

## Technology Edge

### Safe Waves For Young Surfers

You've taken the plunge, purchased a home computer, and arranged for Internet access. Instantly you have invited the Information Superhighway to detour through your home, bringing you and your kids all the best that the world has to offer, right? Absolutely.

But unfortunately with all the best that the world has to offer, comes all the worst the world has to offer, as well. And with 6 million + domain names registered to date, how in the world can we keep our children from wandering into (or seeking) some of the downright frightening sites that make up the seamy side of the World Wide Web?

Fortunately, there are several solutions that are easy, affordable, and non-confrontational. These solutions can be divided into three categories: software, check-ups, and communication.

#### Software

There are several affordable "blocking" software programs that can be purchased to safeguard your kids as they surf the Web. Perhaps the best known of these programs is "Net Nanny." Net Nanny can prevent specific information from going out into the Internet, such as your address, your phone number, or other personal and sensitive data, and keep it from falling into the wrong hands. Net Nanny allows you to monitor, screen and block access to anything residing on, or running in your PC, whether you are connected to the Internet or not, and in real time. You determine what is screened with the help of their free, fully editable/customizable list.

Net Nanny is available both through local retail outlets and online at <http://www.netnanny.com>.

Another popular blocking software is called "CYBERSitter." Working secretly in the background, CYBERSitter analyzes all Internet activity. Whenever it detects activity the parent has elected to restrict, it takes over and blocks the activity before it takes place. If desired, CYBERSitter will maintain a complete history of all Internet activity, including attempts to access blocked material. Orders can be placed online at <http://www.cybersitter.com>.

Net Nanny and CYBERSitter are only two of many excellent blocking programs available. A more complete overview of programs available can be found at ZDNet Products, at <http://www.zdnet.com/products/special/filter2.html>.

#### Check-ups

Another good way to keep tabs on your kids' surfing habits is by looking into the browser's history. Internet Explorer makes it very easy to look at where your browser has been by giving you a little picture (icon) to click on at the top of their screen. Clicking on this History button will show you where you or your kids have been for the past several days, depending on how your browser was configured.

Netscape has the same feature, but makes it a little harder to find. Find the "Tools" menu, and then click on "History." Using this method to chaperone your children's surfing activities is certainly less expensive and less restrictive, but older children may feel that their privacy

is being invaded directly by you rather than by a software program.

#### Communication

Of course, honest, open communication between parents and children is always recommended. Instead of alluding to "dirty pictures" or "sick people" on the Internet, set some common sense rules for your kids' computer use. Ira Winkler of ZD TV News suggests the following ground rules for kids:

1. Do not visit pornographic sites.
2. Do not give out your name or address for any reason.
3. You must tell a parent if someone tries to meet with you.
4. Accessing computers without permission is illegal.
5. You have a time limit for using computers (determine a daily limit).

Explain to your children that it is very easy to pretend to be someone you are not on the Internet, and to be very careful about talking to strangers. They've heard that line before, but they've got to hear it about the Internet.

And then after you've educated your child about the potential dangers of the Internet, pull up a couple of chairs and spend some time together, exploring all the wonders that this fabulous medium has to offer. Some of the very greatest Web sites are those designed for kids, so you may find yourself frequenting your child's favorites! ♦

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