

The Internet: What are the Risks?

The Internet can be called “The Net” or “The Information Highway.” The Internet is a vast network of thousands of computers. Because it is so new, there are no laws that website creators must obey. There are guidelines, but they are voluntary, which means there is no legal punishment when someone does not follow them.

The Internet has opened lines of communication and opportunities for fun and education. Many use the Internet for research on school projects or to learn more about their favorite hobbies or sports team. The Internet is like having the world in your home. Just as you learn about a new place to visit, you must learn about the risks and set up rules about the Internet.

What are the risks on the Internet?

- **Exposure to Uncomfortable Material**
There are chat rooms, websites, and other places online containing material that may make you feel uncomfortable or offended. It could be material that is sexual, violent in nature, expressing hateful attitudes, or encouraging dangerous or illegal activities.
- **Giving up Your Privacy**
There are also risks with negative legal or financial consequences, such as giving out a parent’s credit card number on an unsecured website or doing something that violates another person’s privacy, such as using someone else’s password without their permission.
- **Putting Yourself in Danger**
Internet predators often lure unsuspecting children into sharing private information, even secrets, about themselves. While online, a child might provide information or arrange an encounter that could risk his or her safety or the safety of their friends or family members. In some cases, Internet predators have used e-mail, instant messaging, and chat rooms to gain a child’s confidence and then arrange a face-to-face meeting.
- **Cyberbullying**
Just as bullies can harass us face-to-face at home or at school, cyberbullies can harass through the use of the Internet. Both strangers and acquaintances can harass over the Internet. Harassment over the Internet should be reported to an adult.