

Internet Safety for Children

Establish rules for safe usage

This is the one thing that will vary most depending on the age of your child. Let your child know what is acceptable online behavior – when they can use the computer, whether to ask you before opening files, etc. You can be a lot more specific and nuanced with caveats when the kid is 16 than when they're 6, and 16 year old will need access to more functions on the computer. For instance: "It's okay to download files from these specific sites, but ask me before downloading anything else" - this might be a tricky concept for a kid in elementary school. With a younger child, you can take an additive approach – they can use only specific programs, for a set length of time. With an older child, let them know what things are off-limits, and at what time they are to cease use.

Monitor your child's activities

With a very young child, you may want to be the one directly interacting with the computer. As they are more dexterous and begin to have schoolwork that requires computer use, they will need to start taking over the interactions. You may still wish to stay physically nearby to offer assistance and to make sure they stay within appropriate boundaries. Older children still need monitoring and boundaries, but you may wish to install a program to patrol their activities.

Limit access

There is no reason a child needs to be able to access system files or your important data files. It's a good idea to create a separate user account with limited permissions and higher security settings for your child to use. This can help keep them from accidentally installing unwanted programs and it also has a side benefit of giving them a feeling of having their own separate space to personalize to their taste. For an extra measure of protection, you can encrypt any folders where you keep sensitive data files. This too has another benefit: It can help protect your data in the case of malware or other intrusion.

Implement parental controls

Parental controls are no longer limited to web-filtering. Programs like Family Protector can be used to automate a lot of the boundaries we talk about before like enforcing time limits, specifying which applications they can use and when, as well as taking periodic screenshots.

Keep the lines of communication open

Let kids know that whatever happens on the computer, they can come to you to talk about it. There are ways to back out of accidental deletions, remove malware, etc. It's better that you know what's happened, so that you can fix the problem quickly.

You wouldn't let your kid play in a busy intersection, and you shouldn't leave your kid on the Internet unattended. It's simple to set age-appropriate boundaries for your kids that can be modified as their abilities and needs change. Not only can it potentially protect your child, but your computer and its data as well.