

Kids' Rules for Online Safety

I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.

I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.

I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother or father along.

I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.

I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the service provider.

I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

I will not give out my Internet password to anyone (even my best friends) other than my parents.

I will check with my parents before downloading or installing software or doing anything that could possibly hurt our computer or jeopardize my family's privacy.

I will be a good online citizen and not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law.

I will help my parents understand how to have fun and learn things online and teach them things about the Internet, computers and other technology.

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

Safe Blogging Tips for Teens

- Avoid postings that could enable a stranger to locate you. That includes your last name, the name of your school or sports teams, the town you live in and where you hang out.
- Check to see if your blogging service has a "friends" list that allows you to control who can visit your blog. If so, be sure to allow only people you know and trust. Be very careful before adding strangers to your list and be extremely careful about the information you post that can be accessed by people outside your friends list.
- Avoid getting together with someone you "meet" through a blog unless you are

certain of their actual identity. If you do meet them, arrange the meeting in a public place and bring some friends along.

- Be very careful about photographs you put on your blog. It's best to avoid photos that can make it easy for people to recognize you. It's a very bad idea to post photos that are suggestive or sexual in nature. Before uploading a photo, ask how you would feel if that picture were seen by your parents, a college admissions counselor, a potential employer, a future boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse or, perhaps, your grandparents. What if you were to run for office someday? What you post on the Internet can be downloaded by others and can hang around forever.
- Avoid postings that could embarrass you, your friends or family members now or later. Remember, what you post on your blog can be copied and stored and could come back to haunt you years later.
- If you allow non-friends or strangers to post comments to your blog, check the comments regularly to make sure they're appropriate and, if not, remove them. Never allow messages that are mean, threatening or embarrassing to you or others. Never respond to such messages either. Just delete them and, if possible, block that person from visiting your blog.
- Do not lie about your age when you sign up for a blog. Age limitations are there for a good reason. Claiming that you are older than you are could get you into trouble and put you at risk.

Teens Guide to Safe Blogging

by Larry Magid

Blogging is great. Just be smart about what you share

Unlike the article we wrote for parents and teachers, we don't have to give you a course in blogging basics. As a teen, you've probably visited your share of blogs or "spaces," and there's a good chance you may have your own blog. If so, congratulations. Even adults like us who worry about bloggers' safety and privacy applaud the fact that teens are increasingly taking advantage of the Internet's great communications tools. Millions of teenagers maintain their own blogs. In fact, a study done at Georgetown University shows that more than half of all blogs are maintained by people 13-19.

So let's talk about safety and privacy. As you know, when you're online you're out in public, and that's definitely true if you have a blog that's accessible to anyone on the Net. We don't need to tell you that there are creeps out there who might want to jeopardize your personal safety or steal your or your family's money. It's just a sad fact of life on the Net. Federal law-enforcement people confirm that online predators are very interested in teen blogging. That's why some of the blogging services have privacy features that let you control who can access your blog. And that's what this is about - giving you control. Check with your service to see what types of restrictions you can put on your blog and use them. In most cases it is possible to communicate with your friends or your friends' friends without having to open yourself up to the entire Internet.

One of the nice things about blogs is that you can post just about anything. But just because you can post anything doesn't mean you should. Remember, *anything you post can not only be seen by others but can easily be copied and stored*. So, what you post can be held against you. Something that seems very cool right now may not seem so cool two or three years from now, when you're sending around applications for schools or jobs. So think just a bit about your future before you post that incendiary comment or that inappropriate photo. Besides, what may seem appropriate or even funny to friends right now can be used against you when there are disagreements, breakups, etc. - in blogs, email, IMs, and even file-sharing networks.

As you know, people online are not always who they appear to be so be very careful about the type of relationship you establish or information you give to people you meet through your blog or blogs you visit. The same goes for in-person meetings. The fact is you just shouldn't meet people in person who you only know from the Internet. They may be great but you never really know, do you? If you do, make sure you do so in a public place and bring along at least one friend - the more and bigger the better. Your school's football team should do the job nicely. Never, ever, agree to meet someone alone. Seriously, you really need to be careful because you never really know who an online "friend" may actually be or what his or her intentions are.

You also need to be aware of your blogging service's rules or "terms of service." Violating them not only risks your getting kicked off the service but they're usually there for some good reasons: to protect you, to protect others and to keep you on the correct side of the law. Most of the rules are pretty obvious - don't send spam, don't distribute viruses and other harmful code, don't stalk, threaten or harass anyone and don't turn your blog into a porn site. While everyone in America - including teen bloggers - has First Amendment rights, you still need to be careful about

what you say, especially about others. Being mean to other people is not only, well, mean, it can in some circumstances be illegal if you cross certain lines.

One last thing. You may not want to share your blog with your parents, but they do have some legal rights and obligations. We recommend that you do give them the web address of your blog and it's a very good idea to talk with them about what you're doing and reassure them that you understand basic safety and privacy rules. Not only can that make for peace in the family, but they might learn something along the way. Who knows? Maybe you'll learn something too.

Real World Blog Safety Risk

What's in your blog can and will be used against you

By Prof. Jonathan I. Ezor

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Blogging represents a unique opportunity to get your words and thoughts out, not only to friends and family but literally to the whole world. It's no surprise that teenagers in particular, who are both immersed in technology and have so much they want to say, have leapt into the blogosphere in huge numbers. From Blogger to MySpace, LiveJournal to personal Web sites, teens are spotting trends, discussing shows and groups, and generally expressing themselves everywhere on the Web.

Unfortunately, blogging brings with it some risks as well that smart bloggers need to think about. A lot of these risks are common to all bloggers, but some are more relevant for kids. Even if you're blogging about non-controversial things, you should consider the following:

1. Blogging is Everywhere, for Everyone, Always

Who's reading your blog? The better question might be, who isn't reading it? The wonderful and scary thing about the Internet is that it reaches every corner of the world, and potentially every person too. That includes parents, teachers, principals, marketers, law enforcement officials, brothers and sisters, potential boyfriends and girlfriends, former boyfriends and girlfriends, soon-to-be-ex-boyfriends and girlfriends ... you get the idea. If college admissions officers and prospective employers aren't already looking for blog entries by candidates, they will be soon.

Even if you don't tell anyone about your blog, search tools like Google's Blogsearch and other built-in search engines on the blog host sites, as well as regular Web search tools can help inquiring minds find you and your blog. A Long Island lawyer recently searched MySpace, and discovered that her 12-year-old daughter had a page in which the daughter described herself as "hot." Needless to say, the mom sent a nice note through MySpace to her daughter about the page, and it's no longer up.

Your blog host also probably keeps archives, even long after you've stopped posting (or switched to another host). Even if you delete a blog entry or your host's archives expire, that doesn't mean your writing isn't still available. The Internet Wayback Machine keeps free archives of millions of Web pages, including many blog entries, dating back to 1995.

2. Taking You At Your Words

In the blogosphere, all people have is your words. A poorly-phrased joke or sarcastic remark (“I wish someone would take a baseball bat to X’s ugly face!”) can look like a threat that brings the police or even the FBI to your door. Bad grammar can be embarrassing or worse; imagine a college recruiter going from your carefully edited essay to your latest blog entry, where you write that “I luv that college with it’s dorms, and there cool parties.” The lesson here? Edit, edit, and edit some more, or at least make sure your readers know when you’re intentionally slinging it up (or use privacy tools to keep everyone out but friends!). Blogs aren’t instant messages—they are semi-permanent ones, and should be treated as such.

Sometimes words can get you sued: If you blog that “Suzi does drugs” and she doesn’t, Suzi or her parents can sue you for defamation. Be careful to clarify which things are opinions, and stick to facts you are sure about. Also, don’t assume the Internet is anonymous—even if you don’t put your real name or email address on a blog, a lawyer can often make your Internet service provider and the blog host cooperate to track you down.

3. Copyright—Easy to Violate, Easy to 'Fix' (Sue)

As much as we might want to think that the Internet is its own world, without any pesky laws or rules, we know better. The same laws that apply in the real world apply to the Internet, and blogs are no exception. That means that if you include copyrighted material in your blog (pictures, MP3 files, that cool Web comic, the script to the next X-Men movie), you can find yourself with a court date and a big fine to pay. Nor does it matter that you’re doing it for free or that you found the item for free on the Web to begin with—if it’s copyrighted (and basically every creative work of any kind is automatically), you can’t share it without permission from the owner.

Happily, you can avoid most of the possible copyright problems by linking to something you want to share rather than bringing it into your own blog. It takes a bit of extra work, and could take people away from your blog, but the good news is that it takes away the problems too.

4. Privacy—Who’s Asking, and Who’s Telling?

Another risk you face when blogging is sharing personal information about yourself or others. It’s not just the obvious bits of information (name, address, phone number social security #) where sharing can be problematic—even “anonymous” bits of data (your age, your school, your hobbies), when put together, can help someone figure out who you are. A marketer may just try to sell you something; a predator may be able to figure out where you’ll be, at what time, based on what you write about yourself—and try for a personal and dangerous “meetup.”

To minimize these risks, avoid naming your school, team, town, friends, family members, or yourself in your blog. Pseudonyms can be a good thing.

5. Comments—Can Others’ Sticks and Stones Hurt You?

Many blogs allow for readers to post comments. That can be a great way of getting feedback, encouraging discussion or even creating a community, but it can also cause problems for the blog owner. Keep in mind that, if any reader posts something which is illegal or even offensive, it’s the blog owner to whom the complaints will go. Even if you’re not actually responsible under the law (and the rules differ depending on the kind of violation), you may still have to deal with lawyers, subpoenas, and the possibility of being caught in the middle of a flame war or worse.

Of course, the easiest way to deal with this is to disable comments, to choose a blog host that doesn't permit them, or block posts by anyone but friends (if your blogging service allows that. If you'd rather allow for comments, make sure you check them frequently, and pull down those that you think might be problematic. Better to take the offensive about what you allow than to be defensive (or worse, a defendant) afterwards. The bottom line, here, is to be thoughtful about what and how you blog. Remember how far-reaching the Internet is and that what you write today may well be around 5 or 10 years from now when you're way past the part of your life that your blog is all about. Be smart, be safe, and have fun in the blogosphere.

<http://www.blogsafety.com/>

Email:

Please be considerate when forwarding emails. Many people don't want to read forwards, no matter how funny, interesting, or touching they are. Most people simply do not have the time to read forwards and already get a lot of regular email to which they need to reply. Do not just forward anything to everyone on your email list. Assume people don't want forwards unless they tell you otherwise.

Most forwards are not true. I'm talking about things that say, "If you email this to 100 people, you will get money from Bill Gates," or "Pepsi has the pledge of allegiance on their cans but took out 'Under God.' Go protest," or "Someone is dying. Pass this on and they'll get money from a company." They are very rarely true. Check things out before you send it on. It's annoying to get forwards that aren't true. Here are two sites that you can use to verify if something is true or not (you might want to have your parents look at these, since unfortunately, some things that are passed on are not appropriate).

<http://www.truthorfiction.com/>

<http://www.snopes.com/>