



**AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
OBSTETRICIANS AND
GYNECOLOGISTS**

Tool Kit for Teen Care: Internet Safety and Adolescents

How many adolescents are using the Internet?

- More than one in three teenagers say they have a computer with Internet access in the home.
- Half of all middle and high-school students have used the Internet at least once.
- About 26 percent of adolescents say they have used the Internet for an hour or more in the past week.
- Adolescents say they use the Internet for personal use (57 percent), for research (56 percent), and for chat rooms or e-mail (48 percent).

What are chat rooms and are they harmful?

- Chat rooms are places on the Internet where users can exchange instant messages.
- Access to chat lines can be open (public) or restricted (private).
- Chat rooms usually are not moderated. There is no one to keep the discussion focused on the topic or to try to control inappropriate messages. However, some Internet servers offer monitored chat rooms for various age groups.
- Chat rooms are considered to be the most dangerous area for potential sexual offenses on the Internet.

What are the risks of Internet use by adolescents?

- Internet browsers ("surfers") may come across material that is violent, drug-promoting or otherwise offensive.
- Some information provided online is not accurate. Even sites that look professional may not provide correct information.
- Excessive use of the Internet and time spent sitting at the computer may take important time away from studies, athletics, hobbies or social activities.
- Exposure to violence on the Internet may cause increased aggression, hostility and less sensitivity to suffering in others, as has been shown with watching violent movies and television programs.

What are risks of sexual harm from the Internet?

- One in four adolescents aged 10-17 years who use the Internet report unwanted exposure to sexual material, usually while surfing the Web at home.

- One in five adolescents aged 10-17 years who use the Internet regularly report at least one unwanted invitation to participate in sexual talk or sexual activity or is asked for personal sexual information.

Who is at risk for online sexual offenses?

- Girls are at higher risk than boys for sexual solicitations.
- Older adolescents are more likely to be solicited, because they tend to use the computer unsupervised.
- The risk is increased for those who use the Internet often, participate in chat lines, talk to strangers online, or use the Internet at houses other than their own.
- The risk also is increased for children and adolescents who post personal information, talk with strangers about sex, make rude comments or sexual jokes, or look for X-rated sites.

What can adults do to protect adolescents from the risks of Internet use?

- Adults should learn about the Internet and the information that is available on it.
- Adults should be aware of how, when and where their children and teens use the Internet.
- Adults should support the use of the Internet for homework, reports and the desire to learn more about topics found in other media or in the news.
- Adults should discuss the possible dangers of Internet use with children and adolescents.
- Parents or guardians should monitor and limit the amount of time children spend on the computer and the Websites they visit on the Internet.
- Parents or guardians can ask children to whom and from whom messages are sent.
- Home computers can be kept in a family room or living room where adults can supervise use.
- Parents or guardians can use Internet safeguard functions (software or services that filter or block inappropriate Websites, e-mail, and other materials).
- If a child or adolescent reports getting a message of a sexual nature, adults should not blame or punish the young person, but should use the opportunity to talk about sex. The e-mail should be forwarded to the Internet provider and the provider should be informed that the e-mail is offensive. Many Internet providers have specific e-mail addresses for these types of reports. The police also should be contacted.

What can children and adolescents do to use the Internet safely?

- NEVER give e-mail addresses to anyone whose identity cannot be confirmed.
- NEVER give out personal information such as a home address or telephone number online.
- NEVER agree to meet someone they met only on the Internet.
- Use a fake name for a screen name instead of a real name.
- Do not respond to any message or e-mail that makes them feel uncomfortable. Report these messages to parents, guardians, or other authorities.
- Tell their parents or another trusted adult about any sexual messages or pictures involving children found on the Internet because they are illegal. Unfortunately, most of the time these things are NOT reported to the police, Internet service providers or other authorities.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and Websites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these Websites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these Websites.

American Academy of Family Physicians
11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway
Leawood, KS 66211-2672
Telephone: (913) 906-6000
www.aafp.org or familydoctor.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
Telephone: (847) 434-4000
Fax: (847) 434-8000
www.aap.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
409 12th Street SW
PO Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6290
Telephone: (202) 863-2497
Fax: (202) 484-3917
www.acog.org

American Medical Association
515 North State Street
Chicago, IL 60610
Telephone: (312) 464-5000
www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html

Center for Media Education
2120 L Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20037
Telephone: (202) 331-7833
Fax: (202) 331-7841
www.cme.org

Crimes Against Children Research Center
University of New Hampshire
20 College Road
126 Horton Social Science Center
Durham, NH 03824
Telephone: (603) 862-1888
Fax: (603) 862-1122
www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
699 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3175

Telephone: (703) 274-3900 or 800-THE-LOST
Fax: (703) 274-2222
www.missingkids.org

The Online Safety Project
www.safekids.com

U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Crimes Against Children Program
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 11163
Washington, DC 20535
Telephone: (202) 324-3666
www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm

U.S. Department of Justice
Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
Telephone: 1-800-627-6872 or (301) 519-5500
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

Prepared by the ACOG Committee on Adolescent Health Care. For more information, e-mail adolhlth@acog.org. References available upon request.

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