

Tips to respect and protect teens using the Internet

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By: *The University of Missouri Cooperative Extension*

Although raising teenagers has always been a challenging part of parenting, it is more different now than it has ever been. One of the biggest challenges parents of teens face today is all the technology that is available. Social networking sites, e-mails, and text messages enable teens to have relationships with almost anyone. This new technology can make it difficult for parents to know what their teens are doing and with whom they are spending their time.



Just as you show interest in your teens' everyday activities, it is also important to keep tabs on what they're doing online. Talk with teens to learn who they are chatting with, but avoid sounding accusatory. Parents should think of the Internet as another public place where teens are going. Just as you would monitor what teens do when they leave home, you should also monitor teens' online activities.

The following list of tips can help you keep teens safe on the Internet:

Monitor usage: When possible, keep computers in public areas of the home rather than in bedrooms. Set limits on when and how often teens use the Internet. When computers are used in teens' bedrooms, have them keep the door open and position the monitor so it is visible from the hallway. Install parental monitoring software to limit what sites are accessible and periodically visit the list of recently visited sites to ensure that only appropriate sites have been accessed.

Monitor content: Know what social networking sites your teens are using and join those sites to keep an eye on their profiles. In the past, parents only needed to ask about who their teens were friends with at school, but now it is just as important to monitor who they are friends with online.

Discuss safety: Warn teens about the dangers of chatting with strangers and establishing online relationships with people they don't know. Many tweens and teens use social networking sites to talk with friends they know from school, but others become friends with strangers.

Set privacy settings: Help teens set their online privacy settings at appropriate levels to limit who is able to view their profiles. If privacy settings are too loose, their profiles are available to virtually anyone on the Internet.

Set information guidelines: Make teens aware of potential far-reaching consequences of their postings. Some teens share personal thoughts and feelings just as they would in a private journal or diary. Sharing too much personal information can make them vulnerable to others. In addition, college admissions staff or potential employers may view their postings, which could potentially hurt their future prospects.

Be aware: Despite parents' efforts to monitor teens' behavior and activities, teens are able to find ways around them. For example, teens may delete their Internet histories, hide their phone when sending a text message, or create profiles using a different name or age so parents cannot find it.