

OUCH!

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Protecting Your Kids Online

GUEST EDITOR

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BACKGROUND

We all want the best for our children, including the ability to leverage the latest in technology. In today's world, children need to understand technology not only to be competitive in their education and careers but also in many cases to develop and maintain active social lives. However, with these capabilities come risks – risks that our children are often not aware of or prepared to deal with. As parents, it is our responsibility to ensure our children understand these risks and how to protect themselves. In this newsletter, we explain the top three threats to your children and how you can help them stay safe online.

TOP THREE THREATS

To protect your children, you have to first understand the dangers they face online. By understanding these dangers, you and your children will be able to work together better to defend against them.

1. **Strangers:** Dangerous strangers are one of the most common threats most parents think of. These are individuals who establish relationships with your children in order to take advantage of them. Such individuals may attempt to befriend your children or pretend to be children themselves.
2. **Friends:** Cyber bullying is a growing problem on the Internet and one that as a parent you may underestimate. Bullying has always existed, but the Internet amplifies the issue as bullies can post harassing messages to the entire world and even hijack your child's identity online. In addition, bullies can remain anonymous on the Internet, making them harder to track down and stop.

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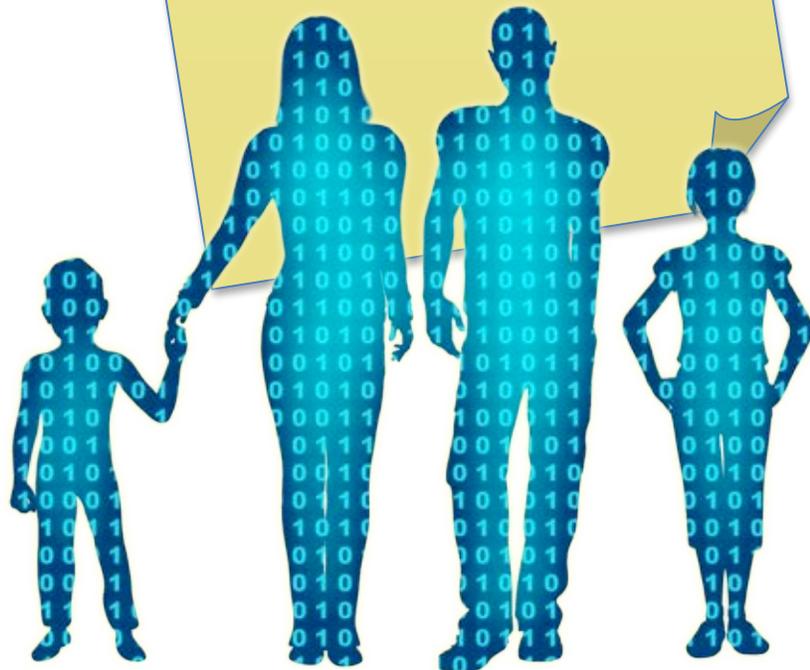
3. **Themselves:** In today's world of social networking, children can be their own worst enemy. Anything they post is not only accessible to the entire world but once posted may be difficult or even impossible to remove. What your children may not realize is how these postings can impact their future. It is becoming standard practice for universities or hiring organizations to review the social networking activities of student candidates or new hires to gain a better understanding of their potential. If your children have anything embarrassing or illegal posted about them, it may be held against them. In addition, highly personal information can be used by strangers--or even by friends--to target or harm them.

PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN

Now that you understand the key risks, here are steps you can take to defend against them.

- **Education:** The most important step you can take is education. No single technology or computer program is going to solve all the dangers your children face online. Make sure you are always talking to them about their online activities, and stay current with what they are doing. In addition, create an environment where your children feel comfortable coming to you with questions or problems they may have online.
- **Dedicated Computer:** Have a separate computer just for your children. This ensures that if they do accidentally infect their computer, your online accounts,

The key to protecting your children online is to educate them about the risks they face and keep talking to them.



such as online banking, are not affected or compromised. In addition, keep the children's dedicated computer in a public, high-traffic area so that you can monitor their online activities. Finally, make sure each child has and uses his own non-administrative account on the computer. This will allow you to more easily track what each child is doing on the computer.

- **Rules:** Create a document that identifies the rules you expect your children to follow when online. Also, consider posting how the rules will be enforced and possible consequences for violating the rules. Review the

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document with your kids and then post it by their computer or in some other visible area. This way your children will know and understand your expectations.

- **Monitoring:** Children are by nature trusting and curious. Unfortunately, as parents we know that this can sometimes lead to dangerous or painful situations. So monitor your children's activities; they simply do not realize how dangerous the world can be. Help them to identify issues and discuss these issues together so that they can build a safe online presence. You may not realize it, but your computer has parental controls that help you to monitor their activities, or you can purchase programs that give you greater monitoring capabilities.

- **Filtering:** In addition, you may want to filter your children's online activities, such as restricting which websites they can visit. This is especially important for younger children, as it protects them from accidentally accessing dangerous or unwanted content. Just like monitoring, your computer has parental controls that enable you to filter their activities, or you can purchase programs that give you greater capabilities. However, as children grow older filtering becomes less effective. Not only do children need greater access, such as for school or work, but they will be also accessing the Internet with devices you do not control,

such as computers in libraries, at a friend's house, or at school. This is why ultimately education is the most important step you can take.

RESOURCES

There are additional resources on the Internet on how to protect your children online or provide additional monitoring or filtering capabilities. Here are several to start with:

Non-profit Dedicated to Protecting Kids

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/63ebnz3>

OnGuard Online

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/6bm8xyu>

Microsoft Family Safety

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/3mqatb9>

Facebook on Protecting Your Kids

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/3tbda2a>

OpenDNS Service

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/3m37k3k>

Parental Software Options

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/3sd7pzg>

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