

# THE PARENT LETTER



About Our Kids:  
A Letter for Parents by the  
NYU Child Study Center

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## THE INTERNET AT HOME: MAKING IT WORK FOR YOU AND YOUR KIDS

The Internet can be a window on the world for children. They can connect with other children with similar interests; they can research topics they're studying; they can find out interesting facts about places all over the world. Parents and kids can share Internet experiences and have fun together. But there's also a downside. The Internet also contains some dangerous, pornographic and inappropriate material. Knowing how to protect your children and yourself from the downside of the Internet takes time and thought, but ultimately you and your children will feel safer. Here are some issues of concern:

### ❑ **Exposure to inappropriate material**

Parents should monitor the type of information their children are exposed to online as much as they monitor what they are exposed to on television or in movies. Don't let the computer teach your children things that you don't want them to learn without your guidance. There may be issues you may feel are important to convey personally, such as moral or religious topics, and some sites may not be appropriate for your specific requirements.

### ❑ **Excessive use of the Internet for exploring/chatting with others**

For many children, the computer has replaced the telephone for communication. Chatting and browsing can become addictive and can distract children from everyday responsibilities such as homework, chores or even bed times. The time children spend on the computer should be controlled and monitored. Studies have shown that if children spend too much time chatting on the computer, they may have difficulty with social interaction in real life.

### ❑ **Contact with people who may want to harm children**

One of the most talked about and publicized problems children may encounter online is that there are people who seek to expose children to inappropriate content for their own pleasure or even meet children online to develop inappropriate relationships. Make every effort to know which web sites your children are browsing, what chat rooms they're using, and what kinds of e-mail they're receiving.

## **Family Guidelines**

### ❑ **Set up family rules**

Help your children understand the need for family rules for computer use, and work out the rules with them. Clearly define issues such as what shouldn't be seen, with whom they can chat with, and how often and for how long they can use the computer. It should be firmly stated that there are to be no secret relationships or secret use of the computer. Explain that the Internet is not like movies, television or other media in that there are no controlling networks or censors on the Internet, and anyone may provide information without regulation.

### ❑ **Keep the computer in a central location in the house**

Keep the computer in a public area of the house, not in the child's room, so you can see what's going on. Kids are more likely to follow the house rules and be more responsible about which sites they're viewing. It's your responsibility to protect your children from bad influences, and this is a good way to monitor the content and the time that your child spends online.

❑ **Set up firm rules about what information cannot be provided online**

Many legitimate sites ask for information from the child, but there are also many inappropriate sites that are well hidden and disguised to get personal information. To avoid problems, establish what information a child should NOT provide to anyone online, such as their full name, address, phone number, credit card number or other personal information that may lead to putting your child (and you) at risk. In addition, disclosing this information can also lead to massive amounts of junk mail, both online and at home.

❑ **Choose appropriate methods of monitoring and restriction**

Make sure you know what your children are doing and watching online by monitoring which sites and chat rooms they have visited. This can be difficult sometimes, since many kids are more computer literate than their parents and may be able to “hide” their tracks. Luckily, the computer itself can help you monitor your kids’ activities. Many Internet Service Providers (ISPs) offer "parental controls" that allow you to tailor your children's access to the Web. For example, the ISP America Online can set up parental controls which allow you to take charge of your child’s online experience by limiting time spent online, preventing unwanted e-mails, and other controls. If you feel these controls do not provide enough security, many "off-the-shelf" software programs may be purchased. Read up on what is available, become an educated consumer and feel good that you have done your best to protect your children. Let your children know that you can oversee what they are doing, but emphasize that this information is for the purpose of protecting them, not threatening them.

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**ABOUT THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER**

The NYU Child Study Center is dedicated to the research, prevention and treatment of child and adolescent mental health problems. The Center offers evaluation and treatment for children and teenagers with anxiety, depression, learning or attention difficulties, neuropsychiatric problems, and trauma and stress related symptoms.

We offer a limited number of clinical studies at no cost for specific disorders and age groups. To see if your child would be appropriate for one of these studies, please call (212) 263-8916.

The NYU Child Study Center also offers workshops and lectures for parents, educators and mental health professionals on a variety of mental health and parenting topics. The Family Education Series consists of 13 informative workshops focused on child behavioral and attentional difficulties. To learn more or to request a speaker, please call (212) 263-8861.

For further information, guidelines and practical suggestions on child mental health and parenting issues, please visit the NYU Child Study Center’s website, [AboutOurKids.org](http://AboutOurKids.org).

**AboutOurKids.org**

THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER ONLINE

**Changing the Face of Child Mental Health  
NYU Child Study Center**

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