

The Internet
Part 6
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In previous articles, we have identified the threats that are present within the internet. The dangers within cyberspace are real and growing. Now the focus needs to be on how to prevent your child from becoming one of the thousands that are being harassed and solicited on the net. Chances are that your child knows more about computers than you, but there are some simple tools and techniques that can be done to make it difficult for a predator to reach your child.

A basic strategy for computer safety is to set up rules and enforce them. An establishment of basic internet rules provides a structured and safe environment for children. These rules should include the following:

1. The child should know when they are allowed to use the computer and what sites they are allowed to visit.
2. The child should also be told that they must report any inappropriate language or pictures that they see on the internet.
3. The child should not allowed to give out any personal information or to receive/send any pictures. Many children are quick to tell others what school they attend or what city they live in. A predator only needs to be given a little bit of information to initiate a conversation.

Another strategy and is to have the computer in a family area. A child should not have internet access in their private bedroom. A child is less likely to get into trouble or visit unwanted sites if the computer is in the living room. While your child is on the internet, it is best to become a nuisance. Sit next to them and read the paper, fold towels, peel potatoes; whatever it takes to be near your child while they are on the net. If you are nearby, they are more likely to avoid unwanted sites or online chat. There is software that can be purchased that can eliminate most threats, but nothing is better than a parent's presence. A parent can't always be present, so another easy step would be to remove the internet cable when a child can't be supervised.

Lastly, for a parent to protect their children from internet dangers, it is crucial to have communication. Parents need to teach their children about the dangers on the internet. A parent should not be scared to be frank with a child about safety issues. An uncomfortable discussion can make the difference between a safe child and an unsafe child. The parent should ask questions of what is being seen on the net, what is being downloaded, who they are talking to, and what games they play. The child also needs to be told to communicate with the parent. They need to tell a parent when they are solicited or made to feel uncomfortable while on the internet. Having your child report to you after each internet session is a good way to have an open dialogue about what your child is doing on the net.

Technology will continue to move leaps and bounds. Sadly so will the predators. They are usually a step ahead. It is important that as parents you educate yourself on the dangers that may be present. Parents also need to learn how to prevent such dangers from harming their children. Do not just hope for the best, make the best happen for your child.