

Protecting Our Children

Keep Kids Safe Online During Summer Vacation

(NAPSA)—During vacation, kids often stay up late, sleep in late and play outside a lot. Today's kids also spend more time online during the summer, playing video games, surfing the Internet, and meeting friends in chat rooms and social networking sites. Although these online activities can provide hours of entertainment and learning, they can also expose kids to inappropriate content or people who might want to take advantage of them.

Parents don't have to unplug the computer or be Internet gurus to help protect their children online. "Even if parents can't tell a blog from a wiki, new technology safeguards and online resources can help them take more control of their children's Internet use and create a safer online experience for the entire family," said Kristin Johnsen, senior director for security outreach at Microsoft Corp., which offers dozens of pages of online safety guidance and resources online for no charge, at <http://www.microsoft.com/athome>.

In addition, family safety settings in many popular products—such as Xbox 360, Windows Live and MSN Premium—provide security tools to help block objectionable Web sites, control who corresponds with children, and guard against online attacks.

Triva and Toby Hazelton looked to these online resources and the advice of friends to create strict Internet rules for their children. Courtney, 12 and Taylor, 10 can send and receive e-mail and instant messages but only with friends that the Hazeltons know. They can use the Internet, but only pre-approved sites—and only when Mom and Dad are home.

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"We also talk openly and often with our kids about the threats on the Internet," Triva said. "We want our kids to think independently and know we won't always be able to control their Internet use, so we want them to feel comfortable telling us if something online makes them uncomfortable."

Here are some other tips from Microsoft to consider:

- Set clear rules for Internet usage. Prepare children for the online world just as you would for the real world. Establish guidelines and know who they are communicating with and what they are seeing online.

- Keep personal information private. Don't share personal information about yourself online—such as your name, address, age or gender—with people you don't know in the real world.

- Consider PC proximity. It might make sense to place the family's computer in a common room, especially for PCs that don't have family safety software installed. Parents are able to provide supervision and guidelines more easily this way.

- Keep communication open between parents and children. When kids see something on the Internet that makes them feel uncomfortable, assure them they can talk to a parent or other trusted adult about it without fear of getting their computer privileges taken away.