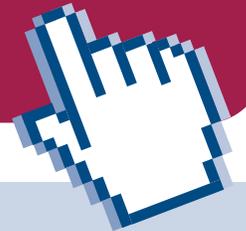# Managing the Internet

Many parents are anxious about introducing the Internet into their homes. Children have always been the heaviest users of electronic media and it is inevitable that they will be drawn to the exciting new medium of the World Wide Web. Because of safety and privacy concerns, parents must take an active role in guiding their children as they explore "cyberspace."

Getting started

Become familiar with the Internet so that you can direct your children's online experiences. Even if you've never surfed the web before, (and still think Java refers to coffee!), it doesn't take long to catch on.

Keep your computer in a well-used place so you can keep a close eye on your children's online activities.

Focus on the positive. You wouldn't take your children to a library and start off by telling them where they shouldn't go – instead, you would point them in the direction of books that interest them. Approach the Internet in the same way. Direct your children to sites where they can learn and share common interests with peers.

The Dangers

The Internet is just like the real world – there are lots of wonderful things to see and interesting people to meet – but there are also dangers that you must teach your children to recognize.

Advertisers have discovered that the unregulated Internet is the ideal vehicle for marketing to children. Interactive advertising sites, disguised as children's entertainment, are proliferating on the Web. Some marketers are using these sites to track children's online computer use and gather personal information.

Many sites prompt children to fill out forms or questionnaires so that they can join a club or win a prize. To protect your children's privacy, make sure they always check with you before giving out any personal information.

One of the Internet's greatest attractions for young people is its interactivity. Keep in mind, however, that "chatmates" are not always who they claim to be. The anonymity of online correspondence makes it easy for people to misrepresent themselves.

Make sure your children always use pretend names or nicknames and don't reveal personal information online. If they receive an offensive message, forward it immediately to your service provider.

Protecting Children

Protecting children from obscene and hateful online material is an important concern for parents. There is help available in the form of filtering technology. Parents can use this software to block adult material or objectionable words or allow access only to sites that have been rated safe for the age of the user.

Keep in mind that filtering technology is just a tool and is not meant to be a substitute for parental guidance. Much of the software is difficult and time consuming to configure. Most can be defeated and those that can't are so restrictive they may block a lot of worthwhile material.

To find safe, child-friendly home pages on the Internet, use the following sites as a starting point:
- Canadian Kids Page (http://www. canadiankids.net/)
- Yahooligans (http://www.yahooligans.com)

For a fun way to teach your child about Internet safety, download the multi-media games from the Media Awareness Network (http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/special_initiatives/games/index.cfm)

Read through the following rules with your kids and post them near your computer.

Online House Rules

1 I will not give out any personal information online without my parents' permission. That includes my name, phone number, home address, e-mail address, location of my school, my parents' work address/telephone numbers and credit card numbers.

2 I will always use a nickname when using the Internet.

3 When creating a password, I will make up one that is hard to guess but easy for me to remember. To avoid having it stolen, I will never reveal it to anyone.

4 I will not respond to any message that makes me uncomfortable. I will log off and tell an adult right away.

5 I will arrange to meet a friend I have made on the Internet *only* if one of my parents has been informed and will be present.

6 I will not send an insulting or rude message to anyone online. This is called "flaming" and is not good Netiquette.

7 I will not disable any filtering software that my parents have put on the computer.

8 I will not believe everything I read on the Internet. I will always check the source of the information and confirm it with my teacher, parent or librarian.