



## Top eight expert tips on Internet safety

Written by Josh Duvauchelle

"The Net is vital to a child's success as a student as well as a future member of the work place," says **Alexis Moore**, author of *A Parent's Guide to Cyberstalking and Cyberbullying* and founder of Survivors in Action. "[It] poses dangers but can be a wonderful and powerful tool when utilized by supervised children who are aware of the dangers, and parents who engage with their child frequently." To help you do just that, we chatted with some of the world's top experts to get their sage tips regarding kids and online safety.

### 1. On why parents should learn new technologies:

"Parents need to tech-up in order to properly monitor their kids' cyber life. Most won't surpass their kids when it comes to technology, but try to be on the same page with them instead of looking the other way or claiming ignorance about all things digital."

— **Thomas Jacobs**, former Arizona assistant attorney general and author of *Teen Cyberbullying Investigated*

### 2. On age-appropriate technology usage:

"For the younger kids, use parental controls on the computer. If you buy a cell phone, ensure that it is a child-friendly device with restrictions on who can call or text them. For the older children, have regular conversations with them about their online use and clearly tell them your values and expectations. Use monitoring software if you suspect your child is getting in over his or her head. Restrict the times in which they can use their cell phones and keep an eye on . . . Facebook or other social networking profiles."

— **Stephen Balkam**, founder of the Family Online Safety Institute and advisor to both the U.S. Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory Committee and the Facebook Safety Advisory Board

### 3. On children posting photos:

"Ideally, children should not post pictures on the Internet at all."

— **Jill Starishevsky**, New York City's assistant district attorney and prosecutor of child abuse and sex crimes

### 4. On what constitutes the biggest online safety risk:

“The biggest risk for kids? They give away their heart to people who don't deserve it. Online communication promotes something called ‘hyperpersonal communication,’ where we tend to disclose things much deeper and much faster online than we would face to face. Part of this is due, especially in the case of young teens, to the way we tend to idealize the person on the other end. Because we don't get many non-verbal cues, we assume the other person is more like what we want rather than what they really are. As a result, kids share too much, get too close and end up getting hurt. So instead of worrying about predators who will come and snatch our kids from their beds, we need to worry more about our kids walking out the front door – right into the arms of the predator.”

— **Dr. Peggy Kendall**, associate professor of communication studies at Bethel University and author of *Connected: Christian Parenting in the Age of IM and Myspace*

#### **5. On when to start letting kids use the Internet:**

“Every child is different and will express interest at different intervals, just like learning to crawl or walk. My son was very young when he showed an interest in the Internet. He was too young to type himself, but I would let him sit on my lap and show him age-appropriate colouring activities of his favourite cartoon characters and help him move and click the mouse to colour them in. As you see their comprehension and maturity level of the Internet grow, continue working with them side by side to open new areas, discuss Internet safety and put rules in place. When our children are learning how to walk, we slowly open more areas of our home for them to navigate through as they are ready. The same rings true for the online world.”

— **Tracie Coppedge**, affinity relations manager for [Bsecure Online](#)

#### **6. On how kids should respond to cyberbullying:**

“My suggestion to kids, as difficult as it may be, is to stop reading, walk away from the computer and tell your parents.”

— **Thomas Jacobs**, former Arizona assistant attorney general and author of *Teen Cyberbullying Investigated*

#### **7. On keeping communication lines open:**

“Having ongoing conversations with your children and teens about what is going on in their lives will keep you close to your children and they will be more likely to reveal problems as they come up. Be sure to talk about the positive things as well as the problems. Daily discussions are ideal, but if you cannot do that, do what you can.”

— **Dr. Kathy Seifert**, bullying expert, forensic psychologist and author of *How Children Become Violent*

#### **8. On choosing an online name:**

“When networking online, it's better to use your first name only – or better yet, use a nickname that your friends recognize. In some cases, individuals may consider altering the spelling of their name or leaving out letters.”

— **Jeremy Miller**, manager of the Investigation and Restoration Center at Kroll Fraud Solutions