

Tackling Tough Topics — Internet Safety

A national survey found the number one topic children search for on the internet is ...SEX. Forty four percent of young people use the internet to get answers to their sexual questions. Parents need to protect children from too much information too soon. There are many things parents can do including blocking, filtering and using browsers for kids but no filter or browser can monitor a child like a watchful parent.

What's a parent to do?

Create a "Family Pledge for Online Safety." Yahoo!igans provides information on blocking, filtering and browsers for kids. It also lets parents know about safe communication on line and how to plan against inappropriate material. (<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/>)

They suggest that each family discuss the following topics and create a family pledge.

1. **Time online** – how much time? Is computer use dependent on finishing homework or chores?
2. **Location/Supervision** – can kids go online without an adult around? At school, in the library, at a friend's house?
3. **Personal Information** – alert your child to NEVER give out personal information to anyone they meet on line – full name, address, phone number, school or picture.
4. **Web sites** – talk about what sites are okay and which ones are off-limits.
5. **Meeting online friends** – kids should NEVER arrange to meet an online friend without an adult present.
6. **Chat Rooms** – explore a few chat rooms together with your child. Do you want your child to chat in monitored chat rooms only? Yahoo!igans gives a listing of links to moderated chats for kids.
7. **Inappropriate Material** – kids should NEVER respond online when they feel uncomfortable or scared. If they have any doubts, instruct them to show the material immediately to an adult they trust.
8. **The Golden Rule** – Remind kids to behave towards others as they would like people to behave towards them. Emphasize that you can hurt another child's feelings by what you say in an email or in a public chat room.

Parents can use a search engine that is suitable for children.

1. Ivy's Search Engine Resources for Kids (www.ivyjoy.com/rayne/kidssearch.html) lets you search 9 family friendly or general filtered search engines and 14 kid search engines from one site. It also lists and links to 26 web guides for kids and 7 specialized searches for kids.
2. Ask Jeeves for Kids (<http://www.ajkids.com/>) uses "G-rated" sites and sites written specifically for kids. It lets children ask questions in plain English – for example, "Why is the earth round?" It does not provide a list of sites to explore but returns one site that is most likely to answer the question.