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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

# Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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## Help Kids Surf Safely

By Joanne Ko

**Your kid continually begs for more screen time, but you're nervous about how to ensure her safety — and for good reason. Nearly one in five 10- to 17-year-olds who went online monthly during a six month period was solicited sexually, according to the Youth Internet Safety Survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice.**

Plus, it's well known that kids bully other kids in social networks that permeate the Web. Your child is likely active in at least one of these sites: More than 60 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds have set up a profile on sites like MySpace, Friendster or Xanga, according to a study commissioned by the

**National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). What's more, 14 percent have had in-person meetings with someone they met online.**

"Working moms can't always be around to watch over their kids' shoulders while they're online," says Staca Urie, manager of outreach at NetSmartz (www.netsmartz.org), a partnership of NCMEC and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America that promotes online safety. "That's why you have to be proactive in establishing rules and creating an open dialogue with your kids, so they're comfortable coming to you if they encounter anything that seems risky or unsafe."

Studies show that children are more likely to make smarter online choices if their parents have talked to them about safety concerns. Set up your child's computer in a common, well-trafficked area so you can keep a casual eye out and discourage late-night surfing. Then discuss regulations with her and post them next to her computer. To get Net-safe:

### Set online ground rules.

Establish how much Web time is okay with you — maybe it's one or two hours outside of school — and consider getting time-limiting software or having your child use a timer. Also, periodically ask about each name on her buddy lists (on blogs, instant messengers and so on) and in her email address

## Move Over, MySpace

Introduced by Industrious Kid, Inc., [www.imbee.com](http://www.imbee.com) provides an ageappropriate social networking site for kids 8 to 14. The site allows them to blog, exchange messages and share photos. The best part? You get tools to monitor all of your child's imbee activity (messaging free, blog and photo sharing \$4 monthly).



## Upcoming Articles

September 2007  
**Avoiding Relapse**

October 2007  
**As Bad as it Gets: Depression**

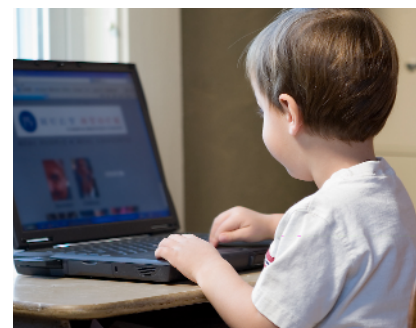
Continued on pg. 2 →→

book. Ask about sites she visits regularly and games she plays online. Just as you know who her in-person friends are and where they go together, you should know about her virtual relationships and hangouts. Have her commit to chatting only with people she knows and visiting sites and playing games that you've sanctioned, advises Urie.

**Lay down the law about privacy.** Between blogs and networking sites like MySpace, LiveJournal and Facebook, it's all too easy for kids to share identifying information — just

what Internet predators seek. So make sure your child fully understands that posting her full name, her address or phone number, the name of her school, personal pictures or anything else remotely identifying is forbidden. Also be clear that downloading or clicking on unfamiliar links can expose private information stored in the computer. If you have a webcam, tell your child she may use it for approved activities like talking to her grandparents, but not for sharing self-portraits or videos or talking to someone she's never met.

**Talk about inappropriate activity.** Pop-up blockers and junk-email filters are a poor match for the bombardment of unwanted sexual content. Plus, teens use social sites and blogs to post negative and defaming comments about other kids. Make sure your child knows that she should ignore solicitations, and that if she ever feels uncomfortable, offended, confused or scared, she should tell you or another trusted adult right away.



**Have your child make you a promise:** She'll never meet up with an online acquaintance without discussing it with you. Help her understand that people lie online and can't always be trusted. If your teen knows of a friend meeting an online stranger, she should contact the anonymous CyberTipline ([www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com), 800-843-5678), a service of NCMEC.

**Lay out rules of "netiquette."** Insist that your child follow-copyright laws and not download other people's words, music or art illegally. Reinforce that she should always use polite — and never hurtful — language. In other words, she must treat others online as she'd like to be treated. Let her know that Internet use is not a right but a privilege — and that it can be taken away. ■

## IDK Online Lingo

Want to know what your kid's chatting about? Then you gotta know the online acronyms. If you see "POS" in an IM (instant messaging) box, it means "Parent Over Shoulder." Meaning you! Here are other acronyms your child's likely to see or use. For more, go to [www.netsmartz.org/netparents.htm](http://www.netsmartz.org/netparents.htm) and click under "Learn."

- 121:** One to one
- A/S/L?** Age, sex, location?
- B4N:** Bye for now
- BEG:** Big evil grin
- BF:** Boyfriend
- IDK:** I don't know
- IPN:** I'm posting naked
- JK:** Just kidding
- KOL:** Kiss on lips
- LMIRL:** Let's meet in real life
- MOSS:** Member of the same sex
- MOTOS:** Member of the opposite sex
- P911:** My parents are coming!
- PAL:** Parents are listening
- PDA:** Public display of affection
- SETE:** Smiling ear to ear

## Resources

### United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number. [www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.