

## Internet Safety

The Internet can be a wonderful tool for both family education and entertainment. Unfortunately, it has also become a playground for predators and bullies. 20% of children online have been approached by adults looking for sex, according to Love Our Children USA. The increased ability kids have to meet strangers in chat rooms and on social networking websites has resulted in abductions and murder.

### ***Top 5 Tips for Talking to Your Kids about Internet Safety***

1. Talk to your child about which sites are appropriate and which aren't. (Her friends' parents may be more lax about Internet safety; your child should know she is expected to follow your rules no matter which computer she's using.)
2. Talk to your child honestly about strangers online; make sure she understands the dangers.
3. Make sure your child knows she must never give out her real name, address, or other personal information.
4. Know all of your child's usernames and passwords -- not to spy, but in case of an emergency.
5. Have your child read and sign a child/parent Internet-safety agreement (you sign it, too). There's a good one on the Love Our Children USA website.

Keep your computer in a central location and monitor how much time your child spends on it, suggests Ross Ellis, founder and CEO of Love Our Children USA. Moms can also invest in an Internet-monitoring software program.

### ***What Moms Can Do about Internet Safety***

Once children are old enough to IM or become interested in chat rooms and social networking websites, it's important to warn them about meeting strangers online. Psychologist Dr. Lisa Boesky, author of *When to Worry: How to Tell If Your Teen Needs Help -- and What to Do About It*, shares these tips.

Don't tell her not to meet strangers -- she'll only tune you out. "Telling your teen to avoid strangers on the Internet doesn't work," Dr. Boesky says. "The Internet creates a false sense of intimacy. If your daughter has been talking to someone online, she probably feels like she knows him. He's not going to be one of those people who would hurt her. No way. The only problem is that sometimes, many times, she's wrong."

Instead, talk to her about how fake the Internet can be. "You need to talk to your teen about the false sense of intimacy that develops online and how fake it can be, as well as

the dangers that can happen," Dr. Boesky advises. This is a good time to talk to her about these sex traffickers who prey upon young girls on the Internet.

Figure out WHY she's meeting strangers on MySpace or similar websites. Parents need to look at why their teen girls are vulnerable to this, says Dr. Boesky. "What is it that's missing in her life?" she asks. "What is it she's seeking from this person on MySpace? Once you figure that out, how can you help her fill that void in a healthier, safer way? Most of today's teen girls are desperate for a connection. Once they meet the first person who will give that to them, their judgment often goes out the window. Part of it is that they're not getting that connection at home or from friends. It's a normal need, but they're going about it in a dangerous way."

Tell her about people who've been taken advantage of, raped, or murdered as a result of MySpace. You may also want to use real-life examples of girls who have been murdered, raped, or who've disappeared after meeting someone through MySpace, Facebook, or Craigslist. (Google "Donna Jou" for starters -- she's a 19-year-old who went on a date with a guy she met on Craigslist last year and hasn't been seen since.)

"Don't tell her about these cases in a lecturing way, or a holier-than-thou way," says Dr. Boesky. "You want to come from an 'I'm concerned about this because ...' angle. Parents should stay away from phrases like 'you should' or 'you shouldn't.' Try 'I'm concerned' or 'I'm worried' instead. The last thing you want her to do is shut you out."

If you find out after the fact that your kid met a stranger, ask why. "If they do meet someone online and you later find out about it, ask your teen what made her think this was okay," Dr. Boesky advises. "This might make you get out of your own head and into your teen's logic. They have a whole other logic about meeting people online than we do. There's no way to understand them unless you get a sense of where they're at -- not where they should be. Keep in mind, it's part of the teenage years to feel invulnerable and 'unique.' They truly believe 'this will not happen to me.' Parents need to show them that there are other teens just like them out there and it did happen to them."

Internet safety is an issue parents may need to continue to discuss with children of all ages.

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## ***Related Momlogic Stories on Internet Safety***

1. [It's MySpace -- Get Your Own Space](#)
2. [Google's Got Your Kid's Back](#)
3. [The Changing Rules of Cyber-Parenting](#)

## ***Additional Resources for Internet Safety***

- [Google Tips for Online Safety](#)
- [FBI Parent's Guide to Internet Safety](#)
- [Love Our Children USA](#)