



## “Staying Safe in Cyber-space”

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Few dispute technology has made life easier. Computers allow us to access, organize and present information, and communicate in new and exciting ways. Children are often more knowledgeable and capable online than their parents. However, just because they can, does not mean that they should.

The online world can be a scary and dangerous place. Children can be cyber bullied, cyber-stalked, harassed, and expose their computer to viruses. Children can be lured by predators, sexually exploited, or approached by pedophiles using technology to manipulate and gain access to children. One in five children have been sexually solicited online and sexual exploitation remains a serious problem in Canada. Here are some suggestions to safely manage Internet use at home.

It is important computers are in common areas of the home to make monitoring easier. Only 13% of children say their internet use is monitored. It is hard to know what children are doing if the computer is tucked away in a bedroom. Once online, children are in a public space. It is important kids create a ‘screen’ name to protect their real identity. Information, comments or photos posted online can spread like wild fire and soon be on thousands of computers, and once posted, cannot be taken back. People have been fired from jobs, or denied entry into university, for posting humiliating, harmful or dangerous items online.

Many Internet service providers provide parent-control options and are willing to explain these functions if you call them. You can purchase software to block access to certain sites. Filtering programs can restrict transmission of personal information, and other programs exist to monitor and track online activity. You can also check the history of sites your children have visited allowing you to check the content of those particular sites.

To protect children, it is vital we talk with our children about Internet safety and develop rules for Internet use:

- Parents should know their children’s passwords to check for inappropriate content or communication. Passwords should never be shared with friends or others;
- No cyber bullying or making hostile or insulting messages;
- No posting of pictures without parental permission;
- Under no circumstance shall should your child share personal information such as their name, address, phone number, or mother’s maiden name;
- No pornography. If encountered, it should reported to a trusted adult immediately; Children should never agree to meet someone they have met online, and the incident should be reported to parents;
- Children should report suspicious activity to you, or call Kids Help Line 1-800 668 6868.

Knowledge is power. Embrace the technological world of your child, learn the skills your children are using, and teach them how to stay safe in cyber space.