

Mom's Guide To Keeping Kids Safe Online

(NAPSA)—Today's moms need to defend their children against threats in two worlds: those outside the front door and those on the Internet. Although online resources such as Web logs (or "blogs") and social-networking sites teach kids how to communicate and express their opinions, they can also expose kids to online predators and scam artists.

Like many moms, Triva Hamilton guided her children from Web site to Web site when they were taking their first steps online. But now that her kids are getting older, "I can't be in the room every second that the kids are on the computer," she said.

Instead, Hamilton and her husband have looked to friends and creditable sources, such as www.microsoft.com/athome, to learn more about online threats. They've also created strict rules—including no kids online until after dinner, when Mom and Dad are home.

"Keeping kids safe online is like teaching them how to avoid strangers and other potential threats in the physical world," said Debby Fry Wilson, director of the Security Engineering and Communications Security Technology Unit at Microsoft Corp. Microsoft is one of the founding sponsors of staysafe.org, which provides free, noncommercial guidance on how to manage online

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safety and security issues. "By setting realistic rules and ensuring kids understand the need for caution, parents can help their children be safer online."

Tips on the site (www.staysafe.org) include the following:

- **Create a contract.** Develop an Internet code of conduct, with rules based on the child's age. All family members should sign the contract.

- **Talk.** Create an ongoing dialogue about Internet safety. If families frequently talk about good and bad aspects of the Internet, it becomes easier to chat when parents have concerns.

- **Protect identities.** To avoid attention from criminals, kids should know to never reveal their name, address, age or other information online. Parents should also help kids create a screen name that protects their identity and ensures that their online profile is blank.

- **Teach by example.** Parents can help kids learn to avoid destructive programs by maintaining strong security settings on the family PC. They should also use a firewall, an anti-virus product and anti-spyware software.