

## Internet Safety Checklist

When used responsibly, the Internet can be a useful tool for communication, information and services. To deal with the constant surge of content and activity the Internet offers, creating an Internet Safety Checklist for your family to follow will ensure your computer or anyone who uses it won't become a victim of Internet abuse or theft. Here are a few items to consider:

1. **Install safety software** – Keep software updated and use it daily. It's especially important to keep antivirus and anti-spyware software updated as new threats are constantly released.
2. **Use a family-friendly Internet service provider (ISP)** – Reputable ISPs like Cox typically have information and security software in place to assist in your Internet safety efforts.
3. **Talk about online safety with family members and friends** – Reviewing a few guidelines with your family and friends will eliminate confusion. You should discuss a few do's and don'ts, and determine who has access to what.
4. **Use a family-friendly search engine** – This will prevent users of any age from stumbling upon unsuitable or fraudulent content.
5. **Be careful about whom you interact with online** – Talking to people you know is one thing; talking to strangers in chat rooms, message boards, social networking sites, blogs and other areas open to the general public poses a number of risks. Whenever you interact in these areas, use a nondescript screen name and a password that's different from other accounts you have.
6. **Be careful about what information you make public** – Always think twice about what you post in public or exposed areas on the Internet. Never post information that personally identifies you, a family member or a friend. This includes sensitive information such as birth date, gender, home address, town, state, e-mail address, phone number, school name, photos and financial data – essentially anything that can be used to track you down and/or steal your identity.
7. **Be aware of incoming e-mail** – Unsolicited e-mail with attachments and links can transmit spam and viruses to your computer. Many e-mails, which appear legitimate and trustworthy, may be phishing scams that ask for personal information like account numbers and passwords. Never freely share this information with any individual or entity you don't trust or regularly do business with.



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8. **Don't exchange personal information for "freebies"** – Unwanted software, such as spyware and viruses, often piggybacks software or offers that are "free." Like so many things in life, if it's free, there's probably a catch, so beware.
9. **Keep the family computer and Internet-connected devices in a central location** – Obviously laptops are another issue, but a stationary family desktop computer should be in an open and supervised area of the home. This prevents children from straying into inappropriate web sites or performing prohibited functions on the computer.
10. **Beware about meeting an online acquaintance in person** – While children should never make plans to personally meet someone they've encountered online, adults should proceed cautiously by taking a friend and meeting in a busy, public place. Remember: Your online buddy may not exactly be whom they claim to be when you meet them in person.
11. **Report abuse** – You and your kids should take appropriate action if you see or suspect illegal activity, harassment and predatory behavior of other online users.
12. **Review Internet activity with your family** – Double-check your Internet settings including contacts, history, image files, downloads, etc. Let your kids know that this is a routine check-up, not an invasion of privacy, to protect everyone and maintain the safe operation of your computer.
13. **Family time online** – Anyone who uses the family computer should be familiar with online tools for blogging, sending e-mail, instant messaging, etc. Kids often know more about these tools than their parents, so it's a great opportunity for everyone to learn together.
14. **Create an Internet safety contract with your children** – This way there is never any question about the rules. Kids should understand that the Internet is an invaluable resource with a wealth of information that should be used responsibly.