

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY ABOUT ONLINE SAFETY



Your son or daughter is taking part in classroom lessons from the CyberSmart! Student Curriculum that will support an ongoing dialogue about online safety in school, in your family, and in your community. In preparing these lessons we've carefully examined all the most up-to-date research and want to share it with you.

Technology solutions are not enough.

Filters, antispam software, and other technological solutions are useful but not sufficient to keep children and teens safe online. Ultimately, Internet safety depends on the decisions that youths make when they go online at school, at home, or at the library. That is why CyberSmart! teaches critical thinking and decision-making skills and recommends that younger children be supervised by parents or guardians.

Here's what we teach, at age-appropriate levels, about safety online:

- All students learn strategies for responsibly managing online messages and avoiding situations that make them feel uncomfortable.
- All students learn when to seek the help of a trusted adult.
- Teens learn that it is inappropriate for adults to flirt or exchange sexual messages with them—online or offline.
- Teens learn that it's risky to give personal identity information to people only known online *in combination with* talking online to such people about sex.
- It's normal for both younger children and teens to experiment with their identities online, so student learning is focused on skills for managing impressions and audiences.
- Students learn to always think about protecting private identity information—including full name, postal address, e-mail address, phone numbers, calling card numbers, credit and debit card numbers, and Social Security numbers—for privacy and to avoid identity theft.
- For young children, no personal identity information should be shared online without a parent's or guardian's permission.

Rethinking the “conventional wisdom”

The latest research from the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center shows that while parents may worry most about the online safety of their youngest children, it is teens who are the primary targets of Internet sex crimes. Furthermore, statistics reveal that Internet offenders target those teens who are willing to talk online about sex. The conventional wisdom that offenders piece together bits of private identity information in order to locate children is largely unfounded. Almost all teen victims go voluntarily to meet these offenders face to face. For this reason, CyberSmart! lessons focus on educating your child, not scaring them or you.

Here's what families can do:

- Start a conversation with your children about what they do online. Let them know that you understand how important using the Internet and other networked devices, such as cell phones, are to their lives.
- Keep the family computer in an open part of your home, showing your child that you are aware of, and interested in, his or her online activities.
- Let your children know that safety challenges—such as protecting the identities of family members—are a shared responsibility of all members of the family. As a family, set rules that consider the age and developmental stage of each child. Hold family meetings to revisit these rules on a regular basis.
- Let your teens know you understand that it's normal for them to be interested in romance and sex. Talk about how to avoid risky behaviors online, such as engaging in flirting or sexual talk with adults they've met online, sending/posting provocative photos of themselves, or planning to meet people face to face that they only know online. Make sure they understand that adults who talk to teens online about sex are committing a crime.
- Start a conversation at home about unintended audiences, so that your children understand that what they post online can never be deleted and could be viewed by teachers, principals, college admissions offices, and future employers.
- If you think your family has been the target of identity theft or other online fraud, contact the Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov) to learn what to do.