



REPORT to PARENTS

RP 32:5

Limiting Your Child's Online Access With Parental Controls

We all know that, as much as technology has opened new worlds to our children, it has also put them at risk of predators and of growing up too soon through exposure to things they shouldn't see at their ages. It's important for parents and caregivers to do all we can to help our children use technology safely and wisely. Here are some very important suggestions to put to work in your home:

Be in control. Parental controls are available for every make and model of computer and it's important to make sure they're in place. Use the "search" feature on your computer to locate where the parental controls feature is. Make sure you, with your own password, are the only one who can change the control settings. Each user of the family computer should be given access to the computer only through his or her own password. For each child, determine what type of content you want him or her to be able to see, and what you want blocked.

Check with your provider. Make sure to find out what services your Internet Service Provider (ISP) offers to help protect your children online. Many ISPs have invested heavily in ways to make sure that children can use the Internet safely.

Be picky. You can use parental controls to make sure your children visit only sites that are age-appropriate, or can make sure they can't download any files from the Web. You also can filter out content you don't want them to see, and prevent them from running certain programs.

Watch the clock. Parental controls often allow you to determine when, by hours of the day and days of the week, your children can access the Web, and when they will be blocked. This keeps kids from spending too much time on the computer and from getting on when no one's home to supervise.

Sharing is bad. Although it's important for you to always know

their passwords, do not let your older and younger children share passwords and do not divulge yours to them. If they sign on under your user name/password, they will not be protected through the parental controls you've set.

Get extra protection. Several excellent products go further than your computer's built-in parental controls and give you more confidence that your child's Web experiences will be safe. For those who are really concerned, a program such as the highly

rated Web Watcher can track everything that happens on your child's or your family's computer, including who's using it, when, for how long, and on which sites.

Check their history. It's always a good idea to log onto the computer using your child's password and user name after your child has finished surfing the Web, whether it's for homework, to be on MySpace, or to play games. Log in as them, open the Internet browser, and then view the sites they've just visited by simply clicking the little down-

pointing arrow at the right hand side of the box where you type in a Web address. When you click on the down-arrow, all the recently visited sites will be displayed in a list. Check to see if there are sites that your child visited that he or she shouldn't have.

Sneaky tricks. Unfortunately, older children, who are most likely to want to visit "off limits" sites, are also able to learn how to delete their history of visited sites. Fortunately, you can use an empty history as a clue. Make sure your children know that they will be disciplined if you see that they have deleted their history (which is done by going to the "tools" menu and clicking on "Internet options" or "options" and choosing to "delete").

Remember, experts, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend that children spend no more than two hours a day using a computer, especially when on the Internet. It's up to you to help them make sure that their spending that time wisely, and safely.

