

# tool kit for teen care

## Internet Safety and Adolescents

### How many adolescents are using the Internet?

- More than 1 out of 3 teenagers say they have a computer with Internet access in the home.
- Half of all middle and high-school students have used the Internet at least once.
- About 26% of adolescents say they have used the Internet for an hour or more in the past week.
- Adolescents say they use the Internet for personal use (57%), for research (56%), and for chat rooms or e-mail (48%).

### What are chat rooms and are they harmful?

- Chat rooms are places on the Internet where users can exchange instant messages.
- Access to chat lines can be open (public) or restricted (private).
- Chat rooms usually are not moderated. There is no one to keep the discussion focused on the topic or to try to control inappropriate messages. However, some Internet servers offer monitored chat rooms for various age groups.
- Chat rooms are considered to be the most dangerous area for potential sexual offenses on the Internet.

### What are the risks of Internet use by adolescents?

- Internet browsers ("surfers") may come across material that is violent, drug-promoting, or otherwise offensive.
- Some information provided online is not accurate. Even sites that look professional may not provide correct information.
- Excessive use of the Internet and time spent sitting at the computer may take important time away from studies, athletics, hobbies, or social activities.
- Exposure to violence on the Internet may cause increased aggression, hostility, and less sensitivity to suffering in others, as has been shown with watching violent movies and television programs.

### What are risks of sexual harm from the Internet?

- One in four adolescents aged 10–17 years who use the Internet report unwanted exposure to sexual material, usually while surfing the web at home.
- One in five adolescents aged 10–17 years who use the Internet regularly report at least one unwanted invitation to participate in sexual talk or sexual activity or is asked for personal sexual information.

### Who is at risk for online sexual offenses?

- Girls are at higher risk than boys for sexual solicitations.
- Older adolescents are more likely to be solicited, because they tend to use the computer unsupervised.
- The risk is increased for those who use the Internet often, participate in chat lines, talk to strangers online, or use the Internet at houses other than their own.
- The risk also is increased for children and adolescents who post personal information, talk with strangers about sex, make rude comments or sexual jokes, or look for X-rated sites.

### What can adults do to protect adolescents from the risks of Internet use?

- Adults should learn about the Internet and the information that is available on it.
- Adults should be aware of how, when, and where their children and teens use the Internet.
- Adults should support the use of the Internet for homework, reports, and the desire to learn more about topics found in other media or in the news.
- Adults should discuss the possible dangers of Internet use with children and adolescents.
- Parents or guardians should monitor and limit the amount of time children spend on the computer and the web sites they visit on the Internet.
- Parents or guardians can ask children to whom and from whom messages are sent.



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- Home computers can be kept in a family room or living room where adults can supervise use.
- Parents or guardians can use Internet safeguard functions (software or services that filter or block inappropriate web sites, e-mail, and other materials).
- If a child or adolescent reports getting a message of a sexual nature, adults should not blame or punish the young person, but should use the opportunity to talk about sex. The e-mail should be forwarded to the Internet provider and the provider should be informed that the e-mail is offensive. Many Internet providers have specific e-mail addresses for these types of reports. The police also should be contacted.

### What can children and adolescents do to use the Internet safely?

- NEVER give e-mail addresses to anyone whose identity cannot be confirmed.
- NEVER give out personal information such as a home address or telephone number online.
- NEVER agree to meet someone they met only on the Internet.
- Use a fake name for a screen name instead of a real name.
- Do not respond to any message or e-mail that makes them feel uncomfortable. Report these messages to parents, guardians, or other authorities.
- Tell their parents or another trusted adult about any sexual messages or pictures involving children found on the Internet because they are illegal. Unfortunately, most of the time these things are NOT reported to the police, Internet service providers, or other authorities.

### For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

**American Academy of Family Physicians**  
11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway  
Leawood, KS 66211-2672  
Telephone: (913) 906-6000  
[www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org) or [familydoctor.org](http://familydoctor.org)

**American Academy of Pediatrics**  
141 Northwest Point Boulevard  
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098  
Telephone: (847) 434-4000  
Fax: (847) 434-8000  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

**American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**  
409 12th Street SW  
PO Box 96920  
Washington, DC 20090-6290  
Telephone: (202) 863-2497  
Fax: (202) 484-3917  
[www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

**American Medical Association**  
515 North State Street  
Chicago, IL 60610  
Telephone: (312) 464-5000  
[www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html)

**Center for Media Education**  
2120 L Street NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20037  
Telephone: (202) 331-7833  
Fax: (202) 331-7841  
[www.cme.org](http://www.cme.org)

**Crimes Against Children Research Center**  
University of New Hampshire  
20 College Road  
126 Horton Social Science Center  
Durham, NH 03824  
Telephone: (603) 862-1888  
Fax: (603) 862-1122  
[www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html)

**National Center for Missing and Exploited Children**  
699 Prince Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-3175  
Telephone: (703) 274-3900 or 800-THE-LOST  
Fax: (703) 274-2222  
[www.missingkids.org](http://www.missingkids.org)

**The Online Safety Project**  
[www.safekids.com](http://www.safekids.com)

**U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Crimes Against Children Program**  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 11163  
Washington, DC 20535  
Telephone: (202) 324-3666  
[www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm)

**U.S. Department of Justice  
Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center**  
PO Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
Telephone: 800-627-6872 or (301) 519-5500  
[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html)