



Safe Searching 101

Avoiding trouble means knowing more about Web site sources.



Parents worry about social networks, chatting, texting, and sexting, but safe searching rarely makes it onto their top ten list. That's a mistake. From the time when their kids start searching for "Barbie" sites, they can start finding trouble online instead of fun things about their favorite doll.

We need some quick background on how the Web works to understand why safe searching is so important. The Web is structured around top-level domains or TLDs. These include .com, .org, .net, .gov, .edu and newer ones, like .mobi and .name, as well as country domains, such as .uk, .ca, and .tv. Some, such as educational institutions (.edu) or military operations (.mil), require that you meet their qualifications. But most TLDs permit anyone to buy a domain name and use it. Probably the most famous TLD confusion is whitehouse.com, which was an adult site for ten years and is now a Web site broadcast service. It most certainly is not associated with the residence of U.S. presidents in Washington, D.C. To address the problem of pornographers using popular kids' themes to draw children to their sites, a federal law was enacted making this a crime.

How to Filter Out the Bad Stuff

Sometimes our teens and kids misspell a Web site name or what they are searching for and end up at a slimy site. And sometimes they are just searching for trouble. Online, it's easy to find. For all of these risks, consider using your search engine filtered settings. All popular Web sites offer these, without charge, in their advanced settings. You can also use Yahoooligans/YahooKids for younger children. It's Yahoo's child-size search engine where all sites are appropriate for kids, including links to images for school reports. If you are using family tools or parental controls, they should block any unexpected search result, or at least access to problem sites.

When you are searching for something online that involves more than one word, such as a person's full name, or a phrase or quote, put it in quotes, like "Parry Aftab." Otherwise, if you search for Parry Aftab without quotes, the engine will search for every "Parry" and every "Aftab" online. It's lots to weed through. Searching for the defined phrase makes it simpler.

Ask your teens how they search for things and what they search for. You might learn something. ~ Stay safe, Parry Aftab

You Know You've Got It When

Six steps you can take to make sure you understand online searching.

- Use filtered settings on your favorite search engine to match your needs and talk to your teens about searching safely.
- Identify and use relevant safety controls on your web browser and operating system.
- Search for your own name and your teen's online.
- Search Facebook, YouTube, or Flickr for information.
- Select "news," "videos," and "images" options on your favorite search engine.
- Know the difference between trustworthy and untrustworthy Web sites and how to identify them.