

Keep kids cyber-safe and monitor online activities

By JENNIFER COLTON

If you have a child old enough to see, they've probably connected with the Internet. Whether it's watching YouTube videos or posing for Facebook photos, children are growing up with the Internet all around them. Keeping children safe online and making them responsible citizens of the digital world is now a part of the parent's handbook.

How you monitor your children may depend on what age they are, but at all ages, children need to know you are aware and interested in what they do online.

Protection software

One way to control what your children see online is to purchase parental software, or programs that set up filters for what your child can and cannot access, such as adult content, gambling, pornography and illegal drugs. Net Nanny, a subscription-based service, is the highest rated parental control software, primarily based on its filtering and blocking and ease of use scores. Other programs include Norton Family, McAfee's Safe Eyes, Circle with Disney and Mobicip. Many programs also include built-in time limit settings – a plus if you have a child prone to sneaking extra screen time. Cost: Variable. Net Nanny starts around \$40 per computer and \$20 per phone.

Site-specific monitoring

If your child is only interested in a few sites, you can change the settings and monitor each application individually. Facebook and Twitter, for example, allow

privacy controls that limit your child's interaction with others as well as who can see his or her information. There's a fine line between monitoring and invading privacy, but your child should give

through once a week and make sure your child hasn't wandered into any of the more questionable sectors of the online world. Make sure your children know that you will be doing this – but don't tell

ily around, what are they doing at night while you're asleep?

Set clear rules

The one form of parental monitoring that might not first come to mind should be one of the first steps – communication. Make sure you discuss with your child what they can and cannot do online. If they're setting up a profile, make sure they know what information can be shared and what can't. It's the same discussion you have for setting any family rules. While being online is a little more general than where a child can go on the way to/from school, it's still an important piece to make sure everyone understands where the lines are. This can also include "making friends" online. Make sure you know who your children are talking to. Cost: Communication.

Keep communication lines open

Just because you've set rules doesn't mean your children will always follow them. Check in with your kids about what they're doing online and who they're talking to – just like you do with their friends at school and activities. Children have wider access through the Internet than ever before, and parents need to keep communication lines open. This goes both ways – good and bad. If children have positive experiences, try to share their enthusiasm, even if you've never played the game or spent much time on their site/app of choice. And, if your child has a bad experience, make sure they know they can come to you, no matter what it is. Cost: Communication.



you access to his or her accounts on all online forums and websites. If your child has his or her own Facebook account, for example, they can participate in private Facebook messages. Cost: Time.

Check the history

If your child browses the Internet, set aside time to periodically check where they've been stopping along the way. Checking the history of the web browser on a PC or tablet will give you an idea of the kinds of site your child is visiting. This also works for YouTube, where you can scroll through a list of what they have been watching. Skim

them exactly when. This opens communication and, as in the case of security cameras, may help deter some curious clicking. Cost: Time.

Watch the location – and the time

If a computer is set up in a common room of the house, children are less likely to violate any house rules with what they're doing online. A child with a computer or tablet in his or her bedroom may be more willing to head to sites they know they shouldn't when a watchful eye is not nearby. The same goes for the times your children are going online. While they may not be breaking the rules at 4 o'clock in the afternoon with a whole fam-

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