

# What You Need to Know about the World Wide Web Just the Facts!



## World Wide Web Concerns

The World Wide Web is one of the most widely used information and entertainment mediums today. Much of the information online is legitimate, but some people also create Web sites to intentionally lure and mislead. The Web is designed for people to quickly and easily find what they are looking for, which enables your children to easily access all kinds of information.

When thinking about your children using the Web, consider this quote from Larry Flynt, publisher of Hustler magazine – “There’s an awful lot of material on the Internet that children should not have access to. There’s material that even I, in my wildest imagination, would not consider publishing.”

### Pornography

Pornography has been available online almost since the Internet came into existence; in fact, it was the first commercial success on the Web. The Web offers free and easy access to pornography. “Free samples” are everywhere, even on commercial sites, and children do not necessarily have to provide ID as they would in an “adult bookstore.”

The Web has more than just still images; it offers videos, online chat, live peep shows, and much more. For this reason, online pornography makes Playboy-style magazines seem tame. Most pornography sites offer free previews to attempt to lure web-surfers of any age into the paying areas. As a result, there are few restrictions on the nature of the pornography freely available online.

Pornography on the World Wide Web is almost unavoidable, so don’t assume that your kids haven’t seen it. Talk to your children about online pornography and provide them with information if they have questions. Setting computer rules with your kids and asking a computer-savvy friend to show you how to see what sites your kids visit are good ways to know what they are seeing and how often. It is also a good idea to invest in filtering and monitoring software and even home firewalls like Norton and McAfee to help restrict pornography.

### Misleading and False Information

When Mark Twain said, “Don’t always believe everything you read” it was never more true than with the World Wide Web. There is no overriding organization deciding what should be on the Web or taking responsibility for its accuracy. Although a lot of information is legitimate, the World Wide Web also has no shortage of misleading

### Misleading and False Information cont.

information that impressionable children may not realize is a stretch of the truth or completely untrue.

For example, the Web site [www.malepregnancy.com](http://www.malepregnancy.com) (a spoof site!) illustrates how completely false information can be made to appear quite convincing on the Internet. Your children can come across misleading information by searching for one thing and finding another, through e-mail spam, or through advertisements from both legitimate and non-legitimate Web sites.

The best ways to ensure your children avoid the drawback of believing plain misleading information online is to:

- Talk to your kids about the World Wide Web—discuss who can put information on it, explain what type of information is on it, and encourage them to talk to you or another trusted adult like a teacher or sports coach about the information they find.
- Suggest your children visit [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) to check if information they find is legitimate. The site hits urban legends, myths, and truths about multiple subjects.
- Set computer use ground rules.
- Ask a computer-savvy friend to show you how to see what sites your children are visiting and explore, by yourself or together, the Web sites they visit.

### Illegal Downloads

Downloading music, videos, movies, and software is growing in popularity among kids as it is fast, cheap, and appears to be anonymous. Napster, Kazaa, Morpheus, and Limewire are just some of the file-sharing or “peer-to-peer” software programs that kids use to get these

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files. The actual software is legitimate and legal, but what your kids do with it may be illegal.

Just as it is “fair use” in law to videotape a TV movie on your VCR to view later, limited file sharing of music is accepted for personal use. However, the performing artists and companies who sell the music or movies become more concerned when “pirated” downloads become large scale. Similarly, unauthorized downloads of computer programs (“warez”) are an increasing concern to software developers.

Copyright holders are starting to trace and criminally charge people for downloading and sharing their products, which they view as stealing, whether it comes from a stranger or a friend. Downloading from someone else’s computer also carries the risk of downloading viruses, trojan horses, or spyware/adware to your computer.

If your kids download music, you should contact your Internet Service Provider (ISP) for free software to remove any spyware or adware that may also be on your computer now. Investing in home firewalls and anti-virus software such as Norton and McAfee can catch some harmful attachments or viruses that may accompany other downloads.

You should also ask a computer-savvy friend to teach you and your children about safe downloading to your computer and what risks are associated with it. You should also talk to your children about file sharing being illegal and how copyright laws are being enforced more often.

### Unintentional Access

Have you ever unintentionally ended up somewhere you didn’t want to be? This happens all the time on the World Wide Web. A simple typing error can take you somewhere you didn’t expect to go. The difference can be as simple as a misspelled name or a different extension (like .com, .ca, .org, or .gov).

To draw traffic, so-called “stealth Web sites” deliberately mimic the names of real Web sites, but with a slightly different spelling, or an extra word, or a different extension. Instead of the legitimate sites, they will lead you to pornography, hate literature, or racism.

Pornographic sites have also misused trusted brand names in Web site addresses (for example, a slight misspelling) to bring traffic to their sites. Most disturbing, some of these sites are specifically geared to attract kids.

Talk to your kids and ask them to show you the sites that they like.

To help your children avoid stealth sites or misused brand names, suggest that they use a search site or engine when they are looking for information instead of guessing at the Web address.

Some popular search site examples include [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) and [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). There are also kid specific search sites such as <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick!>, <http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/>, [www.surfsafely.com/](http://www.surfsafely.com/), which can be very useful for school projects.

Investing in filtering software, monitoring software, and home firewalls can help your children avoid some of the “bad” Web sites, but remember, these products will not block out everything you don’t want your kids to see. Ask a computer-savvy friend to teach you how to monitor what Web sites your children are accessing regularly.

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### Intentional Access

Curiosity is normal for kids, and with the World Wide Web, that curiosity can take them anywhere. Finding information on the Web is easy, which makes the Web very popular and widely used. At the same time, since anyone can put anything they want on the Web, you can find recipes for making bombs as well as for chocolate chip cookies. Whatever kids are looking for, if they are sufficiently determined, they can probably find it.

There is no governing body regulating what people put on the Web; therefore, a large amount of information is not restricted, monitored, or quality controlled. This creates obvious pitfalls for children. Do you really want your children getting their sex education or role models from a pornography site, or their attitudes on race from a hate site?

The Web is not a baby-sitter. Talk to your kids. Provide an open atmosphere where your kids can talk to you and ask you questions as opposed to looking for answers to their questions on the Web. You can also encourage them to talk to another trusted adult such as a teacher or sports coach. Set some house computer usage rules and keep the computer in a common area so you can see what your kids are doing on the Web.

It is a good idea to talk to friends and your Internet Service Provider (ISP) about home firewalls, monitoring software, and filtering software for your computer. These can help restrict your kids' access to specific Web sites or categories of Web sites. With the software, you can also set up "white lists" and "green spaces," which can only allow your children access to Web sites you have approved. For more detailed information about these products, visit [www.getnetwise.org](http://www.getnetwise.org).

If you are unsure about what your kids are finding online, talk to a computer-savvy friend and learn how to monitor your kids' Web activity.

### Access to Potentially Harmful Information

If kids want to know about something, they can probably find information on it on the World Wide Web. It is amazing how easily kids can join a pop star's fan club...or an extremist's cult. Access to potentially harmful and socially unacceptable information is just a click away on the Web. Kids can access Web sites promoting hate, racism, bombs, drugs, terrorism, or cults. Online gambling Web sites are irresistible to some children and can lead to deceptive and addictive behaviors.

Simple curiosity can lead your kids to such sites, not realizing that extremist groups attempt to recruit kids who show interest in the material. Interested kids may "sign up" to receive additional material from the Web site. If your kids sign up for something on one of these sites, they are basically providing personal information to strangers.

It is never too late to set up safety features on your computer to protect your children. The most common safety features are home firewalls, monitoring software, and filtering software. You should talk to a computer-savvy friend, your Internet Service Provider (ISP), or a technician at a computer store about these and other products you should use to protect your children while they are online. Read the "Filtering Software" document in the Resources section for more detailed information on filtering software, monitoring software, and firewalls.

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### Access to Potentially Harmful Info cont.

Knowing what your children are doing online is also important to help keep them safe. Talk to your kids about their Web activity and encourage them to explore information on other topics of interest through safe searching techniques.

Suggest they search for information using search sites geared towards children such as <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick!> or <http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/>.

### Gang Violence

Playing video-style games on the World Wide Web (also known as multi-player “online gaming”) is increasing in popularity. Kids play these and many other games on the Web with both friends and people they have never met from all around the world. Games on the Web range from checkers and chess to violent terrorist wars.

Some online gaming can lead to gang violence in the real world. News reports are increasing of violent (and very occasionally fatal) episodes outside Internet cafés where individuals or groups are playing games. Some gangs have driven across town to settle issues that came up online.

Kids may innocently form their own “gangs” with other kids they meet online, without ever imagining that their online opponents are willing to raise the stakes – and may be able to trace them.

You can’t assume that your kids are safe when they are playing games online, especially if they are multi-player games. With the violence related to online gaming increasing, it is really important for you to know if your kids are involved. Talk to your kids about what they are doing online and talk to a computer-savvy friend who can help you monitor if your kids are playing games online. You should also encourage your kids to talk to you or another trusted adult anytime they feel uneasy about anything when using the Web.

### Gang Violence cont.

Setting some computer ground rules at home is good, but remember that your kids can play games from a friend’s computer as well as at Internet cafés. To help protect your children at home, you should speak to a computer technician at a store or with your Internet Service Provider (ISP) about software to help monitor and filter your children’s Web activity.

### Summary

There are serious issues you should consider when your children use the World Wide Web. The Internet is not a baby-sitter. On the Web, your children can find everything they want and even things they don’t want.

Certain software products can help restrict your children from accessing inappropriate Web sites, but you should also play an active role in protecting them. Explore the resources in this program and talk to computer-savvy friends about how you can help protect your children. But most importantly, talk to your children. Simply getting involved is the most important step you can take.