

Internet Safety Tips for Parents: How safe are we?

Imagine yourself walking in a strange city with your family. How safe would you feel? You would probably be a little nervous. You know that the city is huge, and you are not sure where you are. Certainly, there are great things to do with your family, but you need to be careful which people to interact with and you don't want to end up in a dangerous neighbourhood.

By comparison, the Internet might seem like a friendly place. All of your friends are there. Your children can play, learn, create, connect and find almost any kind of information they need.

Despite the Internet bringing huge benefits to our lives, in many ways it can be just as scary as an unknown city. The Internet connects you to everyone around the world, which also means that anyone around the world can connect to you. Some of these people use the Internet to hurt others.

So here is the question, would you allow your child to go around an unknown city unsupervised? Of course not! However, that's exactly what happens if your child has unrestricted and unmonitored access to the Internet.

"It is clear life has changed – the Internet has affected people's lives in many new ways and we don't know where this is headed. This is a very important, very complex issue for society that is going to be debated for the next 50 years." Larry Page, co-founder of Google, May 2010, quoted in The Guardian

Here are some tips parents can take to protect their children while using the Internet:

- Talk to your child and listen to what they are saying to you.
- Explore the Internet together, taking an interest in the websites they use and enjoy. Talking to them about what they do on-line gives you the chance to discuss safe behaviour
- Agree a list of websites, games and apps that they can access.
- Explain how pictures, videos and comments are difficult to remove from the Internet, and once posted can be shared widely with people they don't know.
- Agree that you can look at your child's phone and other devices from time-to-time.
- Agree to take regular breaks away from the screen to do something different.
- Be aware that other devices such as mobile phones and tablets also need to be supervised - appropriately, considering your child's age and ability.
- Encourage them to tell you if something they see online upsets them.
- Set up parental controls on all internet-enabled devices (including phones, tablets, game consoles and smart TVs).
- **Ensure your child knows what to do if someone they don't know contacts them, e.g. ask you for advice.**

Taking an active role in supervising your children's Internet activities will help ensure that they benefit from them without being exposed to potential dangers. Our recommendation would be that people under the age of 16 should not be allowed on the Internet without supervision.