



Internet Literacy: Safe Surfing in the Online World

The Internet is now a major part of the media mix that surrounds us, and an important component of media literacy - especially for young people. The under-18 demographic comprises over 20% of the US online population, and nearly one-half of all kids and teens are online. The average teenager spends about 7 hours a week online (and another 10 hours a week watching TV), with an even 50/50 split of male and female online teens. Their online time is typically spent on

email, instant messaging, doing homework, and playing games.

With so many young people spending so much time online, this market has become a focus for advertisers. According to eMarketer, a leading advertising publication, "marketers all across the Web are working overtime to win over kids and teens." In addition, the Internet presents new risks around privacy, safety and the manipulation of facts.

<http://www.getnetwise.org/>

A public service website providing extensive resources about online child safety, privacy, security and email issues. Includes lists of relevant computer software.

http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/special_initiatives/web_awareness/

A comprehensive educational resource from Web Awareness Canada. This site is designed to offer parents and teachers with "practical information and hands-on activities to help give kids the cyber smarts they need to make wise, safe and responsible online decisions."

<http://familyinternet.about.com/>

Extensive list of articles about making your Internet experience more "family friendly." Be sure to see the list of "Articles and Resources" that deal specifically with kids and online safety.

<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/tg/litintro.html>

Teacher's Guide for learning how to critically assess Internet resources — geared toward helping 7 to 12 year-olds gain Internet skills.

<http://pbskids.org/bts/license/>

An interactive test that challenges kids to understand Internet protocol and safety practices for online surfing.

<http://www.safekids.com/> and <http://www.safeteens.com/>

Good general resource sites — created by syndicated technology columnist, Larry Magid (author of "Child Safety on the Information Highway" and "Teen Safety on the Information Highway" from The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children).

<http://www.nsbj.org/safe-smart/>

Research and guidelines for children's use of the Internet (based on a national survey of parents and children by the National School Boards Foundation).

Fortunately, there is also a growing base of online resources to help with the challenges of building "Internet literacy." Individuals should determine their own comfort level with limit-setting, filtering software, online safety rules and other available techniques, but it is essential to make the Internet a significant part of any media literacy effort. The annotated list (at left) provides selected sites that offer research, suggestions, tools, and further links.

5 Things You Can Do Today

- 1: Start a conversation about Internet usage - make sure you know what sites your kids are using, with whom they are using chat rooms, and the importance of protecting their personal information.**
- 2: Share some Internet time with your kids. By using the Internet together you can learn a lot about their familiarity and level of online sophistication, and also help to set age-appropriate limits.**
- 3: Help them understand authenticity issues by using the Internet to verify information as fact or fiction.**
- 4: Become familiar with your computer's "history" and "cookies" folder, and explore software that can limit or monitor online usage.**
- 5: Become aware of online commercial messages in all their guises, and help your kids to identify which parts of a website are sponsored or advertisements.**