

# Top 10 Internet Safety Tips for Parents

<http://www.webwise.ie>

## 1. Discover the Internet together

Be the one to introduce your child to the Internet. For both parent and child it is an advantage to discover the Internet together. Try to find web sites that are exciting and fun so that together you achieve a positive attitude to Internet exploration. This could make it easier to share both positive and negative experiences in the future.

## 2. Agree with your child rules for Internet use in your home

Try to reach an agreement with your child on the guidelines which apply to Internet use in your household. Here are some tips to get started:

- Discuss when and for how long it is acceptable for your child to use the Internet
- Agree how to treat personal information (name, address, telephone, e-mail).
- Discuss how to behave towards others when gaming, chatting, e-mailing or messaging.
- Agree what type of sites and activities are OK or not OK in our family.

## 3. Encourage your child to be careful when disclosing personal information.

It is important to be aware that many web pages made for children ask them for personal information in order to access personalised content. Being conscious of when and where it is all right to reveal personal information is vital. A simple rule for younger children could be that the child should **not** give out name, phone number or photo without your approval.

Older children using social networking sites like Facebook should be selective about what personal information and photos they post to online spaces. Once material is online you can no longer control who sees it or how it is used.

Teach your social networking teenagers how to use and apply the privacy and security settings of the site. All responsible sites have a Safety Centre and a Block and Reporting system. Learn together with your teen how to use the safety and security settings of the site.

## 4. Talk about the risks associated with meeting online "friends" in person

Adults should understand that the Internet could be a positive meeting place for children, where they can get to know other young people and make new friends. However, for safety and to avoid unpleasant experiences, it is important that children do not meet strangers they have met online without being accompanied by an adult, friends or others they trust. In any case, the child should always have their parents' approval first.

## 5. Teach your child about evaluating information and being critically aware of information found online.

Most children use the Internet to improve and develop knowledge in relation to schoolwork and personal interests. Children should be aware that not all information found online is correct, accurate or relevant. Educate children on how to verify information they find by

comparing to alternative sources on the same topic. Show them trusted sites they can use to compare information.

## **6. Don't be too critical towards your child's exploration of the Internet**

Children may come across adult material by accident on the Web. Also a child may intentionally search for such web sites; remember that it is natural for children to be curious about off-limits material. Try to use this as an opening to discuss the content with them, and perhaps make rules for this kind of activity. Be realistic in your assessment of how your child uses the Internet.

## **7. Report online material you may consider illegal to the appropriate authorities**

It is vital that we all take responsibility for the Web and report matters, which we believe could be illegal. By doing this we can help to prevent illegal activities online, such as child-pornography or attempts to lure children via chat, mail or messaging. The **hotline.ie** service provides an anonymous facility for the public to report suspected illegal content encountered on the Internet, in a secure and confidential way. The primary focus of the Hotline is to combat child pornography. Other forms of illegal content and activities exist on the Internet and may be reported using the service.

## **8. Encourage Respect for others**

There is an informal code of conduct for the Internet. As in everyday life, there are informal ethical rules for how to behave when relating to other people on the Internet. These include being polite, using correct language and not yell at (write in capital letters) or harass others. Also, children as well as grown ups should not read other's e-mail or copy protected material.

## **9. Let your children show you what they like to do online**

To be able to guide your child with regard to Internet use, it is important to understand how children use the Internet and know what they like to do online. Let your child show you which websites they like visiting and what they do there. Acquiring technical knowledge could also make it easier to make the right decisions regarding your child's Internet use.

## **10. Remember that the positive aspects of the Internet outweigh the negatives.**

The Internet is an excellent educational and recreational resource for children. There are millions of age appropriate sites for younger children. Encourage your children to use such sites and to avoid registering for sites and services with adult content and behaviours. Help your child read the Terms & Conditions of Service for any site which they wish to join and to comply with the age restrictions of the site. Help your child apply all the privacy and security settings on the site. Encourage your child to be critically aware and explore the Internet to its full potential.

## **Useful Links**

A Guide to Internet Safety for Parents  
The Hotline

## Cyberbullying: A Guide

**Cyberbullying is a big problem. Initial findings in last year's EU Kids Online survey revealed how almost a quarter of children claim they have been bullied. And many suspect this figure is rising.**

As a parent, cyberbullying is likely to be a new phenomenon to you. While the classroom and playground bullies still exist, the practice has evolved.

Think about it: the internet can be an anonymous, instant and far-reaching communications tool – a perfect match for bullies seeking to inflict maximum emotional damage.

But remember, you can combat this new and dangerous strain of bullying.

### What is Cyberbullying?

We know what bullying is. It's repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical behaviour by an individual or group against others. It's been a problem since the day dot, it's always wrong and it should never be overlooked or ignored.

Cyberbullying is the same, yet slightly different, and, some would argue, more dangerous. Cyberbullies use the internet, mobile phones and other technologies to inflict psychological harm on their targets.

Cyberbullying can take so many different forms. Sending mean or threatening messages, emails, photos or video clips, posting nasty messages to social networking sites, message boards, or chat rooms, setting up fake profiles to say bad things about someone or accessing someone's account repeatedly to make trouble for them are all part of what constitutes bullying online.

The internet is full of nasty messages. Many, however, are once off and do not constitute bullying. Cyberbullying is a repeated and sustained campaign of behaviour which has a serious negative impact on the well-being of the victim.

And it's important that we remember: cyberbullying is not a problem of technology, it's a behavioural issue.

### What is the Difference Between Cyberbullying and Bullying?



The main differences between bullying and cyberbullying are that online, the communication between young people is usually hidden from adults, making it difficult to detect and deal with.

The illusion of anonymity empowers bullies to continue to act aggressively. A lot of young people see the internet as not the 'real world', and therefore don't see what they write as punishable.

Posting nasty messages online also gives bullies maximum impact, because their words are widely and instantly disseminated by a large audience when compared to, say, writing an inappropriate message on a school book.

Other characteristics of cyberbullying mean it can happen at any time because technology is now ubiquitous with mobile, tablet and laptop computers, hateful messages stay online forever and, while traditionally children have known who their bully is, on the internet, sometimes they don't.

### What can I do if my Child is Being Bullied Online?

Parents know their children better than anyone. It means you are best placed to indentify and deal with any cyberbullying they may encounter.

And, in a huge shift in attitudes, the latest batch of research results from the Irish portion of the EU Kids Online survey reveal that Irish parents now worry more about what their kids are up to online than they do about alcohol, drugs or their children coming to the attention of gardai.

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**Anonymity empowers bullies to continue to act aggressively**

There are some tell tale signs associated with cyberbullying which you can be on the look-out for.

**If your child is avoiding school,**

**or seems upset, sad or angry when or after using their phone or PC, it may be a sign of cyberbullying.**

**If your child begins shunning the computer or becomes disinterested with technology, it could also be a sign,**

**as is the rapid switching of screens when you enter the room.**

As a parent, you must also confirm that you are dealing with bullying behaviour. Ask yourself the following four questions:

1. Is your child specifically targeted on their own or is the behaviour targeted at a group of people?
2. Has this been happening over a period of time?
3. Is the behaviour part of a recurring pattern?
4. And, is the behaviour deliberately intended to harm or upset your child?

Once you have confirmed that bullying is taking place, you should get in touch with your child's school or youth organisation. Internet Service Providers should also be contacted and, if the cyberbullying is very serious, or potentially criminal, you should contact your local gardai.

Encouraging your child to talk to you about cyberbullying is key to maintaining an open and positive environment which can help you deal with the situation. Responding negatively by barring internet use or a mobile phone can cause a lot of damage and will also put you out of the loop if cyberbullying happens again.

## What Advice Should I Give my Child?

Start by commending your child for coming to speak to you about the problem.

Then, give them the following advice:

- **Don't Reply:** Young people should never reply to messages that harass or annoy them. The bully wants to know they have upset their target. If they get a response it feeds into the problem and makes things worse
- **Keep the Messages:** By keeping nasty messages your child will be able to produce a record of the bullying, the dates and the times. This will be useful for any subsequent school or garda investigation
- **Block the Sender:** No one needs to put up with someone harassing them. Whether it's mobile phones, social networking or chat rooms, children can block contacts through service providers

- **Report Problems:** Ensure your child reports any instances of cyberbullying to websites or service providers. Sites like Facebook have reporting tools. By using these, your child will be passing important information to people who can help eradicate cyberbullying

Children need to understand the emotional damage cyberbullying, and all other forms of bullying, can cause. All forms of bullying hurt, all cause pain and all should be stopped. By stressing this to your child - and by enforcing the importance of not standing by while someone else is being bullied - it will encourage their responsible internet use.

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**There are things you can do to tackle cyberbullying**

You can also explain to your child the importance of not hurting someone's feelings by email or other forms of electronic communications.

Tell them that respecting other people's online rights is key, and to do this they should avoid insulting people on the internet as well as remain calm if insulted themselves.

Children also need to be thought to respect other people's privacy online and overall they need to act responsibly when on the internet.

## Preventing Cyberbullying

Because the issue of online bullying is constantly evolving, and also because it transcends the school environment, it is difficult to prevent and combat.

However, there are some things that you can do to ensure cyberbullying is tackled head on before it happens.

As a parent, you can create a positive and supportive atmosphere for your child regarding bullying. Often, children are afraid to report it because they fear the bullying will escalate.

But by building awareness and being open with your child, they will feel empowered to talk to you about cyberbullying instead of hiding it away from you.

**You should also get to grips with your child's internet and phone use.** Encourage your son or daughter to show you the websites they use. It will give you the knowledge to make it easier to make the right decisions as challenges arise.

Encouraging good 'netiquette', an informal code of conduct for behaving online, is also a good idea. Netiquette includes using correct language online, being polite and not copying other people's work, as well as complying with copyright laws surrounding music, video and image files.

Mobile operators provide a '**dual access**' service, which can be a really good tool too. It allows you to access your child's mobile phone account records like numbers called, account balances etc. Contact your mobile phone provider for more information.