

The Internet - A Two-edged sword and Children on The Internet - Monitoring for Safety

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The Internet - A Two-edged sword

The Internet is a fabulous place. It contains the largest collection of knowledge and reference materials ever assembled by man. Almost anything you want, can be found by surfin' the 'Net. You can start an Internet business like I did, look for a job, pass around your resume', make friends, share your hobbies and interests, meet people and make friends, or customize your own study course to pursue any interest, however strange, obscure, or unconventional. The 'Net Is by far, the greatest learning and communications tool ever devised. Every child in the country should be connected to the 'Net.... it would make up for the pitiful excuse for what is brazenly called "education" today. In the right hands, with the proper intent, the possibilities of the Internet are endless, and because of this, some users have become '*Net-addicted*', spending inordinate amounts of time, and even neglecting to eat or sleep while glued to the monitor, in search of...

Recently, a rash of child abuse and abduction cases have been featured in the NEWS. Unsuspecting children who either wandered off into the Badlands of the "alt" NewsGroups, Chat Rooms, or the thousands of pornographic web sites, and gotten themselves into serious trouble with predators who lurk in the dark corners of the online sewers. This situation, unfortunately, happens every single day. It is not only a Domestic problem, the implications are world-wide. The situation is not going to get any better, and legislation, attempts at censorship, "V"-chips and all of that nonsense, is just political rhetoric.... It's just smoke, blown by a cacophony of idiots and cretins who want something "cool" or "*risque*" to add to their *repertoire* of campaign baloney that people swallow hook, line, and sinker, and makes them pull the lever for the best (or the most believable) BS-artist on election day.

As responsible corporate citizens, we at Net4TruthUSA will not tolerate these activities, in what we consider to be our *virtual place of business*. Any such activity we observe, will be investigated and reported to the proper authorities, and will be pursued with a vengeance if it's *in our face*.

The general public is too eager to put off their responsibilities onto elected officials, and the people running for office are all too happy to assume the position of being able to deliver on the most ridiculous and ludicrous promises ever conceived in the mind of man. Internet censorship will never, ever, ever happen. It is not technologically possible, it is not politically expedient, and there isn't enough money in the Good Lord's creation, to pay the army of people it would take to do it. The government would have to monitor everything going across all of the phone lines all around the world. They would have to get every little Banana Republic on the planet to agree to the plan, and enforce the regulations. If you think it can be done, I have a bridge in Brooklyn that you may want to invest in.

The answer to protecting your children against 'Net Lurkers is YOU. It is YOUR responsibility - no one else's. If you leave your kid glued to the 'Net alone and unsupervised, don't blame Washington or the Governor's office, if he or she gets nasty e-mail, or wanders off into one of the illicit "Chat Rooms", and gets involved with a Lurker.... blame yourself.... And don't expect to shag off your responsibility on a piece of software either. Software can be defeated or un-installed. Kids are not stupid. Most children today are a lot smarter and resourceful than we adults give them credit for. The only problem is that the maturity of their judgement doesn't match the level of their intelligence or ingenuity. That's where PARENTS come in.

Get involved. Surf the 'Net with your child, just don't let them wander around Cyberspace by themselves. And if you're one of those people who thinks "I'm too old to learn computers", or "I can't learn to do this", my advice to you is:

WAKE UP and GET A LIFE !!

Don't leave your young children wander around the 'Net alone!! The Internet is like the city of Chicago, or New York. Walking around the business district, you're pretty safe, but turn the corner and walk a few blocks, and you literally take your life in your hands.

The 'Net ain't Mister Roger's neighborhood. Make believe you're in Chicago, or in Manhattan. Let your child explore, but keep them from wandering too far off, and don't let them walk around the proverbial corner. If you suspect something's not right, investigate (see the following article). Do not hesitate to call the police if you find something is amiss.



Children on The Internet - Monitoring for Safety

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With the recent rash of Internet-related crimes perpetrated on youngsters by what I prefer to call, for lack of a more descriptive term “Lurkers”, I am posting this reference material as a public service, so that parents, teachers, and responsible adults can have the technical knowledge to determine if their children, or children in their care, have been engaging in inappropriate activities on the Internet, or have been contacted by “Lurkers”.

I started a small business on the Internet, in October 1994. One year later, by the presence of our web site alone, with no other advertising or promotion, we had grown exponentially, and had the potential for a very bright future, into which we would take as many good people along as we can, because our philosophy is that all true success is built upon helping others to achieve success.

I, as an author, firmly believe in the First Amendment, and freedom of speech. However, some of what goes on in “the shadows” of the Internet can hardly be called “free speech” by any stretch of the imagination.

The purpose of this article is to teach you, in a few pages, what to look for when you are supervising a child using a computer connected to the Internet.

STEP 1 - Observation

Being alert is a good first step. However, if you don't have a clue what to be alert for, it can be difficult to keep your eyes open so-to-speak. Some things to look for:

The first sign that something may be amiss is if your child suddenly changes the screen, or switches tasks when you walk into the room. This is easy to do with a web browser, it merely takes a right-click in Netscape to back up a page, or a click of a button on the taskbar to go to something totally different.

Late night sessions on the ‘Net are usually not an indication of trouble, unless it gets out of hand. It may merely be ‘Net addiction, which is not inherently dangerous, but then again, it may be something else entirely. If it gets out of hand, investigate the activities that are keeping him / her glued to the keyboard all those hours.

Getting personal letters in the mail (snail mail) from out-of-town, or from places where you don't know anyone, may be a sign of trouble. You may not be able to *legally* open the envelope yourself, so ask that it be shown to you. If you meet resistance, brush it off, let it slide, then take a look at the computer (see step 4 and 5). Anything suspicious should be investigated by an expert.

Phone calls out of town, or to numbers of people you don't personally know, may be an indication that your child is calling a Lurker. Your phone bills should be examined for any suspicious activity.

STEP 2 - Supervision

Obviously, the child should be left free to explore, and there are several Internet supervisor programs which are available, that effectively block access to the thousands of web sites that deal in pornography, and other inappropriate materials. As with all software, nothing is foolproof. If you haven't installed such software on your system, it may be a good idea to do so.

The "content" feature of the Windows Operating System {START / CONTROL PANEL / INTERNET OPTIONS / CONTENT ADVISOR /CONTENT} is the minimum protection you should set up on a child's computer, before he / she is allowed to use it. Since the child would also have access to PCs outside your home, and E-mail accounts are free to anyone for the asking, logically, direct supervision should be your first line of defense if you want your child to gain the benefits of being online, without being exposed to the mortal dangers which lurk within easy reach. In order to maintain a modicum of control, your child's school, and the parents of your child's friends should cooperate with your efforts in this area.

STEP 3 - Participate

Nothing will ever take the place of direct supervision. However, hovering over your child's shoulder like a hawk ready to swoop, will not go over too well. Getting involved yourself is a better solution. Share the computer time, and help each other pursue mutual interests. Of course, your child can have access to the Internet almost anywhere, so a level of trust has to be established here.

STEP 4 - Bookmarks

In Netscape (or on any Web browser), log onto the Internet, then pull down the BOOKMARKS menu, and examine what you see there. Usually the descriptions will pretty-much describe the web sites the links go to. However, the links can be re-named by the user, so while you're there, click on a few of the more innocuous looking ones, just to make sure they go where they're supposed to go. After you click on a link, do NOT go any further. Use the BACK button to return to the bookmark screen, to avoid "contaminating" the visited links history file.

STEP 5 - Global Disk Search

Without advocating the invasion of privacy, there is nothing wrong with doing a "global search" of the machine for certain key words, phrases, and URL's. Windows' SEARCH feature {START / FIND / Files and Folders / Advanced} can be used to search for files containing text. When doing the search, if a file pops up as "containing" any of the key words listed below, examine the file to see what it contains. If you get a "hit" on any of the NewsGroup keywords, it is most definitely a sign of trouble. Copy the file containing the text to a blank diskette, then have it looked at by someone who knows how to interpret it, or have it examined by a PC-forensic specialist at your local police station. If there is noone qualified locally, don't just forget about it. Whatever you do, DO NOT confront the child with it until you know exactly what is happening. The reason for this is that you don't want to alert any Lurkers that you're on to them. In the hands of a qualified PC-forensics specialist, any Lurkers can be traced and caught in the act of whatever they're up to.

To see if there has been any illicit NewsGroup activity, use the Windows SEARCH (see above) for the following text. Any "hits" on the NewsGroup keywords are klaxon horn, flashing red light alarms, signaling DANGER. Do not enter the comments in italics. The "*alt*" NewsGroup category stands for "*alternate*". The categories listed are the major NewsGroups, and their URL's will probably be listed in threaded messages from other, less popular, but similar NewsGroups.

NEWSGROUPS: Use the Search Files and Folders / Advanced to look for:

alt.sex	<i>several dozen alt categories exist - this keyword will flag all that occur</i>
alt.binaries	<i>binaries are usually photographs of one sort or another</i>
alt.teens	<i>a very popular category - thousands of messages are posted daily</i>
alt.personals	<i>personal ads similar to newspapers, however, most of these are uncensored</i>
alt.gayteen	<i>the title of this NewsGroup speaks for itself...</i>
alt.pedophilia	<i>as does this one.</i>

E-MAIL: To search for any suspicious E-mail, search for the following phrases:

meet me
come see me
visit me
bus ticket
train ticket
plane ticket
sending you money for
I'll be wearing

(And any other phrases that occur to you that may indicate correspondence which may be a lure for a meeting, indications of drug use, or whatever you suspect). When you search for a word or a phrase, don't forget that the computer conducts a LITERAL search. In other words, if you're looking for a word, and you misspell it, or the word you are looking for is misspelled, the search won't find it. Conduct a search for difficult or commonly misspelled words by entering all of the spelling variations that are likely. Windows searches are case insensitive, so capitalization doesn't matter. The Windows Operating System environment is sufficient to conduct a preliminary search. There are specialized software tools that are required to conduct a more in-depth analysis, or to perform forensic data recovery of messages that may have been intentionally deleted. Some E-mail services such as www.BigString2.com allow the sender to control deletion of e-mails he sends. However, there most always is a trace of the file that can be recovered - IF it hasn't been digitally overwritten by a security program such as BC-Wipe, or Norton's Security Suite.

STEP 6 : EXAMINE THE BROWSER'S CACHE - Photos and graphics that are displayed on web sites are retrieved by the browser, and usually stored on the user's hard disk in a *first-in, first-out* buffer called a "cache". The cache stores images and web pages (HTM files) locally, so that when a user returns to a particular page (on the 'Net), the image gets retrieved from the user's disk drive instead of having to be transmitted again over the phone lines. The larger (in size) the disk cache, the faster the browser will perform. There is a point of diminishing returns on the size of cache/performance of browser, but that's not important here. Use a graphics program like *Graphics Converter Gold* (IMSI Inc.) To view all the GIF's and JPG's in the directory.

**If you determine that your child is involved with a Lurker,
PLEASE CALL THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY.**



CONSULTATION

If you are having difficulty determining if your computer is being used for illicit activity, and you fear your child's safety may be at risk, you should immediately call the police. If you need technical assistance beyond what this document provides, the best thing to do is to seek the assistance of a friend who is familiar with the Internet, and knows his way around computers. If you don't have these resources at your disposal, and have a crisis or a critical situation on your hands, I offer you my technical expertise. Please don't call and tie up my business phone with dumb hypothetical questions. If you have what you feel is a critical concern, please feel free to call at any hour, day or night. There is no fee or charge for the consultation - I do this as a public service.

If you need an expert witness, I may be available depending on the situation. There is a charge for this service. I cannot be paid to bias or skew my testimony. I deal in facts. I deal in irrefutable evidence. I will NOT prostitute myself for any amount of money. If you ask me to, it will be the biggest mistake you'll ever make.

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