



Keeping Kids Safe Online & On Cell

TIPS + TOOLS FOR PARENTS





California State Senate

SENATOR PATRICIA C. BATES

THIRTY-SIXTH SENATE DISTRICT

Dear Parent:

Your child's use of the internet and cell phones needs your attention.

As young children, adolescents, and teens become more technology-savvy, unlimited possibilities open up with the internet, their personal computers, and their cell phones.

The internet opens up a new world for young children. It can serve as an educational as well as an entertainment source. Kids become proficient very quickly and can instantly connect, communicate and transmit information anytime and from almost anywhere.

With today's technology, cell phones are now on par in popularity with home and laptop computers. Cell phones seem to be everywhere, and kids are relying on them for a variety of services, well beyond the actual phone call and text message.

Both technologies present a wide range of helpful applications that kids find attractive, such as instant messaging, downloading music and movies, interactive games and access to social networking sites. However, both the internet and cell phones pose a variety of potential dangers that can place children in unsafe and harmful situations. It's vital that parents and guardians take steps to educate themselves about how their children are using technology.

The California State Legislature is continually addressing the issue of internet safety for kids. Recent legislation restricts contact with minors through the internet and makes internet safety information and resources available to public school students. One of the first laws in the nation, AB 86 (2008) added cyber-bullying, electronic or online, to the list of offenses for which a student may be suspended or expelled from school.

Take a moment to review this brochure with your kids. Help keep them safe online and on their cell phones.

Sincerely,

SENATOR PATRICIA C. BATES

THE INTERNET

The internet poses challenges for parents because, unlike TV or radio, the internet:

- is interactive – your child can interact with anyone online;
- allows users to post information that may be inaccurate, misleading or inappropriate for children;
- provides no restrictions on advertising to children;
- may not be anonymous even when it seems to be.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- When purchasing a web-enabled device for your child, research online safety features, parental control options and webcam features. Understand the technology that you are providing to your child and bringing into your home.
- Before you give your child access to the computer/cell phone/gaming device or other web-enabled devices, check security and safety controls, and make sure software updates are automatic and current.
- Discuss with them basic guidelines, such as when they can use it, what sites they can visit, the number of texts/minutes they can use, and establish that any purchases made must be approved by a parent.
- Get involved. Spend time online with your child, and talk about features on their phone and games they are interested in playing (see the Discussion Starters section at the end of the brochure).
- Be aware of all possible devices that your child may use to interact with others.
- Find out if your child has a Facebook page or other social media profiles online such as game consoles or apps on their phone. The computer is not the only place to access the internet.

GET INVOLVED.

Spend time online with your child. Your involvement in your child's life is the best assurance of your child's safety.

STAY INFORMED.

Keep up-to-date on parental controls, the latest in privacy controls for social media, and trends in new technology usage.

BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR YOUR KIDS.

If you see something you don't like, contact your internet service provider (ISP) or the company that created the material.

SET RULES ABOUT INTERNET USE.

Keep computers in a family area so you can monitor your child's activity.

WHAT PARENTS OF TEENS SHOULD KNOW

- 93% of teens go online.
- On average, texting teens send and receive 1500 text messages a month.
- 97% of teens play computer, web, portable, or console games.
- 27% of teens play online games with people they don't know.
- 73% of teens have profiles on social networking sites.
- 47% of teens have uploaded photos; 14% have posted videos.

PHISHING

You and your child should be aware of "phishing" scams. It's a growing problem where criminals send bogus emails; for example, a fake security notice from a bank or an instant text message with a deceptive note. The intent is to "phish" for personal information and financial data by urging the receiver of the fake communication to reply with critical information. Thus the thief is able to steal the unsuspecting victim's identity.



NEVER give out your Social Security number, the number one target of identity thieves.

BROWSING

Exploring information on the world wide web has benefits and risks for kids.

BENEFITS TO YOUR CHILD

- access to educational resources
- access to current information
- access to school calendars and activities via their websites
- access to fun and educational games
- access to learning skills useful in future jobs

DANGERS AND RISKS

- easy-to-find sites with sexually explicit images
- sites promoting hatred, bigotry, violence, drugs, and cults
- inaccurate, misleading, and untrue information
- unrestricted marketing of alcohol and tobacco products
- marketing that deceptively collects personal information to make contact or sell products
- easy access to games with excessive violence

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Look for software that can block or filter inappropriate sites.
- Teach your child to immediately end any online experience if uncomfortable or scared and tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- Teach your child never to give out personal information without your permission.

PARENTAL CONTROLS CAN:

- block access to inappropriate materials;
- allow you to specify what is appropriate;
- monitor your child's activity by recording web addresses that he or she visits;
- let you set access levels for each family member;
- limit search results to appropriate content for kids;
- enforce time limits.

BE SMART WITH YOUR CHILD'S CELL PHONE

Like the internet, cell phones bring with them a host of potential dangers. On one hand, they are a wonderful tool for parents to keep in touch with their children, not only on a daily basis, but in case of an emergency. On the other hand, today's cell phones can do almost anything a PC can do, making kids vulnerable to unsafe situations. Here are some important facts to keep in mind.



TEXT MESSAGING

Texting has become almost second nature to kids. Just as they need to be reminded that the same rules about talking to strangers in person apply online, children also need to be careful about who they text and what they say.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Some cell phones allow kids to access social networking sites, like Facebook. Again, the same rules that apply to the internet apply to cell phones. Kids need to know who they're talking to and what information they're revealing. Parents need to impress upon their children not to reveal personal information, such as their address.

BULLYING

Cyber-bullying, while rampant on the internet, has now gone mobile. Cyber-bullies are turning to text technology to harass others. Make sure your child knows that this, too, is a crime and should always be reported to a parent, teacher, or law enforcement.

GPS CAPABILITY

Many cell phones today have GPS technology installed. Unfortunately, this same technology that allows parents to find their children can also be used by predators. Parents should check their child's settings to ensure safety features are set to their satisfaction.

CAMERAS/VIDEOS

Most mobile phones in use today have cameras; some even have video cameras. Talk with your kids about never letting other people photograph or film them in embarrassing or inappropriate situations (and vice versa). They need to understand their own and others' privacy rights in sharing photos and videos via cell phones.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

Safety controls are not as numerous for cell phones, but the industry does offer helpful options for parents. Many service providers offer security features that allow parents to set boundaries, control contacts, restrict numbers and calling times, restrict texting and filter online content. Check with your provider to see what services they may offer.

SEXTING

Kids are engaging in “sexting,” an alarming and growing trend that can lead to very serious consequences. Pre-teens and teenagers are text messaging explicit photos of themselves to their friends. It involves taking nude or semi-nude photos and sending them via their cell phone.

These pictures and messages are being sent without giving thought to the dangers. Beyond the potential legal ramifications – possible child pornography charges – kids need to realize once a photo exists in cyberspace, it is there forever.



A photo taken today as a prank can appear on the internet years from now and even be used as a source of blackmail.

Child safety experts estimate 1 of every 5 teens has electronically sent or posted inappropriate photos or videos of themselves. Some have been as young as elementary school age. If you haven't talked to your kids about this, do so today. Parents and guardians are the first line of defense when it comes to educating children about the hidden dangers of impulsive or bad decisions.





INTERACTIVE GAMING

Playing video games online with friends is a popular household activity for kids, but there can be some hazards when playing with strangers online.

BENEFITS TO YOUR CHILD

- Learn to work cooperatively with others to achieve a common goal
- Learn how to delegate responsibility
- Can improve multi-tasking
- Can improve self-confidence through completion of achievements

DANGERS AND RISKS

- Can increase levels of aggression
- Can inspire social isolation and lead to poor social skills
- Academic achievement can be negatively affected with increased amount of time playing online
- Can play with other players that yell profanity or speak inappropriately through head sets
- Can be addictive

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Regulate how long your child can play video games daily.

- Video games come with a rating (Early Childhood, Everyone, Everyone 10+, Teen, Mature, Adults Only, and Rating Pending). Be sure to check the rating on the video game you are buying and why it has the rating it was given.
- Play a video game with your child and see what kind of game it really is. It might not be something you want your child playing.

CHATTING

Chatting online is a popular pastime, but kids should be reminded that the same rules about talking to strangers in person apply online.

BENEFITS TO YOUR CHILD

- Talk to other kids with similar interests and concerns on websites specifically for kids
- Communicate with family, friends, teachers, etc.
- Improve keyboarding and written communication skills





DANGERS AND RISKS

- Chatting is the most likely online activity through which children will encounter predators, offensive language, and adult conversation.
- Too much time online limits a child's well-rounded development by taking the place of friends, schoolwork, sports, and other activities.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Teach your child not to give out or post his or her name, address, Social Security number, school, photographs, or anything else that identifies them.
- Explain that people are not always who they claim to be.
- Never allow your child to arrange an in-person meeting without your approval.
- Limit your child to specific chat rooms.

CYBER-BULLYING

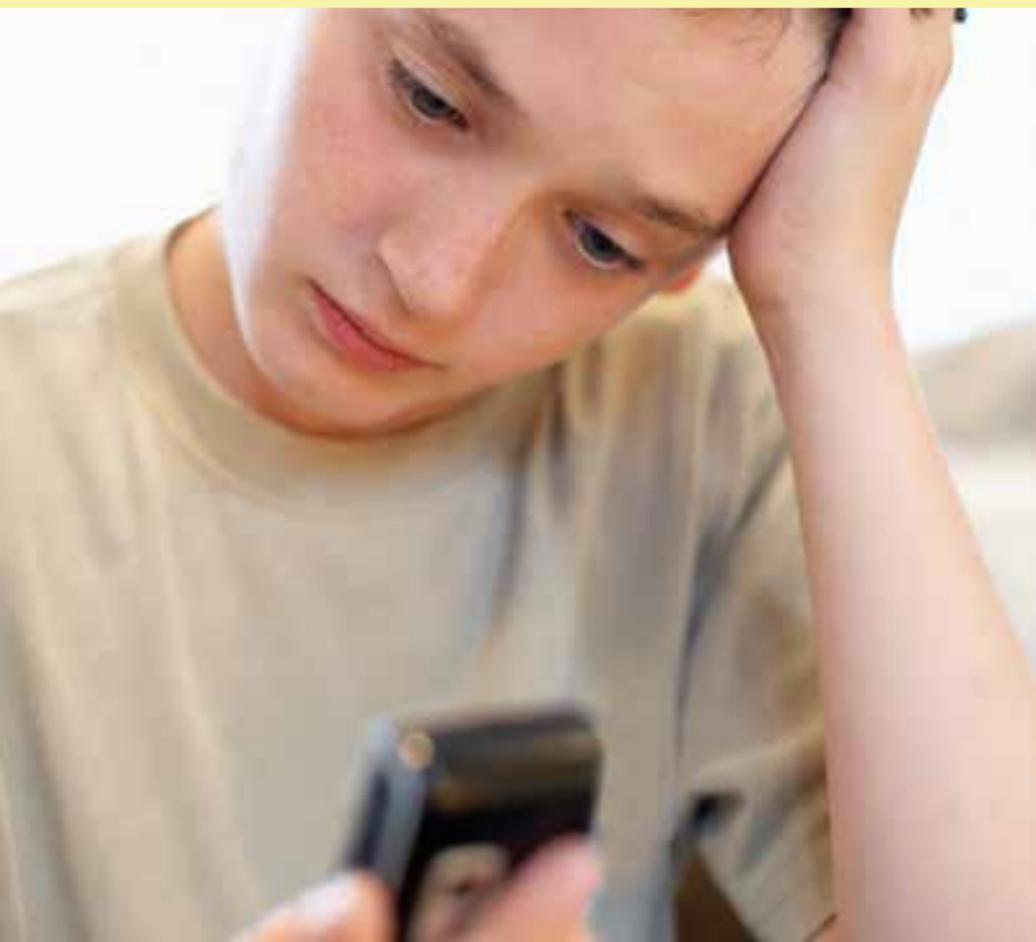
Online harassment, called cyber-bullying, is when someone repeatedly makes fun of another person through emails or text messages, or uses online forums and postings to harm, damage, humiliate, or isolate another person.

DANGERS AND RISKS

- Can include threats, negative labeling, posting gossip, and even threats of physical violence
- Two kinds: direct (sent directly) and indirect (using others, often without their knowledge, to send messages)
- Cyber-bullying is a crime and reportable to the police

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Alert your child's school so staff can be aware of potential dangers.
- Be your child's support system. Take their concerns seriously. Cyber-bullying can make your child feel overwhelmed and helpless.
- Understand the enormity. A cyber-bully can enlist an infinite number of participants, and all anonymous.
- Know your child and know the warning signs. Kids with low self-esteem can be easy targets. Your child may become more moody and withdrawn, spend more time online or avoid it altogether.
- Cyber-bullying is not a joke, it's not funny, and it's not okay – it's a crime.





PROTECTING YOUR CHILD FROM PREDATORS

- 1 in 25 youths receive an online sexual solicitation where the solicitor tried to make offline contact.
- In more than 27% of incidences, solicitors asked youths for sexual photographs of themselves.
- Predators target both girls and boys of all ages and use the anonymity of the internet to be whoever they want to be.
- Predators look for emotionally vulnerable children. If a child indicates frustration with parents or teachers, the predator may suggest that the teacher is not fair or the parents are too strict. This is part of a grooming process that makes the predator seem like someone who “understands.”

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Your kids might not tell you everything, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't ask. Get involved so you're not the last to know.

- What features do you use on your cell phone? Could you show me how to use them?
- Do you play games online with other people? Have you ever said anything mean or hateful or had someone say something mean or hateful to you while playing?
- What would you do if someone sent you a text or picture that was inappropriate?
- What are some websites you usually visit on the internet? What do you do while on that website?
- Do you use Instant Messaging or chat rooms to talk to your friends and other people?

RESOURCES

- **US Department of Justice**
WWW.CYBERCRIME.GOV
- **Federal Bureau of Investigation**
WWW.FBI.GOV/BECRIMESMART
- **Federal Trade Commission**
**WWW.FTC.GOV/PRIVACY/PRIVACYINITIATIVES/
CHILDRENS.HTML**
- **National Cyber Security Alliance**
WWW.STAYSAFEONLINE.ORG
- **National Center for Missing and Exploited
Children**
WWW.NCMEC.ORG and WWW.NETSMARTZ.ORG
- **National Crime Prevention Council**
WWW.NCPC.ORG
- **National Criminal Justice Reference
Service**
WWW.NCJRS.GOV
- **National Parent Teacher Association**
“Internet Safety”
WWW.PTA.ORG





93% of teens
go online;
on average,
texting
teens send
and receive
1500 text
messages a
month.



Senator Patricia C. Bates

36th Senate District

CAPITOL OFFICE

State Capitol, Room 4048

Sacramento, CA 95814

TEL 916.651.4036

FAX 916.651.4936

DISTRICT OFFICES

24031 El Toro Road, Suite 201A

Laguna Hills, CA 92653

TEL 949.598.5850

FAX 949.598.5855

169 Saxony Drive, Suite 103

Encinitas, CA 92024

TEL 760.642.0809

FAX 760.642.0814

www.senate.ca.gov/bates