

# Teen Internet Safety Tips

With a few Internet safety tips, your online experience can be amazing!

## WebMD Archive

Spend much time surfing the web? If you do, you need to be wary of things that lurk on the dark side of the Internet. Not only are there viruses, hackers and spammers -- online predators and a bunch of evildoers are out there just waiting to pounce on teens in the digital world.

You have probably heard of someone's computer being hacked, his or her identity being stolen online, or even having some embarrassing pictures posted online.

"Nah, it can't happen to me," you think. Well, if you use the following Internet safety tips, you have a good chance of being right.

### 1. Keep Your Online Identity Secret

Don't tell anyone your real name and address or what neighborhood you live in. Here's the general rule: Don't give out *any* information that a predator could possibly use to find you. The Federal Trade Commission says that even "small clues" like what school you attend or the name of your athletic team is enough for a predator to figure out your identity. You wouldn't tell some 40-year-old man or woman you met at the mall your name and where you live, would you? So why would you tell *CoolGuy985* or *HotChick16* from the chat room?

### 2. Your Username and Password Belong to You ... And Only You

Don't give your username or password to anyone. It's just that simple. What if a friend logs on and pretends to be you, and then says something really awful and gets *you* in trouble? Sure, it might seem funny to the "former" friend, but it's serious and it happens everyday. With your username and password, someone can post language that gets you expelled from school, in trouble with your parents, or even in trouble with the law. Keep your name and password private.

### 3. The Internet has a Great Memory ... So Keep Its Memory of You Clean

Just because the Internet is so massive does not mean that embarrassing or risqué pictures, rude or mean comments, or illegal activities will disappear forever. Watch what you post about yourself or others -- or allow your friends to post about you -- because you may have to live with it for a long, long time.

#### 4. Be Good Online ... Just Like You Are Offline

Writing "hate" emails, hacking into other people's computers, illegally downloading music or movies and making online threats are just as illegal on the Internet as they are in the real world. You cannot hide behind a screen name and get away with it. Watch what you write -- because someone else is watching what you write!

#### 5. Be Extremely Careful about Meeting Someone in Person

The FBI gives an all-out blanket warning: "Never meet anyone in person that you meet online." That said, many teens do make good friends online. You just have to be super-cautious and *make sure other people you know and trust also know this "new" online person.*

If you do decide to meet the new person, bring your parents with you. All of you meet together in a public area like a mall where there are tons of people around. Ask that the person's parents come, too. If the situation feels creepy, it probably *is* creepy! Just like in the real world, trust your gut instincts -- and walk away.

#### 6. Your Parents Are Ultimately Responsible for Minors Online

Even if your parents don't know much about the Internet, tell them what types of web sites you go to. They will probably be interested and impressed with your Internet skills. They may also help you avoid potential problems if a web site or new "friend" looks sketchy.

Some Extra Words of Caution

#### **Almost Everything on the Internet Is Traceable**

Every search, web site visit, online posting and email is registered or recorded somewhere on the Internet. Once you send something out on the Internet, it's almost impossible to take it back. You have to be careful -- *not impulsive* -- when you write email or go to chat rooms.

#### **People Live in "Fantasyland" Online**

Even though someone writes, "Hi, I'm a really cool 15-year-old guy from New York City," in reality that guy may be a 60-year-old man or even your next-door neighbor. Use scrutiny and caution.

#### **Your Information Can Be Sold to Others**

Every web site has this thing called a "privacy policy." It will tell you how that web site

uses all the personal information about you, like your name. In some cases, though, when you're not looking, some web sites ignore their privacy policy and sell your email address to other companies. When you open your email one day, you might have 150 spam emails in your inbox as a result. If a web site is asking for too much information about you, take control and leave the site. (Again, would you give this information to some older stranger at the mall? Probably not.)

### **What about Nude Photos and Sex Sites?**

You've probably come across some explicit sexual material on the Internet. That's because pornography is big business on the web. If you come across a pornography site or get pornographic email, take control: Leave the site or delete the email.

Remember, pornography is not real life. It's made up -- the men and women are acting. In real life, real people don't act that way with each other. There are much better ways to learn about real sex if you're curious -- like WebMD's Teen Health Channel.

### **Is It Safe to Post Photos of Myself on the Internet?**

No way! In terms of bad ideas, this one tops the chart! John Shehan from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children based in Alexandria, Virginia, says that posting or emailing sexual pictures of yourself can be embarrassing -- and dangerous. "Teens quickly learn the hard way that images are forever memorialized online, and they are almost impossible to delete," Shehan says.

If someone asks you to send them sexual pictures, *be very suspicious -- and don't do it.* Alert your parents. Shehan says that teens who send out one sexual picture can sometimes be blackmailed to send more, when the sexual predator threatens to post the first picture online for millions to see -- or show it to your family or friends.

### **How Do I Report Creepy or Illegal Things Online?**

While most Internet activity is legal, occasionally you might come across something that just seems wrong, creepy or even scares you. The first thing to do is tell your parents -- just like you'd do if a creep talked dirty to you at the movies. Your parents can support you and help you make the right decisions about what to do next. If you decide to report the suspicious activity or person, there are two web sites you can go to:

1. For computer hacking, online stealing, or similar suspicious or illegal activity, go to [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov). Follow the instructions for how to report what you saw.
2. For any suspicious activity involving sexual messages, someone sending you nude photos or asking you to send nude photos, someone trying to get you to do sexual things, or any other sexually related incident, go to [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com).

Admittedly, the Internet is completely awesome. It lets you discover an incredible new world and meet some great new friends in the next town or across the globe. Just use it with caution, since the trail you leave behind may come back to haunt you -- and your

family and friends -- one day.