

# Making sure the Internet is safe for your kids

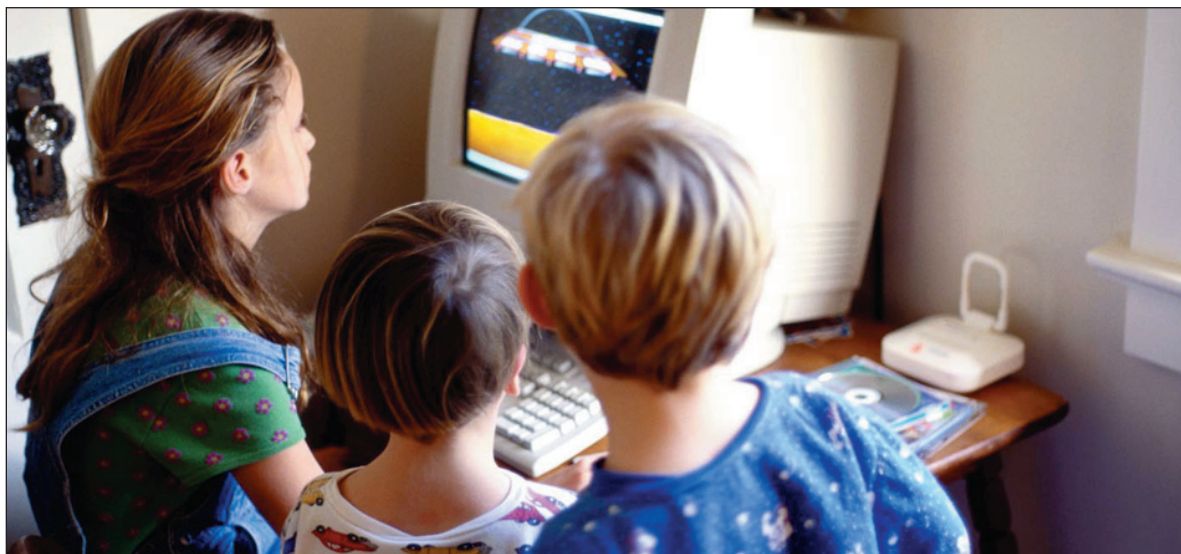
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Special to The IFP

One of the most frequently asked questions I receive from concerned parents is whether parents should shut the Internet off to their kids. While I can understand the fear that may rule over the family computer, parents overwhelmed by the dangers of the Internet are better to open themselves up to the Internet through education instead of unplugging the computer.

The Internet provides our children with a peek into art, cultures, geographies and information that may be otherwise unavailable. This includes immediate access to the latest news, research, photos and maps. Likewise, the interactivity of the Internet offers games, virtual pets and stories which help kids to be entertained and broaden their horizons. The problem however is that others can also interact with kids online, and sometimes be exposed to inappropriate or "unsavory" information that kids would not come into contact with in the outside world.

The Internet can be safe—the key is to treat it just as you would any other destination that is desirable to your kids.

- Learn the basics about the Internet and encourage your kids to tell you what they do online, who they want to communicate with and why. This kind of open conversation about the Internet



will continue as your kids mature.

- Use TV time, or for younger kids, game or story time as an opportunity to go online together and learn. Great educational resources exist on the Internet.

- Look into an Internet service that is really intended for kids.

AOL Canada recently launched a service called KOL ([www.aolforkids.ca](http://www.aolforkids.ca)) which combines education, games and websites approved

for kids.

- Use tools such as timers and email controls to keep track of what your kids are doing online even when you can't sit with them.

- Make sure to keep your com-

puter in a family room or common area, not the child's bedroom.

By setting ground rules, using a kid-friendly Internet service working together, you and your kids can have healthy, fun and educational experiences online. Think of it as another layer of street-proofing: Cyberproofing.

If you have questions for AOL Canada's 'Net Mom', Karen Robbins, or need tips about online safety visit: [www.aolforkids.ca/online-safety](http://www.aolforkids.ca/online-safety).

—News Canada

## Recommended websites for kids

Finding good Internet sites for your kids can be a challenge. Whether games, cartoons, news, sports, or homework help is what you are looking for, this listing of great sites for kids will help get you started.

For more information about the KOL internet service for kids and it's age appropriate online content visit: [www.aolforkids.ca](http://www.aolforkids.ca)

- [www.cartoonnetwork.com](http://www.cartoonnetwork.com)
- [www.cbc.ca/kids](http://www.cbc.ca/kids)
- [www.funology.com](http://www.funology.com)
- [www.howstuffworks.com](http://www.howstuffworks.com)
- [www.schoolnet.ca](http://www.schoolnet.ca)
- [www.sikids.com](http://www.sikids.com)
- [www.timeforkids.com](http://www.timeforkids.com)
- [www.virtualmuseum.ca](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca)
- [www.tvokids.com](http://www.tvokids.com)
- [www.zillions.org](http://www.zillions.org)

## How to be a cyber-savvy parent

Are your children starting to sound like they are talking in code, using "LOL" or "TTYL" in an email or instant message? Do you have a clear sense of what your child does online? If not, it might be time to become a cyber-savvy parent.

It is important to talk to your child about what they are doing online. Provide guidance on good, age appropriate sites that

you found on your own. Your Internet relationship with your child will grow over time.

Online services such as AOL have traditionally been popular with families for integrated parental control settings, and the online guardian feature that reports back to you with a list of where your child has been online. Try these features yourself and set custom controls for

email, web surfing and instant messaging for each child, as appropriate for their age. A new Internet service for kids called KOL ([www.aolforkids.ca](http://www.aolforkids.ca)) has also just been introduced, designed for kids up to the age of 12.

Finally, discuss online safety with teachers to ensure supervision is also a part of your child's educational environment.



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