

5 Easy Ways to Keep Your Kids Safe Online

Written by Johann Taylor
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Kids are spending more and more time connected to the grid these days than ever before, yet the internet is still a very new and dangerous place. Most of us wouldn't let our kids wander alone in dark city streets with complete strangers, but we are perfectly content to let them roam the internet without a second thought. Are your kids safe online? Here are 5 easy tips that will help you make sure they are.

1) Install a good anti-virus and keep it updated.

I've beat this one to death already in previous articles, so I won't go on too long about it. All I'll say is that it will be a thousand times harder to protect your kids on a system that has already been compromised. Malware can do anything from steal your information to redirect search results to take you to porn sites. Keep it off of your computer at all costs. There are many free anti-virus programs on the internet. I personally recommend Avast, and I highly recommend upgrading to the paid Internet Security edition. Anything is better than nothing though.

2) Use a trustworthy content filtering service and check the logs regularly.

A content filtering service is one of the best ways to make sure your kids don't accidentally (or intentionally) go anywhere they shouldn't on the internet. I really like [OpenDNS FamilyShield](#), and would recommend that everyone at least install the basic service whether or not you have kids. The great thing about OpenDNS is that it not only blocks adult content, but it also blocks phishing sites and sites that are known to host viruses/malware. Also, when set up properly on your router, OpenDNS is extremely hard for a child to defeat undetected. The best part though is that this service is provided free of charge as a community service.

Another good option for families with younger kids is [McGruff SafeGuard](#). This program is nice because parents can log into the McGruff site and see everything their kids have been doing online. The only down side is that SafeGuard is very strict and may annoy parents and older children by blocking sites not intended for young children. McGruff's program is also hard to defeat for the most part. I spent several hours unsuccessfully trying to shut it off for a client who forgot their password. There is one fatal flaw though that allows SafeGuard to be compromised

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which I will not discuss here for security reasons.

My recommendation is to install OpenDNS on your router in order to cover all of your computers at home, and install McGruff's Safeguard on any computers used by younger children.

3) Use a kid-safe browser

A kid-safe browser is a great way to keep young children safe on the internet while keeping your computer safe from young children. Basically a kid-safe browser locks down the computer and only allows children to go to sites that have been specifically white-listed. This is different from the content filters above that simply prevent children from reaching sites that have been blacklisted. For a site to be blacklisted or whitelisted it needs to be manually added.

New sites will not immediately appear on either list. This makes a service operating from a white list far safer and stricter at the expense of parents needing to manually add any site that is not on the list. A big plus of kid safe browsers is that a child also cannot exit the browser or use

other programs until a parent has entered the password. This keeps kids from messing with system settings or potentially breaking things. A good kid-safe browser that I recommend is

[Kidzui](#)

4) Insist on being a “Friend” on Facebook & Other Social Networks

Anytime your children have an account on a social networking site whether it be Facebook, Twitter, or Google Plus, you should make sure you also have an account and are one of their “friends.” I would also recommend knowing their login and password so that you can also read

their private messages. Some parents see this as an invasion of privacy, but it is a necessary one. Kids don't think before they post. My sister loves to announce to the world that they are going on vacation for two weeks (in other words, “Come steal my parents' TV. There's no one home to stop you!”) Parents with young children should especially keep a close eye on their children's profiles (by the way, if they are under 13 years old it is technically illegal for them to have an account on Facebook etc.). A lot of parents are under the misconception that only their kids' friends can see their private information. Unfortunately, there is no way for you to know how many of their friends' accounts may have been compromised. Also, kids have been known to “friend” people at random that they do not even know in real life. Make sure that

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profiles have been sanitized of any private information such as phone numbers, addresses, even the

name of a child's school. I could go on for hours about how I think social networking is the black hole of the internet and the problems it causes, but I probably lost your attention already anyway. In short, be smart and realize that your kids won't always be.

5) Educate your kids, & supervise them regularly

The best and most effective way to make sure that your kids are safe online, is to educate them in safe internet use from the beginning. Supervise them at a young age, and have regular talks about internet safety. This will require you to also educate yourself and to occasionally go outside your comfort zone. The sad fact is that no matter what safeguards you put in place, your kids can find a way around them if they really want to. The only way to prevent this is to make sure that they understand the dangers and how to avoid them.

Unfortunately in the last 15 years or so parents have gone from an attitude of caution and paranoia towards the internet to one of utter complacency. I still remember the days of not being allowed to use my real name in my email address or anywhere online. My parents didn't even let me mention what state I lived in. Thanks to them, I lived in constant fear that everyone I met online was a potential serial killer or child molester. This sounds horrible, but this level of paranoia is what kept me safe as a kid, and although I don't advocate returning entirely to that mind set, I am very worried by the amount of private information that we choose to make publicly accessible these days.

Please take an active role in making sure that your kids are safe. We are here to answer your questions, and help in any way we can.