for Children.* London. Free online at www.childnet-int.org.

Library of Congress. *Internet Guides, Tutorials, and Training Information.* Online address is lcweb.loc.gov/global/internet/training.html.

National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families (NCPCF). (1997). *Protecting Your Family in Cyberspace.* Cincinnati, OH. Online address is www.nationalcoalition.org.

U.S. Department of Education. (1997). *Parents Guide to the Internet.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Media and Information Services. Available online at www.ed.gov.

## Blocking/Filtering/Monitoring Software

*Access Management Engine* (www.bascom.com)

*America Online Parental Controls* (www.aol.com)

*BESS* (www.n2h2.com)

*Bonus.com the SuperSite for Kids* (www.bonus.com)

*Cyber Patrol* (www.cyberpatrol.com)

*Cyber Snoop* (www.pearlsw.com)

*CYBERsitter* (www.solidoak.com)

*EdView Channel Lock* (www.edview.com)

*GuardiaNet* (www.guardianet.net)

*I-Gear* (www.urlabs.com)

*McAfee-virus protection* (www.mcafee.com)

*Microsoft Plus! For Kids* (www.microsoft.com/kids)

*Neosoft* (www.neosoft.com/parental-control)

*Net Nanny* (www.netnanny.com)

*Planet View* (www.planetview.com)

*SafeSurf Internet Filtering Solution* (www.safesurf.com)

*SmartFilter* (www.smartfilter.com)

*Surf Watch* (www.surfwatch.com)

*X-Stop* (www.xstop.com)

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