

ADULT ISSUES

ParentLink guides use 'he' and 'she' in turn. Change to suit your child's sex.

The internet and mobile phones have completely changed our world. The internet has become central to how children and young people get information, learn, do school projects, connect with friends and family, and have fun. Mobile phones used to be a portable way to talk to people. Many of them now connect to the internet so you can do most of the things you would on an online computer.

The benefits of communication technology are immense. It's important for parents to recognise its role in children's lives. They've been born into the age of technology and it will be their future. Using it confidently is already second nature to many of them. However, this doesn't mean they know how to use it safely.

Your job as a parent is to keep them out of harm's way as they learn. You don't have to be an expert. Knowing where to find things out and get help is what's important. Knowledge, supervision and guidance are the best protection as well as having agreements about use, both at home and away from home. It's also important to set a good example.

Mobile phones

Many children and young people have their own mobile phone but parents can't always be there to supervise how it's used. Knowing the risks and having ways to avoid them is something you can teach your children.

Ways to be phone smart

For parents

- Discuss safe mobile phone use with your child or young person and agree about use at home and away from home.
- Think about phones in bedrooms. Being connected 24/7 can mean little sleep.
- Decide whether it's okay for them to have a phone which connects to the internet. It can be easy to run up a huge bill and hard to block inappropriate access.
- If you're happy for them to have a phone linked to the internet, contact the phone carrier to find out how to control access to adult content or services.

Knowledge, supervision and guidance are the best protection as well as having agreements about use, both at home and away from home.

For children and young people

Make sure she knows to:

- Only give her phone number or personal details to people she knows and trusts in the real world.
- Tell you about any phone contact that worries her.
- Keep her phone in a safe place and have a security password to stop others seeing personal information and contact lists. It's become common for phones to be stolen and used to send negative text or images to people on contact lists.
- Screen her calls or turn the phone off if she keeps getting contact she doesn't want. When phones are left on all the time a bully can make contact anywhere, any time.
- Not respond if she's contacted by someone she doesn't know, or asked to do something that doesn't feel okay. She needs to save the message or make a note of the number so you can do something about it.
- Not send photos she wouldn't want strangers to see. Once something is sent to someone, you've no control over where it might end up.
- Not send sexually explicit text or photos, or forward them on if someone sends them to her. Sending nude or sexual photos of herself or others under 18 years of age could be classed as possessing and distributing child pornography. This is a crime with serious penalties which could affect future employment.
- Report concerns through the Australian Federal Police website, ThinkUKnow www.thinkuknow.org.au



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The internet

The internet can provide valuable tools and experiences to build children's skills. Staying in control when you're online is the best way to enjoy it. Here are some cyber smart tips to manage the risks and make using the internet safer.

Cyber smart tips

- Have the online computer in a public area in your home.
- Avoid having a laptop that can be taken into a bedroom.
- If you have a home network, ensure your household modem is kept in a public area and access to the internet is managed through this modem.
- Learn about computers and the internet as a family. This way you can teach children how to question things and look out for potential dangers.
- Select a reliable Internet Service Provider (ISP) who can assist with cyber safety for children.
- Install virus scanners and blocking, filtering or monitoring software to protect your computer and restrict unsuitable access.
- Use parental control software and set updates to happen automatically.
- Make sure important documents are backed up regularly.
- Make agreements with children and young people about internet use. Consider their changing needs as they mature and become more cyber smart, as well as needs for privacy as they become more independent. Agreements could include:
 - time limits for any internet activity
 - ways you'll filter and monitor their use to ensure they're safe
 - internet use away from the home, including at homes of friends and family, on public computers, and when using mobile phones and other hand-held devices linked to the internet.
- Learn how to check what children are viewing:
 - know their 'online' names, email addresses and passwords
 - keep track of what's being looked at by checking 'Bookmarks' or 'Favourites', or 'Internet History' on their browser.
- Learn how to block unwanted contact on the sites they use. There should be a 'Help' or 'Safety' tab which tells you how to do this, or a 'Contact Us' tab so you can find out from the site administrator.
- The Australian Federal Police ThinkUKnow website www.thinkuknow.org.au tells you how to block contact on popular sites.
- Ask at your local library about free internet training sessions, written guides for safe internet searching, good websites for children and internet filters.
- Get a copy of your school's information technology (IT) policy and adapt it to suit your household.
- Encourage the school to provide regular cyber safety training for students as well as parents.
- Don't open pop-ups or links from people you don't know.
- Lead by example and don't send inappropriate mobile phone messages or play violent games in front of children.
- Visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Cyber Smart website www.cybersmart.gov.au for lots of great information, and how to protect your personal details.
- Report concerns about bullying, child pornography or other crime to Crime Stoppers www.crimestoppers.com.au or ThinkUKnow www.thinkuknow.org.au websites.
- If you think your child is in immediate danger, contact your local police or call 000.

Learn about computers and the internet as a family. This way you can teach children how to question things and look out for potential dangers.

Popular internet activities

The most popular ways children and young people use the internet include 'surfing the net', sending emails, instant messaging, watching online videos, playing computer games including multi-player games, visiting chat rooms and social networking. They also like to download music, games and videos.

SURFING THE 'NET'

Whilst the internet is a rich source of information, it's hard to know if it's all accurate or true because there are few controls on what can be posted. Although there are good standards for content on Australian sites, this isn't the case across the world. There isn't a system to guide parents about the proper age level for online content in the way there is for TV and films.

WAYS TO BE CYBERSMART

- Ensure there's a purpose for being online. Surfing without a reason is a bit like wandering the streets unsupervised.
- Have a list of okay sites to visit:
 - Cyber Smart Kids (ACMA) website www.cybersmart.gov.au has tips for safe internet use as well as good sites and resources for children, young people and parents
 - Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) website www.youngmedia.org.au has a list of some good children's sites.

ONLINE VIDEOS

- You can use a webcam, video camera or mobile phone to make online videos for posting on sites such as YouTube, Vimeo and even social networking sites.
- Other people can watch your videos and you can see theirs.
- There's little restriction on what videos get posted on the internet.

WAYS TO BE CYBERSMART

For children and young people

Let him know to:

- Restrict video sharing to friends and family and not list a web-cam on his online profile.
- Not do anything on camera if requested that makes him feel uncomfortable. He needs to say 'No', record the contact, log off and tell you about it so you can make a complaint.
- Talk to you before uploading any videos or starting to video chat with anyone.
- Tell you about anything he sees that worries him.

CHAT

The internet is a great way to meet and talk with friends and family through live chatrooms, video chat, instant messaging, blogs and message forums.

- Young people like using live chat but this can be more risky than the real world. You're often talking with strangers and you don't really know if they're who they say they are.
- Sexual predators can use chat rooms to pose as young people in order to lure victims so you need to be wary.
- Some chat rooms are supervised to make sure what people do and say is okay.
- A big risk in chat rooms, and social networking sites, is young people saying things about themselves or others which might seem funny at the time but could have a negative effect in the future. Young people can be impulsive and are still learning to think about consequences.
- Online video chat, including Skype, is like live chat with pictures and sound. A small video camera, or webcam, is attached to the computer so you can see the person you're talking to. You might need to download programs from the internet to use online video chat.

WAYS TO BE CYBERSMART

For parents

Be aware of internet slang and popular terms young people use so you know what's being said. Keep an eye on chat use:

- 5–7 year olds—Limit chat sessions to real life friends and family, using instant message programs. Always supervise.
- 8–11 year olds—Limit chat sessions to monitored and approved sites, using instant message programs. Always supervise.
- 12–18 year olds—Get to know what chat programs and sites they're using and who they're talking to by visiting them yourself and encourage monitored or moderated chat rooms (an adult screens what's said before it goes public).

For children and young people

Make sure they:

- Restrict live video chat to people they know and trust in the real world. Use programs which have a video function such as instant message programs to increase safety.
- Only use live video chat in a public area of your home. Having webcams in bedrooms may tempt them to do or say something inappropriate.
- Never send photos to strangers. There's no control over how they might be used.
- Know how to think about consequences. Before disclosing things about themselves or others, consider if this is something they'd want a prospective employer to see.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking through sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter is a very popular way of staying in touch with family and friends.

- You can let people know what you've been doing, share pictures or videos, or play games together. It's a bit like hanging out at home with someone even if they're on the other side of the world.
- Social networking also provides a way for strangers to contact you, or for bullying to happen.
- Having friends is important to young people, which means they can be at risk of 'friending' people they don't know. This opens the door to strangers making contact and perhaps gathering personal information.
- You can get unwanted advertising or scams, or even have your identity stolen.
- Most social networking sites have age restrictions, but they're easy to get around.
- Children under 13 shouldn't be using these sites as they could be exposed to adult content.
- Whilst there are rules about what can be posted, the amount of daily traffic to social networking sites means they mostly rely on users reporting concerns.

WAYS TO BE CYBERSMART

For parents

Learn how to use social networking sites so you know how to supervise.

For children and young people

Make sure she:

- Lets you view her profile regularly, or 'friends' you on social networking sites she uses.
- Turns on privacy settings and regularly checks them to ensure her profile is only seen by people she wants.
- Learns how to block people she doesn't want contacting her.
- Talks to you before posting anything online, including photos and videos—she may not be able to remove them.
- Gets permission from others before putting their photos online.
- Knows that talking online is the same as real life; she must be respectful and never put anything about someone online that's a lie, harasses or bullies them.
- Uses an online nickname and checks with you before giving personal information.
- Is careful when making new friends online—they might not be who they say they are.
- Never agrees to meet a new online friend in the real world without you.
- Never responds to a contact which makes her feel uneasy.
- Learns how to save things said online in case you need to make a complaint.

COMPUTER GAMES

WAYS TO BE CYBERSMART

Many of these are harmless fun but you need to view the content to make sure it's okay. Some games are not suitable for all members of the family.

- Playing 'multi-player online games' is very popular with older young people and adults. Even though you're playing a game with lots of different players, you need to be careful. Some of them may be friends but you'll also be making contact and sharing information with strangers you know nothing about.
- Games and media images which have graphic violent or sexual content have been linked to emotional health problems in children, particularly younger ones. You'll need to be firm because the games some children like most are those which feature impact violence.
- Children exposed to lots of violent media are at risk of:
 - thinking it's okay to be aggressive
 - being insensitive to others being hurt
 - becoming scared of their world.

For parents

- Check the classification labels of any computer games you purchase.
- Check out what games he plays most often and ask to join in with him. Take note of his reactions as he plays the game. Does he become aggressive, frightened or upset?
- Limit the amount of time spent playing games.
- Install parental control software if the gaming device links to the internet.

Things to watch out for

CYBER BULLYING

Bullying online has become a real concern. Email, websites, chat rooms, social networking sites or instant messaging can be used to bully others. Cyber bullying can include teasing, sending nasty or threatening messages, embarrassing or damaging information or photos. It's against the law to threaten someone online.

WAYS TO BE CYBERSMART

For parents

- Contact the site administrator to have bullying content removed.
- Report bullying to her school if it's coming from another student. Schools have policies to protect students from bullying and can help stop it.
- Report any threats to the police.

For children and young people

Make sure she knows:

- Not to bully others. This includes not doing or saying anything online that she wouldn't do offline. What's said in the virtual world is recorded and could be there for others to see forever.
- To ignore messages from a bully. Bullies will often give up if they don't get a response.
- How to block or delete contacts on email, social networking sites and chat rooms.
- How to keep a record of bullying messages so she can report it.
- To tell a responsible adult if she knows about someone else getting bullied.

GETTING 'HOOKED'

Many children and young people spend a lot of time in front of screens, including TV and the computer. They can become absorbed and over-stimulated by cyberspace and fast moving games.

Too much exposure can have a negative impact on health, social habits and concentration.

It's important to have daily limits for all screen use and to look out for:

- Cutting back on time spent with friends, doing social things, having other hobbies, being outside or playing sports to use the computer.
- Staying up late to finish a game, missing out on school, homework or other responsibilities.
- Talking all the time about games and computer characters and copying what they do.
- Getting upset when asked to turn the computer off, becoming aggressive or withdrawn.
- Make sure regular breaks are taken and they stick to agreed daily limits. Visit the Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) website www.youngmedia.org.au for recommended amounts of screen viewing time for children of all ages.

Reminders

- The internet is a valuable tool for children and young people. It's up to parents to guide and supervise so they can learn to be 'critical' users.
- Being connected to peers through technology and learning ways to keep safe in the cyber world are important skills for young people to develop.
- Learn more about the internet and programs your child uses—become comfortable with the technology and enjoy using it yourself.
- Make sure they understand what bullying is and that they don't bully others.
- When they're making new friends online, be sure they're who they say they are. If meeting a new online friend in the real world, go with them.
- Model responsible use of phones and internet in front of children.
- If you don't feel okay about someone online or find information that worries you, report it to:
 - Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) www.acma.gov.au
 - Crime Stoppers www.crimestoppers.com.au
 - ThinkUKnow www.thinkuknow.org.au

Websites

www.acma.gov.au	Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)—make a report or complaint
www.crimestoppers.com.au	Crimestoppers—report concerns about bullying, child pornography or other crime
www.cybersmart.gov.au	Cyber Smart Kids—tips for safe internet use as well as good sites and resources for children, young people and parents
www.cyh.com	Parenting and child health information
www.parentlink.act.gov.au	Other parenting guides
www.raisingchildren.net.au	Raising Children Network—covering topics for parenting newborns to teens
www.thinkuknow.org.au	Australian Federal Police—Internet safety programs to support parents, carers and teachers; to report concerns
www.youngmedia.org.au	Young Media Australia (YMA)

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