

Internet Safety for your Foreign Service Child

By Laura Miller

As the world becomes more connected and information becomes readily accessible, internet safety and cybersecurity for children becomes an increasingly important concern for parents everywhere. While the internet allows children to stay connected to family and friends back home, children may unknowingly put themselves in potentially harmful online situations where cyberbullying, hacking, unwanted solicitation, internet predators, and other threats can occur. The following information provides tips, guidelines, and resources for parents to address internet safety with children as well as suggestions for age-appropriate internet rules.

The most important action a parent can take to protect their child on the internet is to monitor their child's internet usage. Depending on the child's age, monitoring can range from sitting with a child to adding and evaluating parental controls. Until a child is ten years old, it is recommended that a parent or another responsible adult sit with them while they use the computer and limit internet access to less than an hour. In this manner, adults can teach young children how to search for appropriate websites, what information is appropriate to give, and how to spot and notify an adult of suspicious or potentially dangerous internet activity. For children ages ten to eighteen, consider moving their computer or internet-accessible device to a public area of the house.

For young children, parents should share a family email account that allows them to monitor their child's internet activity. For older children, particularly teenagers, insist on having the passwords to all accounts, and monitor them frequently. Parental controls and browsing history are also important sources for parents to evaluate their child's activity. If the browsing history has suddenly been cleared or clearing the history has become routine, parents should talk to their child about their internet usage and privileges immediately.

Other measures parents can take to ensure their child's safety online include the following:

- Set age-appropriate filters
- Set time limits and stick to them
- Do not allow children access to chat rooms or message boards
- Limit online contact to a parent-approved buddy/friends list
- Set up cybersecurity protections including up-to-date anti-virus and anti-spyware software
- Supervise the photos and videos your child posts online
- Regularly check your child's social networking and gaming sites to see what they are posting
- Create an additional list of rules for your family and have every family member agree and adhere to these rules
- Teach your child to be suspicious of any individual who asks too many questions online
- Create screen names that do not give out personal information
- Check your child's security settings on sites and social media accounts

No matter what age your child is, it is important to have an open dialogue about privacy on the internet, ethical behavior online (known as netiquette), and potential dangers, particularly as a Foreign Service child. Just

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as you have cybersecurity standards to meet for your job, let your children know about the standards they have to meet. Children should **NEVER** post the following information:

- Parent's employment information
- The type of work their parents do
- Potentially embarrassing photos or photos that give away sensitive information
- Personally Identifiable Information (Date of Birth, Address, Phone Numbers, Social Security Numbers, Passport Information)

For more information or online safety tips and videos, visit the following websites:

- Resources for Parents:
 - <https://www.onguardonline.gov/media/video-0001-net-cetera-chatting-kids-about-being-online>
 - <http://www.netSMARTZ.org/safety/safetytips>
- Sharing on Social Media (for teens):
 - <http://www.nsteens.org/Videos/6DegreesOfInformation>
- Safe Web Surfing: Top Tips for Kids and Teens Online:
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrln8nyVBLU>
- Internet Safety for Kids K-3:
 - <http://youtu.be/89eCHtFs0XM>
 - <http://www.brainpopjr.com/artsandtechnology/technology/internetsafety/>
- Internet Safety for Middle School Students (video and game):
 - <https://www.onguardonline.gov/media/video-0004-share-care>
 - <https://www.onguardonline.gov/media/game-0013-case-cyber-criminal>