








CHILD SAFETY: INTERNET CONCERNS

When used properly, the Internet can be a wonderful learning and entertainment tool for you and your family. In many ways, the virtual world of the Internet is like that of the real world. Similar safety rules apply. Just as you wouldn't tell a stranger on the street where you live, you shouldn't tell someone you just met on the Internet your home address. Before allowing your children online, discuss with them safety issues. Talk to them about your concerns and together set up family guidelines for computer use. Here are some ideas to keep in mind.

-  Help your children to understand why it is important that they do not give out personal information, even if their new e-mail pal seems to be real friendly or a "cool" website offers them a free gift for the information.
-  Let your children know that they can come to you if they are receiving messages that make them feel uncomfortable. Tell them that in such an event, they should save the messages for you to read and handle in an appropriate manner.
-  Set up guidelines that deal specifically with meeting people on the Internet. Talk to your children about what to do if their new Internet friend asks to see them in person, or wants your children to send pictures of themselves.
-  Teach your children about "netiquette" (etiquette on the Internet), so that they will not accidentally offend someone.
-  Keep the computer in a high traffic part of the house such as the living room. You can then easily monitor your children's activities without making them feel as if you are watching over their shoulders all the time.
-  Find web sites you think your children will enjoy and 'bookmark' them. This will help direct your children away from using search engines, where they might find inappropriate sites.
-  Most importantly, spend time with your children talking about their experiences online. Give them a chance to show you what they have learned or the things they like.

Many of these safety issues are further discussed on various web sites. Use search engines to find more information regarding safety on the Internet for further reference. By taking the proper precautions, you and your family can explore and enjoy the many wonderful features of the Internet.