

Keeping your child safe on the web

Ensure your child has a healthy online attitude

By Chanelle Dupré

Four steps to regulate use



Developing a strategic plan for children's Internet access

The Internet. It was a technical haven -- a place that allowed the family to stay connected, to find the information we needed to do our homework and to become fully self-sufficient and efficient. Before the internet, we would have had to suffer through long line-ups to make purchases, to book time off from work to run errands or to wait on hold for someone to answer a simple question. Now we have the freedom to book our vacation online, do banking, make bill payments all without having to leave our home. Though this techy age has been a real blessing for single parents, such as myself, allowing us to buy more time doing likeable things, there arose some new challenges because there was such little time to monitor their use.

The computer essentially became a silent babysitter that kept the kids preoccupied for some time. But with it, the children soon discovered ways to have their own kind of "fun" playing games, chatting on messenger with friends, sending out chains of email jokes and spending endless hours surfing. Like the TV, it became the babysitter. The only time I had peace and quiet was when they were busy on the Internet. The funny thing is, I felt guilty. It's not that I'm completely opposed to kids using the Internet for games, but when I see them becoming socially withdrawn and developing an addiction to this machine, I became slightly aggravated.

I attempted to convince the kids that the Internet is a "privilege" not a necessity. After many struggles of trying to get the kids to sit down to dinner on time, to complete their homework, to regulate their access time, to prevent them from being exposed to nudity, to maintain an interest in other extra-curricular activities, I finally decided to confront them by negotiating access time. It didn't work. So I decided to take various measures and became vigilant about its use. Once they were hooked, I had to use a combination of methods and tackle it on a graduated approach to change their habitual use of the Internet:

Regulating excessive use

1. Weekly Activities Chart: I built a weekly activities chart for both the kids that identified time for play, homework, physical activities and use of the Internet. I made it clear that Internet use for play is allocated only 30 – 60 minutes on school days depending on homework load and is a reward for completion of homework or for accomplishing other priorities on the list.

2. Distinguish use of Internet: I explained to the kids what the different types of Internet uses are. I ensured they understood when and how they can use it as a research tool for their homework or as an information resource to satisfy their curious minds.

3. Restrict access by use of login: I enlisted the assistance of my tech savvy brother to help me restrict their access to the main screen through a login with a password requirement. By naming yourself as the administrator, you obtain the user rights to override, to modify, to access and to set parameters of other users. This allows you to have full control of when they are allowed to use the Internet or let alone the computer.

4. Strategic modem placement: The modem provides you with multiple line access of the Internet. If you have one and have two or more computers hooked up, you can either disconnect the party you want to restrict access to, or, in extreme cases such as mine, place the modem in a room where you can lock it up "unhooked".

Ensuring appropriate use of the Internet

Monitoring access

1. Determine access level

Buying netgear to determine access level for safe and unsafe websites is one of the best ways to monitor Internet use. Sometimes, using the Internet tool menu bar to "block sites" is not enough. Netgear allows you to block non-specific sites by using "keywords" that appear on the domain name so as to prevent kids from stumbling into adult type sites.



2. Checking history

Checking history and the favourites folder can help you to keep track of websites they've visited. Now you've become a spy, but it's all for the good -- really.

Encouraging appropriate use

1. Internet use as an educational tool

Learning to use the Internet as a tool to find the information the kids need. Sometimes, the kids ask me questions for which I have no answers. This happens often. I may not be a walking encyclopaedia, but I am resourceful. I try and make it a point to write down their questions and encourage them to look up the answers with a Google search. When this becomes habit for them, they will become accustomed to using the Internet as their resource.

2. Bookmark sites for kids

Internet resources where kids can go to find information at their level, should be bookmarked under the Internet tools menu bar for easy access. These sites can beat laziness with just a click away.

3. Fun activities and educational games

Rather than having to ban games on the Internet altogether, why not find some fun educational games that challenge their minds.

Warm turkey

Strict vigilance would probably be greeted with complete hostility, rebellion, and overall loss in popularity with the kids when trying to regulate Internet use. The best approach is to introduce your new rules and regulations on a gradual basis. Don't go cold turkey, keep it warm for a bit. First, try to change their habitual use by presenting the kids with new ways to use the Internet. Play educational games or try researching on some interesting topics on websites designed for kids. Finally, introduce the new schedule, create the login and take action to restrict use to the degree that is comfortable for you. Not that I'm a control freak or anything, but I want to help them develop good habits and learn to appreciate the Internet as a reward and a tool.

How do you govern your kids' use of the Internet? [Discuss with other readers in our forums!](#)

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