



Online Safety Tips for Teens

We all know that the Internet is a cool place to hang with friends and check out new things. But don't forget about the Internet's risks and dangers. If you're going to use the Web, do it safely! Here are some suggestions on what you should and shouldn't do online to help protect you against the bad stuff.

1. Be careful online

Never reveal personally-identifiable information online. A lot of creeps use the Internet to take advantage of other people, especially kids and teens. Never reveal any personally-identifiable information online, whether it's on your profile page or in a blog, chatroom, instant messenger chat or email.

- Always use a screen name instead of your real name.
- Never give out your address, telephone number, hangout spots or links to other websites or pages where this information is available.
- Be careful about sending pictures to people you do not know very well.
- Never tell people personal or private information about your friends or family.
- Never assume you're completely anonymous online. Even if you don't put personal information online, there are different ways that people can still figure out who you are and where you live.

Never share your password with other people (except for your parents). Your passwords to websites, email accounts and instant messenger services should not be shared with friends or strangers. Your friends may not be as safe as you are and may unknowingly subject you to danger. You should, however, share your passwords with your parents if they ask so they can make sure you're using the Internet safely.

Never arrange meetings with strangers. Just because you've seen a person's picture and read his or her profile, does not mean you know them. Many people online lie about who they are and what their intentions are. Just because someone seems nice online, does not mean they really are. They could be trying to hurt you. Never arrange a meeting with a stranger you've met online. Even meeting a stranger in a crowded place could be dangerous as he could follow you home. If you wish to meet an online friend in person, talk to your parents and arrange a time and place where your friend can meet your parents first, just in case. If you are worried about your parents meeting one of your online friends, you probably shouldn't be friends with them in the first place.

Don't believe everything you read or see online. Be wary of everything you see online unless it is from a trusted source. People lie about their age, who they are, what they look like, where they live, how they know you and what their interests are. Also, a lot of websites and emails contain information that is misleading or just plain untrue. If a person or deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Ask your parents to help you figure out what information is really true.

Don't download files or software without your parents' permission. There are a lot of files on the Internet that are unsafe to download to a computer. Some files will bombard you with

pop-up ads all day long. Some files will actually track everything you and your family does on your computer, including your logins, passwords and credit card information, which criminals then use to steal money from you and do other harm. There is no easy way to tell which files are bad and which are ok to download. That free desktop wallpaper you want to download might also steal your parents' credit card information. Ask your parents before you download any files or software from the Internet.

Don't respond to inappropriate messages or emails. Some people send inappropriate messages just to see if you will respond. If you do, you are simply encouraging them to send more inappropriate material to you. Don't respond to inappropriate messages. Instead, talk to your parents about how to [report](#) <see Report Inappropriate Activity section below> them to the right place.

Don't post inappropriate content. If you post information about tennis, you will attract people who are interested in tennis. If you post inappropriate content or pictures, you will attract people who have inappropriate interests. If you post jokes, photos or other content that contain sexual references you will probably attract people who are only interested in talking about sex. Be mindful of what you are communicating to the rest of the online world through the content you put onto the Internet.

Be leery of personal questions from strangers. People you don't know who ask personal questions are often up to no good. Don't continue communicating with strangers who ask you personal questions. Talk to your parents about how to block them from communicating with you and [report](#) <see Report Inappropriate Activity section below> them to the right place.

Don't be goaded into fights. People tend to say things online that they would never say in person. Some people even say rude and malicious things, sometimes just to see if you will respond. Don't respond to these people. Instead, talk to your parents about how to block them from communicating with you and [report](#) <see Report Inappropriate Activity section below> them to the right place.

Don't use adult sites. There are some websites that kids just should not use. Don't use websites that contain adult content or that facilitate communication with older adults. No matter how much you think you know about the Internet, there are some people and places you just aren't ready to deal with. Enjoy websites that are designed for people your own age.

Understand what you put online will be there forever. Assume that *everything* you put online--- every email you write, every picture you post, every blog or journal entry you post--- will be accessible on the Internet *forever*. Many search engines copy Internet pages and save them for viewing even after the pages are no longer online. Think about that *before* you post anything online. Do you really want pictures or blog entries to be seen 10 years from now?

2. Understand online risks.

Talk to your parents about what you do online. Even though you may know more about computers and the Internet than your parents, they understand online risks better than you. Be open with your parents about how you use the Internet. Answer any questions they have honestly and completely. Talk with your parents about the websites you visit. Tell them about the people you meet online. Tell them what you know about online safety and how you make sure you stay safe while using the Internet. Listen to your parents' concerns. They're only trying to make sure you're safe.

Teach your parents about computers and the Internet. It is natural to fear the unknown. You've grown up using computers and the Internet. Your parents probably didn't. You probably know a whole lot more about computers and the Internet than your parents. Teach your parents what you know. This is your chance to show them something for a change. If

your parents understand how to use computers and the Internet better, they will probably feel more comfortable with you being online.

Follow the Internet use rules your parents and school have established. If your parents or school establish rules on your Internet use--- the websites you can visit, where you can use the Internet, how long you can be online, etc.--- follow them. They understand online risks better than you and know what you are and aren't ready for online. Don't try to circumvent or disable the safety tools they may have implemented on your home or school computers. Don't try to get around their restrictions by using computers at other locations. If you don't think a particular policy is reasonable, talk to them and explain why. If your parents and/or school trusts that you are adhering to the rules they have implemented, they will probably feel more comfortable in relaxing them.

Visit online safety websites. Take a look at what the many websites that offer good online safety tips for teens have to say.

Here is a list of some of the popular online safety websites:

[BlogSafety.com](http://www.blogsafety.com) <link to www.blogsafety.com>
[ChildrensPartnership.org](http://www.childrenspartnership.org) <link to www.childrenspartnership.org>
[Common Sense Media](http://www.common sense media.org) <link to www.common sense media.org>
[Child Safety Network](http://www.csn.org) <link to www.csn.org>
[Cyber Angels](http://www.cyberangels.org) <link to www.cyberangels.org>
[Family Tech Talk](http://www.familytechtalk.com) <link to www.familytechtalk.com>
[FBI](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm) <link to www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm>
[Get Net Wise](http://www.getnetwise.com) <link to www.getnetwise.com>
[InternetSafey.com](http://www.internetsafety.com) <www.internetsafety.com>
[iSafe America](http://www.isafe.org) <link to www.isafe.org>
[Kids Online Resources](http://www.kidsolr.com) <link to www.kidsolr.com>
[Microsoft Security At Home](http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security) <link to www.microsoft.com/athome/security>
[National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](http://www.missingkids.com) <link to www.missingkids.com>
[Net Family News](http://www.netfamilynews.org) <link to www.netfamilynews.org>
[Net Smartz Kids](http://www.netsmartzkids.org) <link to www.netsmartzkids.org>
[Safe Kids](http://www.safekids.com) <link to www.safekids.com>
[Safe Teens](http://www.safeteens.com) <link to www.safeteens.com>
[Stay Safe](http://www.staysafe.org) <link to www.staysafe.org>
[Stop Cyberbullying](http://www.stopcyberbullying.com) <link to www.stopcyberbullying.com>
[Teen Angels](http://www.teenangels.org) <link to www.teenangels.org>
[Web Wise Kids](http://www.webwisekids.org) <link to www.webwisekids.org>
[Wired Kids](http://www.wiredkids.org) <link to www.wiredkids.org>
[Wired Safety](http://www.wiredsafety.org) <link to www.wiredsafety.org>
[Wired Teens](http://www.wiredteens.org) <link to www.wiredteens.org>
[Wired with Wisdom](http://www.wiredwithwisdom.org) <link to www.wiredwithwisdom.org>
[Yahooligans! Parents' Guide](http://www.yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/) <link to www.yahooligans.yahoo.com/parents/>

3. Report inappropriate activity.

Report all inappropriate contact or activity you experience to Tagged's Safety Squad (safetysquad@tagged.com) immediately. Don't be afraid to tell your parents and teachers--- their biggest concern is your safety. If they overreact, explain to them that you understand online safety is important and that is why you are telling them about your experience. Remember, a crime online is still a crime and law enforcement personnel have sophisticated tools used to investigate online crimes.

In addition to your parents, click [here](http://kids.getnetwise.org/trouble/contact) <link to <http://kids.getnetwise.org/trouble/contact>> to find additional authorities and groups you should also consider contacting.