

USING SOFTWARE TO STAY SAFE ON THE INTERNET



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

USING SOFTWARE TO STAY SAFE ON THE INTERNET

HOW CAN I KEEP MY CHILD SAFE ONLINE?



Children love the Internet and go online to have fun, do homework, stay in touch with friends or sometimes buy things like books, games or music. Most of the time, children's Internet use is perfectly safe and enjoyable.

But like everything in life, there are some risks. As a parent or carer, you can do a lot to reduce those risks:

- Choose the best Internet Service Provider (ISP) for you and your family
- Educate your child about staying safe
- Take protective measures to prevent children receiving unsuitable material.

Here, we tell you about the protective software you can get to block or filter material to your computer and how it can help keep your child safe. But first we explain a little more about choosing the right ISP for you, and talking to your child about Internet safety.

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE BEST INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER FOR ME?



Like most people, you will probably get the Internet at home by joining a particular Internet Service Provider (ISP). You can either have a regular subscription, 'pay as you go', when the cost of the telephone call will cover the cost of your connection to the Internet, or receive a service via other means (such as via cable TV).

You normally have to be over 18 to open an Internet account. So if a child has his or her own account, usually it should only be because an adult has provided it.

The ISP you choose can be very important. As part of the packages they offer you, some go to great lengths to help keep children safe online. They may provide educational material, safety information or protective software. Others may do very little, so you need to ask what they offer and choose the best ISP for you.

HOW CAN I HELP EDUCATE MY CHILD ABOUT STAYING SAFE ONLINE?

As a parent or carer, the very best thing you can do is to discuss your child's Internet use openly with them:

- Pass on essential safety tips (See the Home Office leaflet 'Keep Your Child Safe on the Internet')
- Agree what is acceptable and safe online behaviour and use of the Internet
- Encourage your child to talk to you about anything that worries them.

If your child knows they can talk to you about anything that they come across online that they don't like, that is the single best way of keeping them safe.

There are plenty of great web sites that can help educate you and your child about Internet safety. Many provide excellent advice, guidance and publications for parents and children. Examples include:

- <http://ispsafety.ngfl.gov.uk>
- www.nch.org.uk
- www.netsmartz.org
- www.parentsonline.gov.uk.

Some of these present safety information in an entertaining, often interactive, way that is suitable for younger children.

Schools are also doing more to make children aware of the risk of the Internet. There is, for example, an Internet Proficiency Scheme for KS2 pupils.

CAN I BLOCK UNSUITABLE MATERIAL?



Making sure your child understands the risks is the most important thing. But there is now a wide range of software that you can use to reinforce or underpin those choices.

WHERE CAN I GET THIS SOFTWARE?



Some is free, many websites will let you try before you buy, some is included in a broader package of services (for example as part of your Internet connection) and you can buy some separately.

The most comprehensive list of protective software we know about is at www.getnetwise.org. This site lists a variety of software products and the features they offer. It does not rate how well they work. Many websites will let you try software free, so you can find out which best suits your family's needs.

A smaller UK based site is www.parentsonline.gov.uk.

WHAT CAN THIS SOFTWARE DO?

Many software packages combine more than one of the safety features explained here.

You can use them to:

CONTROL CONTENT



What's the risk

The vast majority of information and images on the Internet are legal, decent and honest. But there is still plenty that is either unsuitable for children, for example pornography or violent material, inaccurate or even illegal, such as child pornography.

CONTROL SHOPPING AND ENSURE PRIVACY



What's the risk

Children may not realise the risks of handing out their own or their parents' bank or credit card details, or they might allow their own, or your email address to go on a commercial mailing list that will result in it being bombarded with a huge amount of unwanted (and often very offensive) emails (known as 'spam'). Typically spam tries to sell or promote something or in some other way tries to persuade you to part with hard-earned cash.

HELP CHILDREN MANAGE THEIR TIME AND HEALTH



What's the risk

You may worry that your child is spending too much time on the Internet, instead of getting fresh air or spending time with friends in other ways. Too much time spent staring at a screen or typing can also affect a child's physical health, for example causing eyestrain, backache or repetitive strain injury.

MONITOR AND RECORD INTERNET ACTIVITY OR STOP (DISABLE) INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMES



What's the risk

You may be concerned as to possible inappropriate contacts that your children are having online or files, e.g. pornographic images, that they may be receiving and sharing with friends.

The rest of this section tells you more about the protection you can get from different software, under the headings above. Remember that, as we have already mentioned, a lot of software will offer you more than one of these safety features.

CONTROL CONTACTS



What's the risk

Emails, chat rooms and instant messaging are just three ways of making contact with others over the Internet. Once a child is in touch with someone online, they can quickly move to contact offline through their mobile or other phone. In making online contact children can unwittingly give away information about themselves, where they live or go to school. Online communication also allows someone who means a child harm to pretend to be someone or something they are not in order to gain a child's trust.

IMPROVE YOUR COMPUTER'S SECURITY



What's the risk

Computer viruses or even people hacking into your computer (someone gaining unauthorised access to your computer) can cause serious damage. Some viruses can hand over complete control of your computer to someone who may be far away, but who can use it, for example to send spam to others.

CONTROL CONTENT

CONTROL CONTENT



Sometimes children can stumble across unsuitable material on the Internet simply by mis-typing a website address or because they tried to guess it and got it slightly wrong. It always pays to know the correct address and type it in carefully.

There are several software packages that can restrict or block certain types of picture of text, or entire websites, from reaching your computer. However, none of these products are 100% effective.

Different companies block different kinds of material or sites, so you need to know how these products work. These packages work in one or more of the following ways:

- By blocking sites from a banned list, sometimes called a 'NOT list'
- By blocking sites which contain particular words, such as sexual words or swearing
- By allowing the user only to access sites from an approved list, sometimes called a 'YES list'
- By analysing the images and content of a site and blocking those which contain unwanted material

- By allowing website publishers to 'self-rate' their own material and then working with web browsers to block sites that fail to meet agreed rules.

Most of the programmes that work with a 'Yes list' or a 'Not list' will come with initial lists that the company has put together. But you will be able to add to or subtract from their choices. This means you do not have to accept their verdict on what is and what is not suitable for your children.

Some people prefer self-rating programmes because they allow the website publishers themselves to have an input. There is less chance of something being blocked either because it has been seen wrongly or because it is against the policies of the rating company. For example, some software packages have blocked web sites that criticise the company's products and services.

A lot of the software will block, not only websites, but also banned words in chat rooms, newsgroups, emails and so on.

To find out more...

Visit: www.getnetwise.org or www.parentsonline.gov.uk

CHILDREN'S SEARCH ENGINES



There is a growing number of search engines which link the user only to child-friendly sites.

You might agree with your child that they use only these. They are certainly worth trying, but they are unlikely to be 100% effective in screening out unacceptable content.

To find out more...

Visit: <http://www.searchbox.co.uk/kids.html>

WALLED GARDEN



A walled garden is a collection of web sites or one huge site with a wide range of content, which the service provider has approved as child-friendly.

You can find services offering this kind of protected environment by going online. They usually charge an annual or monthly subscription. As part of the service, you may be able to get access to the wider Internet for older members of the family by using a password.

Walled gardens, as their name suggests, can offer a high level of security. Their main disadvantage is usually the restricted amount of Internet resources within the walled garden.

Some walled garden systems also take a great deal of care about whom they allow to join in the first place. They go to extra lengths to establish the person's true identity, for example by only allowing someone to join if their teacher has verified their age, address and identity.

You can find details of two of the UK's largest walled gardens at **www.gridclub.com** and **www.schoolmaster.net**

CONTROL CONTACTS

CONTROL CONTACTS



It is easy for children to make contact with others over the Internet, to have online 'conversations' and to strike up online friendships. Emails, Instant Messaging and chat rooms are probably the best known ways for making online friends. But it is also possible to swap files, films or music, enter discussion groups and play interactive games online.

Contact that might start in one of these ways can move to text messaging on mobile phones, or speaking to someone you meet online on a fixed or mobile phone. Some computer games played online allow children to combine a mixture of voice and text, and using a webcam (a digital camera linked to the Internet) allows you to see the other person.

EMAILS



Some software packages let you draw up a list of people your children can send emails to or receive them from. Anyone else trying to contact your child will either be blocked altogether, or their email will be sent to you so you can decide whether or not your child can receive it.

Sometimes this software comes as part of your email service from your Internet Service Provider, at no extra cost. Others come as part of a wider package of safety features, or some can be bought just for this purpose. One of the advantages is that it also cuts out **spam**.

CHAT



Most chat rooms are unsupervised, or unmoderated, where no one is recording the identities of the people who use them or the conversations that happen there.

There are some moderated chat rooms specially designed for children. But we don't yet have any standard or widely accepted definition of what is good moderation, so it may be a good idea to check the policies different chat room providers follow. Do they, for example, run police checks on the people they employ as moderators? How are moderators trained and supervised? Do they rely on people to moderate chat rooms, or on technology to recognise unsuitable conversations?

In January 2003 the Home Office Task Force on child protection on the internet published Good Practice Models and Guidance for the Internet Industry on Chat Services, Instant Messaging, and web-based Services. This recommended that moderators of services aimed at children should be police checked. Read the full guidance document at www.homeoffice.gov.uk

MONITORING CONTACTS



Some chat room service providers keep a record of all the conversations that take place. This could be helpful if something went wrong, for example, your child felt harassed or bullied, and you need to trace what happened.

You can also buy software that can record, not just everything that is said in a chat room, but also monitor and record every single keystroke made by the person using the computer, as well as everything that appears on the screen. That would allow you to record conversations that take place using **Instant Messaging**, or in **private chat areas**.

If you decide to monitor a computer used by your child in this way, think about letting them know. Otherwise, if your child found out, they may feel you were 'spying' on them, which could damage their sense of trust and your relationship with them.

FILE SHARING AND SWAPPING



Many children use **file-sharing** software to swap music and games over the Internet. Some of the best known are Kazaa, Gnutella, eDonkey and Morpheus.

Sometimes there is a legal question about who has the copyright to the material being shared. But you also need to know that file swapping software can provide your child with access to a wide range of materials on other people's computers. Computer viruses and pornography can also be passed on in this way.

If you have concerns about file sharing software, you could uninstall them, disable them or monitor the way your child uses them (see below).

OTHER SOFTWARE USES & MORE INFORMATION

CONTROL SHOPPING AND ENSURE PRIVACY



There is plenty of software that will automatically delete credit card numbers, home or school addresses, email addresses, telephone numbers or other personal details if they are typed into a message that is going to be sent to someone else over the Internet. They have the advantage of preventing a child from joining a new online service, such as a chat room, without asking you first.

HELP YOUR CHILD MANAGE THEIR TIME AND HEALTH



It would be ideal to agree with your child how often and for how long they are allowed to go online. But if you find it difficult to enforce the rules, you can get software to limit online sessions. Some of these allow you to specify the times of day, the days of the week or the amount of time that a computer can connect to the Internet. To find out more about posture, eye strain etc. visit: www.hse.gov.uk

IMPROVE YOUR COMPUTER'S SECURITY

There are several things you can do to improve your computer's security without buying specialist software, for example alter your web browser or email software. You will need to feel confident that you know what you are doing before you make any changes, but they can be very effective and will cost you nothing. If you want to get protective software, there is more information below.

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE



A virus can come from material downloaded from a website, sent with an email or from a floppy disc or CD ROM which your child might borrow from a friend. Anti-virus software can detect and destroy a virus in your computer files. You can either buy it or download it from websites. New viruses are being circulated all the time, so you need to update your virus programme regularly.

FIREWALL

This software can protect a single computer or a network of computers from someone else gaining unauthorised access while you are connected to the Internet.

A worrying threat comes from 'Trojan horse' programs which can take control of your computer's operating system and pass on information in your files. More home users are also buying firewall software so they can feel more secure about using their computer online for banking and shopping, especially those who have 'always on' Internet connections. Like anti-virus software, you can get firewall software from websites or you can buy it in computer stores.

MONITOR AND RECORD INTERNET ACTIVITY OR DISABLE INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMES



Many of the products discussed here will also be able to monitor and record a wider range of activities which might be taking place on your children's computer. Monitoring software can record all websites visited, conversations in chat rooms and emails that your child has opened, even when they have been deleted. If you agree with your child that their Internet activity is being recorded in this way then it offers you another layer of supervision if they are using the computer alone. Some of the software will also allow you to disable specific programmes, such as file swapping programmes.

To find out more...

Visit: www.getnetwise.org. or <http://ispsafety.ngfl.gov.uk>

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?



You can find out more from web sites, books and magazines.

WHICH? magazine, published by the Consumers' Association, has articles, surveys and evaluations including some related to Internet use and Internet filtering products. The May 2000 issue has a comparison of Internet Filtering products written for home users. You should find a copy of current and previous issues in your local public library. There is also an extensive website with some content reserved for subscribers only. <http://www.which.net/>

PIN Internet filtering software report

The Department for Education & Skills asked The Parents Information Network (PIN) to independently evaluate Internet filtering software programs. You can see their report, which contains guidance and their evaluation of a range of filtering products on the PIN website.

<http://www.pin.org.uk/filtering/index.htm>

The Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Children In Cyberspace by Parry Aftab

This book is a comprehensive guide to online safety. It includes a section on filtering software. ISBN 0-07-709674-6

Parents Online has been created by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to promote home school links by helping parents understand the role of computers and the Internet in learning. Its pages on safety online contain information for parents and children. <http://www.parentsonline.gov.uk/safety/index.html>

NCH launched IT OK to campaign for safe and equal access to IT for all children, and this site contains information which promotes the importance of Internet safety for all children. <http://www.nch.org.uk/itok/>