The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway

RULES & TOOLS FOR FAMILIES ONLINE

Second Edition

A Publication of
The Children's Partnership
With The National PTA and
The National Urban League

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The Children's Partnership

The Children's Partnership is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. Its mission is to inform leaders and the public about the needs of America's 70 million children, and to engage these leaders in ways that benefit children. The Partnership undertakes research and policy analysis, publishes reports and materials, develops multimedia campaigns, and forges new alliances among parents, policymakers, and the private sector to achieve tangible gains for children.

The Partnership focuses particular attention on identifying trends and emerging issues that will affect large numbers of children and on providing early analysis and strategies for action. In this way, it functions as a research and development (R&D) arm for the children's movement.

The work of The Children's Partnership is supported by private foundations, corporations, the entertainment community, interested individuals, and others with whom it partners on projects. These include The ARCO Foundation, The AT&T Foundation, The California Community Foundation, The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, The Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Joseph Drown Foundation, The Favrot Fund, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, KPMG Peat Marwick, The Mattel Foundation, Pacific Bell, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and The Streisand Foundation. The Children's Partnership has offices in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

Current Programs

America's Children and the Information Superhighway: A multi-year project exploring and demonstrating how the Internet and related technologies can best serve children.

Next Generation Strategies to Build the American Children's Movement: A program designed as a multi-year research, convening, and publishing program. Its mission is to provide community leaders, activists, foundations, and concerned citizens with timely and innovative tools to design effective long- and short-term strategies to advance and sustain a children's social agenda.

Children and Health Care Reform: A multi-year project to monitor changes in health policy and develop ways to improve health insurance coverage for children.

Publishing Ventures

The Children's Partnership researches and publishes (in print and online) the *Next Generation Reports*, a national information service to provide timely bulletins about children's issues. The Partnership also maintains a multi-issue Web site at www.childrenspartnership.org.

The National PTA

The National PTA is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the United States. Founded in 1897, today its nearly 7 million members are parents, teachers, students, and other citizens eager to work on behalf of children nationwide. The organization prides itself on being noncommercial, nonsectarian, and nonpartisan. Its members serve as child advocates in schools, in the community, and before government agencies. The National PTA builds partnerships with other health, education, and welfare organizations, both public and private, to develop national coalitions on children's issues. The organization also produces programs, publications, and training to help state and local PTAs encourage parents and families to become involved in their children's lives.

The National Urban League

Founded in 1910, the National Urban League is the premier social service and civil rights organization in America. The League is a nonpartisan, community organization headquartered in New York City, with 115 affiliates in 34 states and the District of Columbia. The mission of the National Urban League is to assist African-Americans and the urban poor in achieving social and economic equality. The League implements its mission through advocacy, bridge-building between the races, program services, and research.

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F o r e w o r d

WELCOME TO THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

That's the main message of this Guide. It's designed to welcome you, and give you a simple step-by-step introduction to parenting in a world of computers and new forms of media. This Guide will provide some tools and rules for you to use with your children at home, at school, and in the community.

The Parent Perspective

It seems overnight there's a whole new world for kids—and for you. From computers to **software** to the **Internet**—there are so many new things, yet little guidance for parents trying to figure it all out. *(Highlighted terms are defined in Appendix B, the Glossary, on pages 27-28.)*

That's why we decided to write this Guide. We hope to:

1. Introduce parents to a new and changing media;

2. Help parents use commonsense parenting along with simple, practical tips about the new technology; and

3. Boost parents' confidence and jump-start their involvement to make sure that the new media will truly benefit children.

Who Is This Guide For?

This Guide is for parents who have begun to see that computers and **online** services will be or already are a part of children's lives at school, at community centers, at home, or at the library—and who are looking for some guidelines and advice. We have written it with the computer novice in mind, and have provided simple definitions and ideas for how to get involved. But we hope that parents who have already become online travelers will find useful tips as well. We recognize that it is not possible to meet the needs of every parent through one Guide. But, hopefully, this Guide provides a starting point for all parents to get involved. For more specialized information, please refer to the resources on page 25.

What Does This Guide Cover?

Working with the National PTA and the National Urban League, The Children's Partnership talked to hundreds of parents. We found these most frequently asked questions, which this Guide sets out to answer:

- What's at stake for my child?
- What does using computers actually do for my child?
- What is the information superhighway?
- When is my child ready?
- How do I get started?
- How can I find good places to go online?
- How can I keep my child safe?
- How can I make sure my child's school is well-equipped?
- What's at stake for the nation's children?
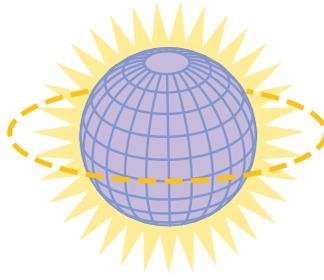
This Guide focuses on computers and services that allow young people to go beyond their own computer at school or at home and link into a wider world. We focus on the "online" world—at this time mostly represented by the **Internet** and the **World Wide Web**—though other aspects of the superhighway are sometimes discussed.

While we try to give parents a brief survey of current technology, we have emphasized parenting strategies in a world where children and young people often know more than their parents. Although we don't focus on **CD-ROMs,** video games, or computer software, we do refer to them, and many of the parenting tips for being online also apply to these media.

Terms Used in This Guide

Along with this new era comes a blizzard of new terms. To help the reader, we have prepared a glossary of commonly used terms (see pages 27-28).

How to Use This Guide

The Guide can be used in two ways:

1. You can read it straight through and find a basic road map to the superhighway, along with road signs to other helpful information (see Resources in Chapter IV of this Guide); or

2. You can simply flip to the chapter that seems most useful to you.

In addition, a **Web site** for parents is available for those who are beginning to get online and want pointers to useful information beyond what's contained in this Guide (http://www.childrenspartnership.org).

Who Are We?

The authors are child advocates and parents. We have written this Guide to start at the beginning, where many parents find themselves, summarizing the best thinking and advice available. We have worked closely with the National PTA and the National Urban League to present accessible yet authoritative information. The Guide has also benefited from the good counsel of our advisors and reviewers who have provided much wisdom, the lessons from a great deal of diverse experiences, and technical expertise. The conclusions contained within are our own.

Last Word

The history of media, and television especially, has taught us some important lessons when it comes to children. First, media has a very powerful influence on young people. Second, without strong public attention to media issues, children's best interests are not adequately served. These lessons are especially important today, as a new information society is being created.

In addition to helping parents do the best for their own children, we hope that this Guide helps parents connect with institutions like the National PTA and the National Urban League as well as their local schools and community institutions to ensure that this new generation of media is good for all kids.

Wendy Lazarus and Laurie Lipper
D I R E C T O R S

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FOREWORD

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Children Online: The ABCs for Parents

What's at Stake?— Why Computers Matter to Your Child

The information age is arriving at lightning speed. Children and young people are among the most active citizens of the new era, and are often first in their family to use the new media. Some parents and other guardians of young people are enthusiastic about the new technologies; others desperately hope these changes will just go away.

However, there is little doubt that computers are here to stay and that they're changing the way young people learn, play, and get ready for their work life.

- By the year 2000, an estimated 60 percent of new jobs in America will require technological skills and computer know-how.[1]

- In the early 1990s, workers with computer skills earned 10-15% more than workers without such skills.[2]

And children are increasingly using new technologies in their schools, libraries, homes, and communities.

- Estimates show that in May 1997, nearly 10 million children were online either at home, at school, or in the community — a five-fold increase from fall 1995.[3]

- For the 50 million children now in U.S. elementary and secondary schools, 27% of classrooms have Internet access and 78% of schools have some kind of access to the Internet.[4]

In addition, parents understand that computer skills are important. In fact, 89% of parents believe computer skills are important to educational success.[5]

But parents face uncharted territory, and the technologies are evolving so quickly it seems hard to get a handle on what this new territory really is. One parent commented:

"...it's like being illiterate in a world of readers. We don't know enough about what's out there to know what to be concerned about."

In addition, not all parents can afford a computer in the home, and not all schools are yet integrating technology into learning—creating a gap between children who are prepared for information-era jobs and those who aren't.

How can a parent teach, when there's so much to learn? This new challenge may seem unlike any other you've faced before as a parent. But, in fact, many of the answers lie in common sense, some basic experience, regular vigilance, and sensible guidelines for children.

How Parents Can Help

AT SCHOOL

Make sure your child's school has the appropriate technology and uses it to enhance learning.

AT HOME

Make sure your child is involved in fun, educational, and safe activities online.

IN THE COMMUNITY

Make sure that the education and technology needs of all children are being met. Contact your library, community center, school board, city council, and your county, state, and federal elected officials.

What Does Using Computers Actually Do for Your Child?

What Computers and the Information Superhighway CAN Do

They can help children learn skills using information resources and technology such as problem-solving, fact-gathering, analysis, and writing on computers—skills that employers will seek from future workers (today's young people). They can also help young people learn computer programming and other marketable skills.

They can open up new worlds of rich learning experiences to children through schools, libraries, and home. For example, children can work on a school project with other children in countries thousands of miles away—or gather information from and try out their ideas with renowned scientists, authors, or business leaders. And "electronic pen pals"—either relatives or new online friends—from opposite ends of the planet can **e-mail*** each other almost instantly.

They can increase access to children who have been shut out. Children in poor or rural school districts can use online services to visit museums, cities, and wildlife preserves they would not otherwise get to see. Children with disabilities can participate more fully in learning, in art programs, and in socializing.

What Computers and the Information Superhighway CAN'T Do

Computer and online time alone can't make your child an honor student. Children learn best when they receive individualized attention and encouragement from teachers and parents. Every kind of technology—from the blackboard to slide presentations to cable TV in the classroom to **CD-ROMs**—is simply a tool whose effectiveness depends on using it well.

Computers alone won't make your child a well-rounded, successful adult. Children still need the balance that comes from outdoor activities, friends and family, solid academic skills, and healthy relationships with strong adult role models.

*Highlighted terms are defined more fully in Appendix B, the Glossary, on pages 27-28.
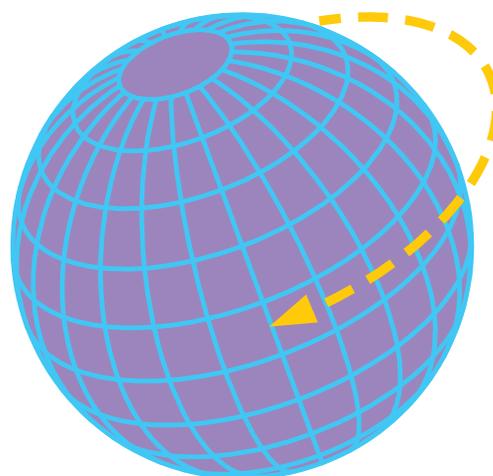
What Computers and the Information Superhighway MIGHT Do

They can be a way for you to spend more time with your child on educational and recreational activities. Research shows that family involvement in a child's education is one of the most important ingredients for success. Spending time online with your child can be a way to connect with what he or she is learning in school and to stay involved. Computers can also help you expose your child to information and experiences that you value.

Online technologies can also be a way for you to stay in touch with your child's teachers, school schedules, and homework assignments. Increasingly, schools are offering parents access to important school information via e-mail and online school **discussion groups**. This can be especially helpful for parents whose work schedules make it hard for them to meet with teachers or be at school during the school day.

So, Why Should You Care About Computers and the Information Superhighway?

First, because **information literacy** skills will increasingly be expected of young people. Young people fluent in information resources will likely have advantages in the workplace. Second, this new resource may hold special educational and other opportunities for your child—as the online world can bring diverse experiences to young people. And, finally, more and more children are taking the lead to get online—and need strong parental guidance to use this new medium as a rich opportunity for learning.

What Is the Information Superhighway?

The part of the **information superhighway** that is most often referred to in the popular media is the **Internet**. "Going online" refers to getting connected to the Internet or other **commercial service,** usually via a telephone line.

Internet

The Internet, sometimes called the Net, is a vast group of interconnected computer networks that spans the globe. It has many features, but is generally a way to communicate, use information tools, and find boundless amounts of information from an unlimited number of sources.

The Internet makes possible a number of online functions such as e-mail, a way of sending messages electronically from one computer user to another; **chat rooms**, which are places online where you can communicate with others instantaneously using your keyboard; and discussion groups, places where you can read and **post** information about particular topics.

There is unlimited information on the Internet, but it can be like a big library without a card catalogue to help find the books you might be looking for. **Search engines** exist to help with this. With a search engine you can sort through vast amounts of online information to pinpoint the material you want. Search engines work by matching words you enter into the computer with the same words found in various information sites on the Internet.

World Wide Web

What has helped the Internet become more popular is the development of the **World Wide Web.** The World Wide Web (WWW or the Web) is a network of sites on the Internet which have words, sounds, and pictures. It is its visual quality that distinguishes the Web from the rest of the Internet. Here, commercial companies, nonprofit organizations, the government, and individuals supply lots of information on just about any subject imaginable. In fact, many organizations and commercial outlets are creating "content" or information aimed directly at kids of all ages, and kids are spending a lot of time on the Web.
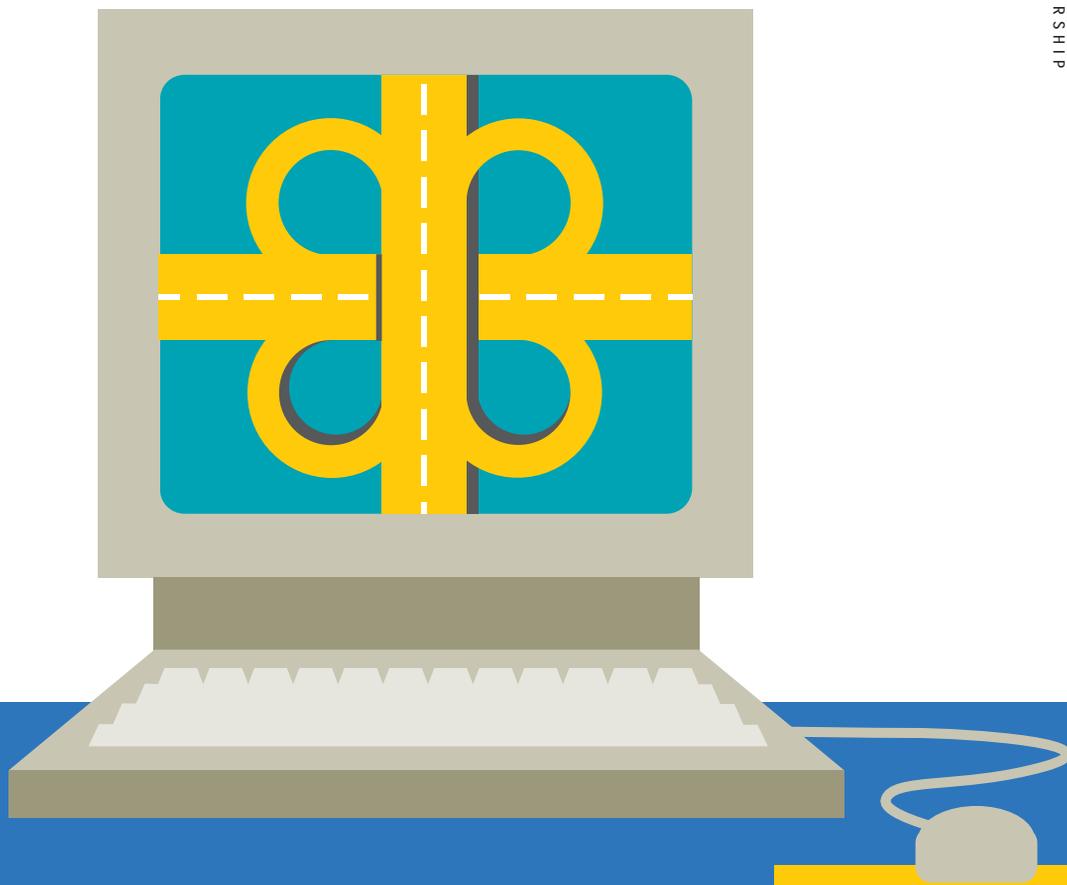
PARENT STORIES

Parents at The Corona Avenue Elementary School, many of whom cannot afford to have a computer in their home, have found the information superhighway to be well within their reach. Technology has motivated parents to become involved in their children's school, a year-round program in Bell, California, with a large bilingual population. Parents started by asking for computer classes where they could learn to use the computer at school. With that training under their belt, two parents are now teaching computer classes for other parents and their elementary school children two afternoons a week. In addition, the parents have created a parent link on the school's home page on the Web (http://www.corona.bell.k12.ca.us). There, they post information about the computer classes for parents and other school news, as well as provide links to other valuable online resources for parents.

"We were so excited to learn the computer, we came at 7:00 in the morning so we could get our class in before school started. Now, there's a waiting list of parents who want to take the class, and we're teaching it," said one of the mothers at Corona.

A necessary tool for exploring the Web is a **browser**, a program that lets you view what's on the Web. Examples of popular browsers are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Browsers make it very easy to move from **Web site** to Web site and back again. You can use a browser to visit Web sites with search engines that help you find what you want to see. Examples of sites with search engines include: www.Yahoo.com, www.Excite.com, www.Lycos.com, www.AltaVista.com, www.Infoseek.com, www.WebCrawler.com, and www.Magellan.com.

Internet Notes

Since the Internet is a new medium for many people, here are two tips for wise traveling:

You Are Not Alone

Because you often sit alone at a computer, and many of your interactions take place anonymously, you might assume you are truly anonymous when online. But it is often possible for someone with the right tools and expertise to figure out where your transmission is coming from and, sometimes, who you are. If you want to play it safe, limit your online messages to those you would feel comfortable seeing printed in your local newspaper.

Check the Source

Another important thing to keep in mind is the credibility of online information. It is easy to be dazzled by all of the sights and sounds of the online world. However, unlike books, magazines, and other information sources that are scrutinized by an editor, much of the information online is not. Individuals with Internet access can post almost anything they want. Don't take everything you see and hear for truth. Always consider the source, and exercise common sense and good judgment in evaluating the information you see.

In Other Words

The term "information superhighway" is also used to refer to:

1. The nationwide network of telephone wire, cable, and wireless and satellite connections over which information moves, also called the **National Information Infrastructure (NII)**; and

2. More informally, the delivery of information like text, video, and audio over the NII network using computers, cable television, telephones, and other delivery systems.
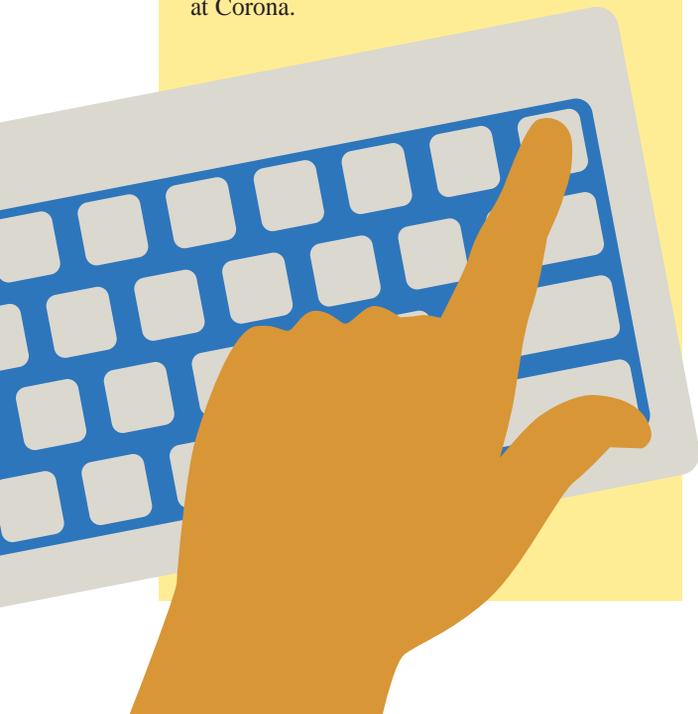
When Is Your Child Ready?

Very little formal research has been done to understand how information technology affects children of different ages and when is the "right time" to start various activities. Also, children differ in their development and maturity—so parents should first consider their own child's emotional development and abilities. But common sense, combined with advice from child development experts, suggests some age-appropriate guidelines.[6]

Unlike some other areas of a child's growth, a parent should not treat computer use as a developmental milestone. There are no "shoulds" in this arena like "a child should walk by 15 months." The main thing to keep in mind is that the online world offers children a new set of experiences, another world to explore. It is also a new resource to help satisfy a child's seemingly endless curiosity and find answers to those amazing questions kids constantly come up with.

Many of the tips in this section apply to more than one age group. We have placed the tip in the age group where it is first applicable.

Ages 2-3:

Computers need not play much of a role in the youngest child's life. However, it doesn't hurt for very young children to see family members using computers and enjoying themselves online—at a library, at a community center, or at home.

Stand-alone computers using CD-ROMs or other software (rather than online activities) are most likely to have what children this age need. Parenting magazines and some nonprofit organizations publish reviews of software that may be helpful.[7]

Handy Tips

✔ Put your child in your lap as you "play" on the computer.

✔ Put your hand on your child's to show him or her the way the **mouse** works.

✔ Children like to play with the equipment: start slowly letting them learn about the keyboard (some are especially designed for children), the mouse, etc.

✔ Look for books and children's video programs like Sesame Street that include images of children and family members using a computer. These can provide important exposure and encourage interest.

Ages 4-7:

While serious computer use isn't a priority for these youngsters, children at this age can begin to make greater use of computer games and educational products. Once again, parents of children this age can look to CD-ROMs and other computer software for early computer learning. Older children in this age group can also begin exploring online children's sections with their parents. This kind of exposure with a young child is a great way for a parent to get involved with new media. Yes, children do learn intuitively and quickly, but at this age they still depend on parents for reading and interpreting directions. This makes a shared computer experience a valuable give and take experience.

Handy Tips

✔ Spend as much time as you can with your child while he or she uses the computer.

✔ Use actual experiences to demonstrate proper behavior and rules.

✔ Show lots of tangible results and achievements. For example, print work your child has done on the computer.

✔ Share an e-mail address with your child, so you can oversee his or her mail and discuss correspondence.

✔ As children go to school, check in with teachers so you can coordinate and reinforce school learning with home learning.

✔ Look to librarians and various parenting magazines for suggestions of good online activities.

Ages 8-11:

This age is when children can begin to directly experience and appreciate more fully the potential of online experiences. Children can begin to use online encyclopedias and download pictures and graphics for school reports. They can also begin to have pen pals from many places, exchanging stories with far-away relatives and online friends, and even doing shared school projects.

It is also a very important age to set guidelines, teach values, and monitor closely what children are doing. As children move toward independence, it is important that you stay "hands-on" and help guide them to enriching and appropriate materials.

Another important reality is that children of this age are being targeted by programmers and advertisers as an important commercial market (see page 17). Media literacy—helping children evaluate content and understand what's behind advertising—is an important skill to teach.

Handy Tips

✔ Set very clear rules for online use and clear consequences if they are broken.

✔ Instruct children not to order products or give out information about themselves or their family without your permission.

✔ Coordinate home with school activities.

✔ Teach children to let you know if they encounter anything scary or unusual online.

✔ Help children understand the nature of commercial information and how to think about it.

✔ Discuss some of the unique aspects of behavior in **cyberspace**—like anonymity and what it means for your child and for others.

✔ Watch the time. Use an alarm clock or timer if you or your child lose track of time.

✔ Watch your phone and credit card bills.

Ages 12-14:

At this age, young people can use the more sophisticated research resources of the information superhighway, accessing everything from the Library of Congress' collection to magazines and newspapers to original letters and archives from around the globe. Similarly, they can work with people in remote places on shared projects and can learn from speaking online to leading authorities on nearly any subject. In addition, many young teenagers are interested in "chatting." Most online commercial services have chat rooms that are appropriate for preteens and teenagers. There, kids can chat (via typing on their computer) to others who share their interests. A parent's job is to stay in as close touch as possible (a tough task at times).

Handy Tips

✔ Since children this age are more likely to explore on their own, set up clear parental rules, limits, and periodic check-ins.

✔ Continue to explore together as much as possible.

✔ Give children a basic understanding of the laws governing online behavior and the consequences of breaking them (see page 18).

✔ Set clear rules about which chat rooms are acceptable for your teenager, and how much time can be spent there.

✔ Be sure your children understand the actions that can be taken if people harass them online or do anything inappropriate (see page 19).

✔ Set a budget for online expenses and monitor it.

✔ Pay particular attention to games that your teenager might download or copy. Many are great fun, but others are extremely violent. Parents need to set limits about what is acceptable and what is not.

Ages 15-18:

The online world is a rich resource for older teens. They can receive information about job opportunities, internships, and colleges and universities; put together **multimedia** reports; get specialized help with a foreign language or a subject at school; and find out just about anything else that interests them. They are also ingenious explorers, discovering new areas online and often meeting new friends. Of course, along with teens' increased curiosity, capability, and freedom come more ways to run into unpleasant or undesirable experiences. As with other activities at this age, parents can still find creative ways to keep in touch with their teenage children about online activities, and this connection is still important.

Handy Tips

✔ Ask your teenager for help researching topics of interest to the family (follow-up on a family discussion, family vacation, a new purchase).

✔ Talk to your teenager about new things online and encourage discussion of new experiences.

✔ Make sure your teenager knows the legal implications of online behavior (see page 18).

✔ Watch time limits to make sure your teenager is still pursuing a well-rounded set of activities.

✔ If your teenager is especially interested in computers, encourage him or her to help younger children with their online explorations (try the local Boys or Girls Club) or to help a school or nonprofit organization get set up.

Girls: A League of Their Own

As they get older, girls use computers and online opportunities differently than boys. Many girls lose interest because the computer world, like science and math, is more oriented to males. For example, video games and other software for home computer use are overwhelmingly developed for and marketed to boys. According to a variety of reports:[8]

- In elementary school, there is little difference between boys' and girls' computer use and ability.

- By the mid-teen years, when computer courses are typically elective, the gender gap grows and continues to widen through college and graduate school. Two and a half times as many men as women now earn computer science degrees.

- Girls use home computers for school work more than boys, and use computer games far less.

- Though in 1997, there were only two women online for every three men using the Internet, the gap is closing.

With so many jobs and much of the culture tapping into computers and information technology, mothers and fathers should do as much as possible to encourage girls' interest in and experience with computers. They should be aware that their girls will need these skills as much as boys, and should let schools and computer and content providers know they want material that appeals to girls as well as to boys.
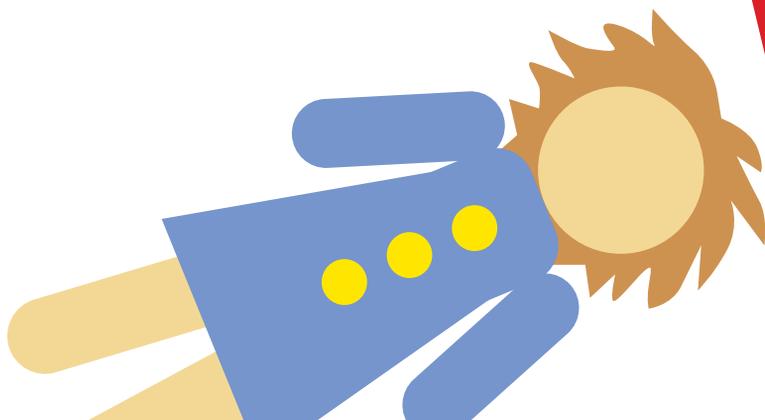
Getting Started Step By Step

Parents and New Technology: The Last 100 Years

1890s
How can I afford a telephone at home?

1900s
Why do my children know more about automobiles than I do?

1910s
Should I take my children to the moving pictures?

1920s
Why do my children know more about radio than I do?

1930s
Are radio programs too violent?

1940s
Are comic books a bad influence on my kids?

1950s
Is TV good for my child—or not?

1960s
What are my children learning from rock & roll?

1970s
Are TV programs too violent?

1980s
Is my child playing too many video games?

1990s
Is being online safe and beneficial for my child?

Have We Been Here Before?

Fifty years ago, in 1946, there were 6,000 black and white TVs in the entire country, mostly in well-to-do homes. Three years later, in 1949, there were three million TVs, and, in 1951, there were 12 million. Today, more Americans have TVs than have telephones.[9]

Fifty years ago, people argued about whether TV was a tool or a toy: would it just provide mindless entertainment, or teach our children and bring the world closer together? People had asked similar questions about the radio, movies, the telephone, and even the telegraph in the 1840s! Today, they're asking the same kinds of questions about computers and the information superhighway.

But the answer is always the same: it isn't the technology. It's the way people use the technology that makes the difference.

A lot of people believe that television could have been much better for children if parents had gotten involved back in the 1940s and early 1950s, letting the networks know what they wanted for their children. If you want the information superhighway to be something other than home shopping and video games, now is the time to GET INVOLVED! Chapter III of this Guide will give you some idea of how to do that.

Some Basic Rules

For most parents who are just starting with computers, there's a simple rule: concentrate on *experiencing* the new technologies—not necessarily *understanding* them. You don't need to understand electronics to get cash from an automatic teller machine. You don't have to be able to build a car to drive one. You don't need to understand all that makes up a computer to see how your child will use one.

A quick trip to an electronics store, a public library, or an Urban League office can introduce you to computers, a wide variety of software, CD-ROMs, and online networks. People here are used to working with beginners. Once you begin to experience **cyberspace**, as the online world is called, it gets much easier to navigate.

Do Your Homework

Learning and playing with new technology can be integrated into your everyday life. When you go to the mall, spend ten minutes with the computer display in the toy store or electronics store. Ask your school to set up a parent night or weekend so parents can see and learn. Ask teachers or librarians where in your community you can go to use a computer connected to the Internet.

Learn With Your Child

Computers can offer one of the best, most fun, and most challenging journeys that parents and children can share. Remember, studies show parental involvement is an important ingredient for educational success. Your goal is to learn and experience as much as possible with your child—and make it enjoyable.

Be a Good Guide and Monitor

Your job (just like in other areas) is to explain, guide, make the rules and enforce them, and keep the whole thing focused on positive learning and fun. One of the best things about this new frontier is that it gives you rich, new opportunities to learn and play together with your child. Here are some tips:

Side by Side: You can help your child have a positive and balanced experience with the computer. The best approach is to start the process together. Set aside a regular time to work on the computer with your child. If he or she has had computer experience, let your child take the lead. It can be a great boost for self-confidence—at least for your child! Ask your child to explain what he or she is doing and why. Go down the highway—together.

Talk with your child about what students are doing on computers at school, whether you have one at home or not. Ask to see what they have created on the computer. And invite friends—yours or your child's—to join in, too.

PARENT STORIES

Felecia, 10, is dyslexic. Her father, a single parent, could rarely make it in to her school to talk with her teacher because of his work obligations. However, he was worried that Felecia wouldn't get the help she needs. Through e-mail, he was able to keep in regular contact with her teacher, and monitor her progress much more frequently than he could have if he had to set up face-to-face meetings.

Lam, who is eight, is from a family that originally came to the United States from Nha Trang, Vietnam. He and his mother went online to research information about Vietnam. Together, they found a Web site about the village where he was born and found a family with the same surname who owns a small shipyard. They were able to contact this family and to begin exploring whether or not they were related to them.

Stories in the Parents' Guide are based on interviews with dozens of families and teachers. Some are composites. We have changed the names and, in some cases, the details of the story to protect each individual's privacy.

The Time Factor: Since you and your child are already strapped for time, perhaps the first place to look is television time. Family, friends, homework, school, and outside play are all very important for the healthy development of children, so try to shift TV time to computer time. (This shouldn't be that hard: studies show that children who use computers watch less TV.)[10]

Monitor Computer Time: Keep the computer in a family area rather than in a child's room—at least to begin with. Keep an eye on the clock, and watch the phone and credit card bills (that's where charges for commercial online services or purchases show up). Check in regularly on what your child is doing.

Setting Up to Go Online

The number of parents who are purchasing computer equipment is growing. Approximately 29 million homes had modem-equipped computers in 1997, compared to 21 million just one year earlier.[11] Schools, too, are getting computers and going online at a fast pace.

This section is a basic primer on buying computers and going online. The information can be used by parents who are helping equip their school or community center or who are setting up at home. Chapter III has further information about getting involved with technology at school.

Get Ready Before You Buy Equipment

Remember, you don't need to understand every technical aspect of computers in order to be a good consumer. Think about the telephone. How many people understand how the telephone actually works or keep up with the newest devices? Like the telephone, the important thing to learn with new technologies is the basics—how technology can help your family spend time together, find and gather information, and communicate, create, and learn.

Handy Tips

- Use common sense and have fun: the goal is to get the best equipment—to get what you most need, at the right price.

- This is a major purchase, but think of it as both a piece of equipment and an investment in an information and skill-building resource for the school or family.

- Visit computer stores—more than once—and ask lots of questions to figure out what equipment enables you to do what you want.

- Check with the Technology Coordinator for your school or school district to find out whether they have special recommendations or know about bargains for schools.

- Remember to ask about possibilities for upgrading the equipment and the need for ongoing maintenance.

- Ask friends and co-workers to describe their experiences and recommend computers (if you can get the same equipment a friend has, you can share learning tips and experiences).

- Visit your library to try out a computer or to find information about purchasing computers.

What's Involved in Setting Up to Go Online

In order to "get connected," you will need:

✔ **A computer** (including a screen, called the monitor; a keyboard; and a mouse, a small device attached to your computer by a cord, which lets you give commands to the computer).

✔ **Software:** most of the internal operating software comes with computers, but you may want to ask about word processing, Internet connection software, and other educational or recreational products.

✔ **A modem,** which connects you to the online world (can be built in or external to your computer).

✔ **Connections:** Phone or cable line and an Internet service provider (see page 11).

✔ **Options:** CD-ROM, printer, parental control tools—either through the online provider or commercial software (see page 15).

* See Glossary for further information about these terms.

SOFTWARE

SOFTWARE

You are connected to the Internet

MOUSE
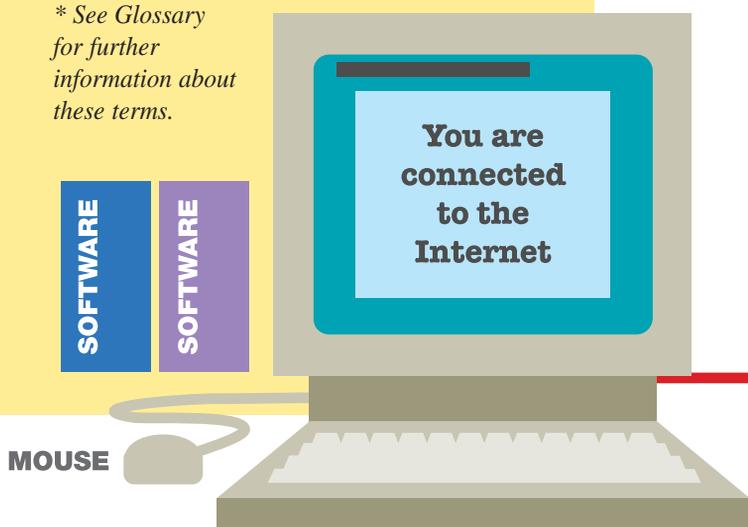
A Word About Used Equipment

Some experts caution against buying used equipment while others feel it can provide a good first experience with computers.

If you go that route, you ought to exercise the same caution you would in buying a used car. Also, many older computers and other **hardware** are slower and might not provide a satisfying experience online, but might be great for starting out with software that doesn't involve going online. If possible, try to bring along a knowledgeable friend or acquaintance who can help make sure you get the equipment you need.

Going Online: Selecting an Online Service

In addition to hardware, you will need a service to connect your computer to the online world. The commercial services (like America Online, Microsoft Network, Prodigy, and others) can be a good first experience for new online travelers because they are designed for beginners, and they offer information that is attractive to families. Many of these services offer a free trial period so you can shop and see what you like.

For their base monthly fee (about $20), these services provide you with unlimited usage. You can pay a lower monthly fee, usually between $5 and $10, for a limited number of online hours. But if you exceed your monthly allotment, you pay an hourly rate — which adds up quickly.

Those parents with more time, patience, or experience might choose to get connected to the Internet at a lower cost through an **ISP (Internet Service Provider)** which can be found in most communities. Call your local telephone company, computer store, or local library and ask for a list of providers.

Some areas of the country are also served by **Free-Nets**, also known as Community Networks. These are nonprofit online access providers which provide services like e-mail, locally-focused discussion groups, and sometimes Internet access. Not all Free-Nets are free; some provide services at a reduced cost. Contact the Directory of Public Access Networks or the Organization for Community Networks for more information (see page 27).

MODEM

When you select a commercial online service provider, remember to check on the following:

- How much free time will they give you to "check out" the service? (Most services do this, and it is probably the best way to sample the online world and see which service is a good match for you.)
- What is the cost of the service?
- How much time is included for that fee?
- How much does additional time cost?
- What are the features, especially for families and your particular interests?
- What features might not be appropriate for children?
- What devices are offered for parents or teachers to protect children online?
- What help is provided to new subscribers? Is there ongoing technical support? At what, if any, cost? How long are the waiting periods?

Dealing With Costs

What will it cost for you to get online? At this time, the average cost for new computer equipment is between $1,000 and $3,000—though equipment that will let you go online can be purchased for $800, and costs are coming down. With used equipment, the cost is less.

If you are interested only in online access and do not need to use a computer for other activities such as word processing, you have a less expensive option. For between $100 and $250, you can buy a device that lets you explore the Internet on your television using a remote control and/or wireless keyboard. Once you have this equipment, you have to pay a monthly fee (usually between $15 and $20) for Internet service. WebTV is the best known maker of these devices.

But getting online still isn't cheap, so many parents will want to find libraries and other places in the community that offer access to computers for free (see page 12).

Keeping Up: Costs and Changing Technology

While technology is changing rapidly, the best attitude is to simply dive in when it is convenient for you. There will be no perfect moment or one right way to get started. Make the time, price, and level of equipment fit you.
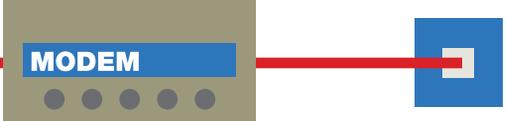
Alternatives to a Home Computer

For the many families who cannot afford to buy a computer and go online, or choose not to for other reasons, finding alternatives is the only realistic option for getting their children on the information superhighway. Although community access to online services is still limited, resourceful parents will find that more schools and libraries, after-school programs, community colleges and universities, and community centers are beginning to offer online access. In very rare instances, schools actually let families sign out computers, and a few housing facilities have put in computer resource rooms.

Your local library provides a wealth of information about the Internet and how families can make the best use of this exciting new media. A growing number of libraries also offer free public access to the Internet. In 1997, 60% of library systems offered public access, twice as many as in 1996.[12] The American Library Association's goal is to have every library online by the year 2000. In addition to online catalogs and reference service, many libraries offer classes for parents, children, and others in how to navigate the information superhighway. The best part—all you need is a library card. And librarians are at hand to provide assistance. For more information, call, visit, or log on to your local library or contact the American Library Association (see page 25).

Though there is no one place in every community to find out where public access is offered, other good places to ask include:

- Your county office of education or school district office;
- The local community college;
- Your local Urban League; or
- Your local PTA.

(See Appendix A, pages 25-27 for contacts).

The day when access to the information superhighway is as available as public telephones is a long way off. And some of the institutions mentioned restrict access and time of use—and, in some cases, charge fees. But by being persistent, parents can find resources in the community. In addition, they can document the lack of adequate equipment and let elected officials and corporate leaders know what is needed.

How Can You Find Good Places to Go and Things to Do Online?

Wonderful adventures are waiting in cyberspace. In fact, more than 1.5 million sites exist on the World Wide Web, with thousands more being added each day.[13]

Good Places to Go and Things to Do Online

There are several ways to get started finding good places to go and things to do online. A number of magazines, newspapers, and organizations publish their "best picks for kids" of Internet sites.[14] These can be useful resources, but keep in mind that sites frequently change their content and location, so review recommendations with care.

Also remember that these publications usually don't distinguish between sites that are commercial and those that are not—an important distinction since the commercial ones contain advertising and marketing devices, some of which might be inappropriate for or exploitative of children (see page 17). We suggest beginning with sites that are well-known, noncommercial, and educational.

PARENT STORIES

Katie, who's five, is learning her ABCs. Her mother is encouraging her by helping her type simple e-mail notes to her dad, who's on a Navy base in Cuba. Katie's mom has taken her online to show her more about the Navy and about where her father is located and what he is doing.

Since experimenting for yourself is the best way to get started online, we have picked a few activities and sites that are fun, educational, and safe. Once you have experimented with these, you can move on to explore the wider range of options available online.

1. Visit the American Library Association's Great Sites
at http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/amazing.html. Here you will find a "cybercollection" of links to more than 700 fun, exciting, and useful Web sites for children and grownups. Content from recommended sites ranges from the Negro Baseball Leagues to the Electronic Zoo to the Titanic.

2. Visit the Library of Congress
at http://www.loc.gov. Some of the most exciting things on this site are the online exhibits which offer amazing graphics. Users can view an art collection or see a special event that is taking place at the Library. The site also provides a great beginner's guide to the Internet—more information than most people will need, but very thorough and useful.

3. See what the space agency, NASA,
has put online at http://www.spacelink.nasa.gov/index.html. Perhaps best suited for older kids, the NASA site contains information about the space agency's programs, an online library for research, and exhibits on recent space and weather phenomena. You can also check out information on all the Space Shuttle's missions, take an online tour and view a special countdown page.

4. Visit exhibits from the San Francisco interactive science museum, the Exploratorium,
at http://www.exploratorium.edu/learning_studio/. The Exploratorium contains online exhibits that are changed and updated regularly. Memory tests, optical illusions, audio and video samplings, and a host of experiments to be done online offer hours of educational fun.

5. Visit the National Weather Service's Interactive Weather Information Network
at http://iwin.nws.noaa.gov/. In addition to checking forecasts, you can track the movement of current weather systems and view video clips of dramatic weather events.

Check out some useful information for yourself

6. The National Parent Information Network (NPIN),
at http://www.npin.org, provides information to parents and those who work with them and fosters the exchange of parenting materials. Materials reproduced in full on NPIN have been reviewed for reliability and usefulness by trained child development specialists. NPIN also provides lists of publications, brochures and other materials for parents.

7. The National PTA Web site, *Children First*,
at http://www.pta.org, offers a wealth of information for parents, teachers and other child advocates. You can review extensive libraries of PTA materials on a wide variety of topics, including parenting skills, leadership development, nurturing creativity, HIV/AIDS education, parent and family involvement in education, legislative issues, PTA membership information, and much more. You can also use the site to interact with PTA leaders and members via e-mail, online discussion groups and online chat rooms. The National PTA also offers two subscription-based Web sites focusing on PTA management issues and general child advocacy.

8. The National Urban League,
at http://www.nul.org, is a useful resource for tracking programs and events related to African-American and urban poverty issues. In addition to its virtual library, the site gives information about its affiliates and activities in 115 cities. It is a rich reference area for students, parents, teachers and history buffs.

9. The Children's Partnership,
at http://www.childrenspartnership.org, contains the full text of many of the Partnership's publications, including this Guide and *Tips and Tools for Parents: Keeping Kids Safe Online*, as well as links to other sites of interest to parents.

10. The Benton Foundation's KidsCampaigns,
at http://www.kidscampaigns.org, will tie you into broader efforts to improve the conditions of children across the country, to improve public policies, and to work effectively with the media.

11. Children Now,
at http://www.childrennow.org, is a good resource for keeping abreast of children's issues and getting involved in advocacy. It includes useful links to other resources as well as volunteer opportunities.

THE CHILDREN'S **13** PARTNERSHIP

How Can You Keep Your Child Safe Online?

The online world mirrors the real one: it includes the good, the bad, and the ugly. While all parents want to keep their child safe, parents will have different standards for what they allow their child to experience online. This section covers:

- Benefits, dangers and parenting strategies for guiding a child's use of e-mail, the Web, and chat;

- Legal and ethical rules of the road; and

- Guidelines for your child to stay safe online.

Parents in Charge

Certain people can pose a danger to kids online and certain information online is not appropriate for children, or is appropriate only for certain ages. Most parents have strong feelings about what their children should be exposed to, and are concerned about how easy it is to get information online. Parents may worry about materials that are sexually explicit, violent, racially biased, or overly commercial.

The good news is there are several things that parents can do to help make their children's online experiences safer.

1. Learn About the Internet

If you are just starting out on the Internet, see what your local library, community center, school or newspaper offers by way of introduction.

2. Get Involved

Your involvement in your child's life, including his or her online life, is the best insurance you can have of your child's safety. Use our parenting tips in this section and learn with your children about fun things to do as well as about the dangers online in a way that makes you a partner in the experience, rather than a resented censor.

3. Stay Informed

Keep yourself informed about **parental control tools** and how they can help you keep your child safe online. (See below for an introduction to what currently available tools can and cannot do.)

4. Become an Advocate for Kids

If you see material or practices online you do or do not like, contact your Internet Service Provider and the company that created the material. Take advantage of this unique opportunity to make sure that this growing medium develops in positive ways for kids.

PARENT STORIES

José, a 10-year-old boy from Los Angeles, really likes science. He is especially interested in viruses, particularly the Ebola virus, which he has read about in the newspaper and seen stories about on TV. His dad even had a book about viruses called *The Hot Zone.*

One morning, using a search engine called "yahoo," he typed in the words "Hot Zone" to see if he could find out more about the Ebola virus. What he found was a sexually explicit Web site complete with photographs.

"Dad," José called out laughing, "you better come see this." Startled, José's father sat down at the computer with him and helped him to find accurate information about the Ebola virus. Together, they talked about what to do if such a situation occurred again and reaffirmed the family rules for using the Internet.

Parental Control Tools

These tools use several different strategies to help you control what your child does online. Check out the overview of e-mail, the Web, and chat on these pages for a list of the most common features of parental control tools.

But, remember no parental control tool is 100% reliable. Not only do tools inadvertently allow access to some inappropriate material and block access to some valuable information, but savvy children may be able to get around the controls.

Finding Parental Control Tools

At this time, there are three primary places from which parents can obtain parental control tools:

1. Your Internet Service Provider (ISP). The best place to start is with the company that provides you with a connection to the Internet, such as America Online or Prodigy. Most offer a range of control features, often for free.

2. Your Local Computer or Retail Store. Here you can buy "blocking and filtering" software, such as Cyber Patrol and CYBERsitter, that includes features similar to the ones provided by an ISP. You have to set up these products on your own computer.

3. Your Web Browser. You can also use certain Web browsers, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer, to enforce parental control **rating systems.**

Keep an eye on other parental control tools, such as "safe areas" for kids, new types of rating systems, and search engines designed to find *only* information that has been approved for families.

Be Sure to Find Out Whether the Tool:
- Has the protection features best for your family;
- Can be used on the type of computer you have;
- Requires a subscription fee after you've bought the product; and
- Works with commercial service providers, with direct Internet connections, or with both.

E-mail Safety

Positive Benefits for Your Child

- Keep in touch with teachers, family, friends
- Get help with homework
- Establish mentoring relationships
- Practice writing
- Receive online newsletters
- Make world-wide pen pals

Danger/Risks

- Strangers, at times pretending to be someone else, can communicate with your child
- Harassing messages
- Unsolicited e-mail ("spam"), usually about sites with sexually explicit material, products for sale, or moneymaking schemes

Parenting Tips

- Share your child's e-mail account and password
- Talk with your child about the people he or she is meeting online
- Set a rule that your child never arranges an in-person meeting without you present
- Complain to the sender of unsolicited e-mail and to your ISP about unwanted e-mail

What Parental Control Tools Can Do

- Route your child's e-mail first to your account
- Reject e-mail from specific e-mail addresses
- Limit e-mail with offensive language and personal information from being sent and received

Web Safety

Positive Benefits for Your Child

- Access rich educational and cultural resources (text, sounds, pictures, and video) otherwise unavailable to most people
- Obtain up-to-the-minute information
- Improve ability to understand and evaluate information
- Stay informed by accessing your community and school Web sites
- Play fun and educational games
- Learn educational skills useful in future jobs

Danger/Risks

- Easy-to-find sites with sexually explicit images and text
- Easy-to-find sites promoting hatred, bigotry, violence, drugs, cults, and other things not appropriate for children
- Inaccurate, misleading and untrue information
- No restrictions on marketing products such as alcohol and tobacco to children
- Marketing that deceptively collects personal information from kids in order to sell products to them or their parents
- Requests for personal information for contests, surveys, etc., that are used in unauthorized ways
- Easy access to games with excessive violence and gender stereotypes

Parenting Tips

- Keep computer in family area to better monitor your child's activity
- Regularly spend time online with your child to learn about his or her interests and activities
- Teach your child to end any experience online when he or she feels uncomfortable or scared by pressing the back key, logging off, and telling a trusted adult as soon as possible
- Establish an atmosphere of trust and understanding with your child by not blaming him or her for uncomfortable online experiences
- Discuss the difference between advertising and educational or entertaining content and show your child examples of each
- Show your child the difference between sources of information that are credible and those that are not
- Teach your child to never give out personal information unless he or she has your permission and you know how and by whom the information will be used
- Establish strict rules for ordering products (and then monitor credit card bills)
- "Talk back" to Internet Service Providers and content creators to let them know what you want and expect from them in keeping kids safe online

What Parental Control Tools Can Do

- Block access to materials (text and pictures) identified as inappropriate for kids*
- Permit access only to materials specifically approved as safe for kids*
- Allow you to specify what types of materials are appropriate for your child
- Help you monitor your child's activity on the Internet by storing names of sites and/or snapshots of material seen by your child on the computer for you to view later
- Allow you to set different restrictions for each family member
- Limit results of an Internet search to content appropriate for kids
- Block advertising that appears at the top of a Web page.
- Enforce time limits set by parents

Each control tool determines whether materials are "inappropriate" or "safe for kids" differently. Make sure you ask what criteria the tool uses and how the evaluation process works; then check out the tool yourself.

THE CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP

Chat Safety

Positive Benefits for Your Child

- Develop relationships with children and adults around the world

- Talk to kids and teens with similar interests and concerns, in rooms specifically for kids that are monitored closely by adults

- Communicate instantaneously with family, friends, teachers, community leaders, etc.

Dangers/Risks

- Offensive language and adult conversation

- Because of its interactive nature, the most likely activity online through which children will encounter people who want to harm them

- Too much time online, which limits a child's well-rounded development by taking the place of friends, schoolwork, sports and other activities

Parenting Tips

- Accompany your child in chat rooms until he or she learns your safety rules

- Teach your child to never give out personal information such as his or her name or address, school name or address, or anything else that is personally identifying

- Explain that people are not always who they say they are

- Set a rule that your child never arranges an in-person meeting without you present

- Limit your child to specific chat rooms or consider blocking out chat entirely

What Parental Control Tools Can Do

- Allow access only to monitored chat rooms or block access to all chat rooms

- Block private messages between a child and another user

- Limit your child's ability to give out personal information

Privacy and Commercialism

The Internet was founded as a research and defense tool, and only now is its full commercial potential being explored. Advertisers and marketers recognize that millions of children are spending more time online and represent a major market:

- In 1997, children spent $27 billion and influenced an additional $187 billion in other's spending.[15]

Online protections for children are just being developed in this arena, so parents need to be particularly vigilant and active.

- Parents are used to media that have been regulated over time to protect children, like telephones and television. However, many regulations, such as those which restrict alcohol and cigarette advertising to children, do not necessarily apply online.

Moreover, traditional distinctions between advertising and content are blurred in many child-oriented sites—making it harder for children to distinguish commercials from "content." Further, the interactive nature of this medium makes it easier for marketers to collect personal information from children without necessarily revealing how it will be used and without getting permission from parents. In some cases marketers use free merchandise and familiar characters to encourage children to provide personally identifying information.[16] According to a report from the Center for Media Education, online advertisers are targeting children as young as four, using marketing and advertising practices that are potentially harmful to children.[17]

As a parent, you can help protect children from harmful or inappropriate marketing practices by letting companies know what you think of their advertising and marketing practices and by contacting your Congressional representative or the Federal Trade Commission if you experience practices you think are wrong.

THE LAW ONLINE
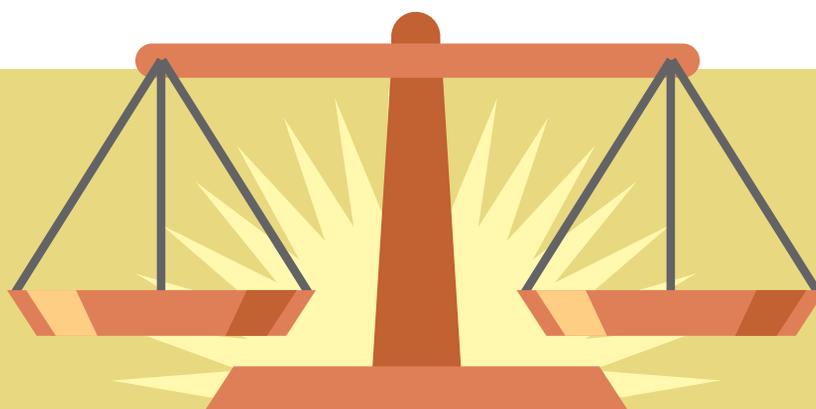
Many laws that pertain to information in other forms like books, magazines and television may apply in cyberspace, but have not yet been tested. Although the law is changing and lawmakers are struggling to find ways to regulate this challenging new medium, some rules do apply. In some cases, you or your child could inadvertently run into trouble with the law, including prosecution, prison, and fines for breaking the law. Here are some basic guidelines about frequently asked legal questions. Refer to the Resources section (page 25) for updated and more extensive information.

Copyright

Copying photographs, music, stories, films, and other artistic works is not allowed online without obtaining the proper permission from the owner of the copyright. Typing a story from a magazine and distributing it or scanning a photograph for posting is illegal unless you obtain permission from the original publisher. However, many photographs and graphics have been approved for public use (they are considered "in the public domain"). And, in cases where permission is needed, you can often request it just by clicking an e-mail link.

Copying or Distributing Software

Virtually all software is copyrighted. Copying and distributing *purchased* software is almost always illegal. However, there are software programs called "freeware" or "shareware" that can be used for free, for a minimal fee, or only under specific conditions. Regardless of what the software is called, you should read the conditions under which you can upload or download it legally.

Privacy

E-mail is generally afforded privacy rights if it is sent between individuals. Information or messages posted to a public location are not considered private. Children should be aware that no legitimate service provider will ever request information about them. Some Web sites, however, will request your address or phone number for marketing purposes or to add you to a mailing list. This is not illegal, but there is no obligation for your child to give the information.

Hacking

It is generally considered illegal to access or attempt to access a private information system, such as a company's internal network. This is called hacking. Children will explore the Internet—that is what it is there for. They should be warned that if they ever encounter a private system that asks them for a user ID (or userid) and password, they should leave the site immediately.

Obscenity

This is a very complicated area. However, parents should remember that materials they might consider obscene or objectionable for their children to see may be protected by the First Amendment and not considered legally obscene. Under current law, anything that is legal in print is generally also legal on the Internet. However, commercial online services have the right to restrict access to obscene or indecent materials on their systems. One clear area is child pornography; the production, sale, or possession of child pornography in any medium violates federal law.

Who to Call if You Have a Problem With Behavior Online

Most commercial online services have strict terms of service that help protect you and your child in the event you encounter offensive behavior. If you or your child are the victim of harassment or other trouble online, contact your commercial or Internet Service Provider immediately. Offenders can have their accounts terminated, and service providers usually will cooperate with authorities when there is the possibility that a crime has been committed.

If the situation involves incidences of online enticement of children for sex acts, child pornography or child prostitution, you can report the incident to The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's "CyberTipline" by calling toll free, (800) 843-5678, or going to their Web site, www.missingkids.org/cybertip. The CyberTipline forwards all reports to the appropriate law enforcement agencies.

A Young Person's Contract

Just like teaching a young person to drive a car, you need to provide your child with some tools to help him or her stay safe online. One of these can be a Contract that outlines the rules of safety that you and your child agree on. It might be a good idea to post the Contract right by the computer.

STAYING SAFE ONLINE:
A YOUNG PERSON'S CONTRACT

1. I will **ALWAYS** tell a parent or another adult immediately if something is confusing or seems scary or threatening.

2. I will **NEVER** give out my full name, real address, telephone number, school name or location, schedule, password, or other identifying information when I'm online. I will check with an adult for any exceptions.

3. I will **NEVER** have a face-to-face meeting with someone I've met online. In rare cases, my parents may decide it's OK, but if I do decide to meet a cyberpal, I will make sure we meet in a public place and that a parent or guardian is with me.

4. I will **NEVER** respond online to any messages that use bad words or words that are scary, threatening, or just feel weird. If I get that kind of message, I'll print it out and tell an adult immediately. The adult can then contact the online service or appropriate agency. If I'm uncomfortable in a live chat room, I will use the "ignore" button.

5. I will **NEVER** go into a new online area that is going to cost additional money without first asking permission from my parent or teacher.

6. I will **NEVER** send a picture over the Internet or via regular mail to anyone without my parent's permission.

7. I will **NOT** give out a credit card number online without my parent present.

Young Person_____Date _____

Parent/Guardian_____Date _____

Right and Wrong: Ethics Online

In addition to the law, parents ought to know about the special ethical issues that come up with this new technology. The interactive, seemingly anonymous nature of the online world raises old ethical questions in new ways, especially for children.

Because the online world can feel "pretend" to a child, it is very important that a parent articulate and reinforce the importance of basic values (ethics) such as truthfulness, responsibility, and respect. Children need a careful explanation of what is acceptable behavior and why, and they need to know what exceptions, if any, are permissible.

Parents can use the "new" situations that come up online to reinforce basic standards of conduct and talk about values. For example:

Is it all right to download software programs that are available at some online sites?

Only when the source of the information gives you explicit permission to do so. Stealing information is like stealing other things. It's wrong and illegal.

Can I take information off the Internet and pretend that I created it?

No. It is both wrong and illegal to take information that you did not create and represent that it is yours. Many words and images are protected by laws, so pay careful attention to which ones are. It is important to report who or what the original source is.

Is it all right to pretend to be somebody else when you're online? (Can a boy pretend to be a girl? Can children pretend to be older than they are?)

The online world allows you to create a special name that you can use, and helps children go online with a degree of anonymity. However, pretending to be something you are not in a way that deliberately misleads others who are presuming you are truthful is not all right.

It is important for you to talk with your children when these kinds of questions come up. They provide one of your best teaching tools. Since you're learning too, take the time to really discuss the tough questions and help your child to be a good citizen in cyberspace.

Etiquette Online: "Netiquette"

"Internet etiquette," called "netiquette," is also important for children and their parents to understand. There are widely accepted rules of behavior to follow when you're online, including (but not limited to):

- Don't TYPE ALL IN CAPITAL LETTERS for emphasis. IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING. If you need to emphasize a word, use asterisks, like *this.*

- Be polite. When you enter a chat room, wait awhile to find out what people are talking about before you participate. Be patient with newcomers.

- Be careful not to use rude or bad language online. Many providers will terminate your account.

Safe Traveling on the Information Superhighway: A Parent's Checklist

✔ Tap your child's natural sense of wonder and discovery and temper it with your experience and counsel.

✔ Let your child take the lead, but stay with him or her until you've decided the activity is appropriate.

✔ Spend as much "cybertime" with your child as you can.

✔ Provide your child with clear, simple instructions about how to avoid danger and what to do if something happens.

✔ Set limits appropriate to your child's age.

✔ Talk to your child often about his or her computer/online life.

✔ Monitor, monitor, monitor (time, phone bills, chat groups, and onscreen materials).

✔ Use online experiences as another way to teach responsibility, good conduct, and values.

Sample online symbols called Emoticons

:-)	=	I'm happy
: -(	=	I'm sad
(:-&	=	I'm angry
:-O	=	I'm shouting

Acronyms:

BTW	=	by the way
LOL	=	laughing out loud
OTOH	=	on the other hand
IMHO	=	in my humble opinion

There are hundreds of these symbols to use while online. You will see them as you spend time e-mailing, and most Internet guides will have a list of them (see Resources, page 25).

Classrooms and Communities Online: Getting Involved

At School—Getting Involved with Technology

Schools are where many parents first encounter computers and online technology. More and more schools are getting connected to the information superhighway, as they acquire computers and get linked to the Internet. And because schools are located in every community and open to every child, they are the best way to ensure that every child gets the benefits of new technologies.

PARENT STORIES

The 19 schools in Calvert County (a rural community in Southern Maryland) were like many other schools. They had no technology plan until business leaders, teachers, school board members, and others joined forces two years ago to design a five-year plan to benefit the students. They came up with a careful plan to surmount the difficult hurdles in connecting their students to the information superhighway—security, costs, classroom use, administrative use, parent skepticism, and a host of other issues. Once the vision was laid out, the resources followed.

The school board approved the plan and committed $100,000 to get it started. County residents approved a technology bond measure to pay for the mainframe computer—the central hub of the system. A local company stepped forward to pay for the dial-up service so that every school could be connected to the Internet. Then, when the governor announced a $53 million initiative to link Maryland's students to the information superhighway, Calvert schools were ready to implement their program and were recognized for their foresight and vision.

Schools using technology in education are blazing new, uncharted paths. When schools have sufficient hardware, connectivity, educational content, and teacher training, computer-assisted learning can improve academic performance and can motivate students who have been hard to reach.[18] For example, computers and technology have shown very promising results in enabling students with disabilities to learn and communicate more successfully; they have also produced significant gains for students in isolated or rural areas.[19]

There are some simple ways you can begin to get involved at your child's school:

- Ask a teacher to set aside a time for you to come in and observe or join in on the computer with your child.
- Encourage your school to have a parents' night to see what the students are doing with computers and technology.
- Ask the principal to set up a meeting to talk with parents about the school's goals with technology.
- Find out whether your school has a **technology plan.** If so, become familiar with it. If not, identify which teachers are most interested and encourage them to develop a plan.
- Get involved with your PTA's technology committee.
- Volunteer in your school's computer lab or classes.

As you begin to get involved, remember you are probably not alone. Many telephone and cable companies have announced major initiatives to provide Internet connections to schools. Computer hardware and software companies are also donating significant amounts of equipment to schools. Many states and cities, professional associations, and civic groups are also getting involved with providing technology to schools. The Federal Government has established a program called the e-rate to provide discounts on telecommunications services to schools and libraries.

Schools and Technology

78%
of U.S. public schools have some access to the Internet.[20]

63%
of schools with a large proportion of students from poor families have access to the Internet, compared to **88%** of schools with higher-income students.[21]

27%
of all public school instructional rooms have Internet access.[22]

Becoming a Technology Ally at Your Child's School— Some Tips

There are a variety of places parents can turn to get technical help as they work with their school on technology matters. Some written materials are listed in Chapter IV. In addition, your state department of education or school district office may provide useful materials or training. Also ask district office personnel whether there are companies or nonprofit organizations in your community that help schools design technology programs.

The following checklist for establishing a strong technology program at your child's school was developed based on a review of successful programs, with input from teachers, administrators, and parents.

Step 1: Building Readiness—What's Needed?

- Support from the principal and school district.
- A core of enthusiastic teachers.
- Training for teachers.
- A school culture that encourages ongoing reassessment of curriculum.
- A link to the library staff from the start.
- A core of enthusiastic and, ideally, experienced parents.
- Allies and sources of help from the start, including other schools, private sector mentors, nonprofit organizations, etc.
- A system for respectful, honest discussion of issues between teachers, administration, parents, and students.

Step 2: Designing and Introducing the Program—What's Needed?

- A clear educational vision for the school.
- Technology goals and a plan to help achieve the school's educational goals.
- Attention to how students will use the resources (collaborative projects, storage of their work, etc.).
- A systematic and thoughtful introduction of the technology plan to teachers and parents.
- Coordination, as needed, with the school district.
- A plan for paying for the wiring, computers, software, and online use.
- Smart decisions about wiring, computers, programs, etc.
- Involving parents and students in designing the plan (bringing parents in early helps build a strong parent/school relationship).
- Involving students in the planning process.

Step 3: Keeping the Technology Program Up to Speed—What's Needed?

- Ongoing discussion and evaluation of the technology activities (involving administration, teachers, parents, students, and staff).
- Ongoing professional development, technical assistance, and troubleshooting.
- Resourcefulness in generating funds to maintain and upgrade the program.
- An entrepreneurial team to forge alliances with corporations and other needed resources.
- Regular checks to be sure the program meets educational goals.

Acceptable Use Policies

Many state departments of education and local school districts have recommended that schools develop a contract with every student using online services at school to insure they are using the information superhighway appropriately. Called Acceptable Use Policies, these contracts encourage responsible behavior by students and give teachers enforceable rules; for example:

- The network should be used in a way that is consistent with the school's code of conduct.
- Students should share the system and be careful not to monopolize it.
- The network should be used for educational purposes (e.g., students should avoid placing commercial advertising online without permission).

The policies also ban illegal activity like:

- Selling drugs or other illegal materials online;
- Using copyrighted material without permission;
- Using networks to view indecent or obscene materials;
- Creating or distributing computer viruses;
- Using somebody else's name or code number to send or receive messages;
- Sending racist, sexist, inflammatory, or obscene messages; and
- "Hacking" of any kind.

Failure to abide by the rules can result in suspension of computer privileges or even prosecution.

The Home-School Connection

The home-school connection is at the heart of a successful educational system. Take the time to keep up with what your child is doing at school. Go to parent-teacher meetings. Ask what your child is doing on computers at school. If there is a hookup between your home computer and the school network, be sure you use it to keep up with school announcements and to communicate with teachers. E-mail can make it easier to leave messages with other parents or teachers about the school and your child's activities.

Stay Involved

Developing a state-of-the-art technology program for your child at school takes time and persistence. Expect lots of roadblocks and doubtful colleagues along the way. Set short-term goals you can meet but also expect to be working on achieving your goals for a number of years.

Helping Ensure That All Children Have an On-Ramp

The Public Policy Arena

Elected and appointed officials—on the school board or at the city, county, state, and federal levels—all make many important decisions that influence whether or not children will have access to the information superhighway. These public policy decisions will determine whether new information technologies are available to all children, or primarily to those kids whose parents can afford to personally buy the technology.

State legislators, for example, decide how much of the state budget to allocate for school technology programs. Members of the state public utilities commission determine the community obligations that should be carried out by the companies they regulate, such as telephone companies. Federal officials at the Federal Communications Commission decide how to provide "universal service" in the telecommunications arena, including the discount that schools and libraries will receive (called the "e-rate"). And school board members decide what competencies their graduates should have, such as computer literacy.

In-Home Access— Haves and Have-Nots

19%
of households with annual incomes less than $20,000 own computers[23]

39%
of households with annual incomes $20,000-$39,999 own computers[24]

58%
of households with annual incomes $40,000-$59,999 own computers[25]

68%
of households with annual incomes more than $60,000 own computers[26]

Get Involved

As concerned citizens, parents can join forces and have a significant influence on the outcome of these important decisions. There are groups around that can help you find out what decisions are being made and what actions you can take to make a difference. (See Resources, page 25, to get started.)

It can be a fun and educational experience to research important issues of the day on the Internet, with your child, then e-mail decision-makers with your thoughts. For example, contact the Federal Communications Commission, using the address listed on page 27. On their Web site, under "Education," there is a good briefing on current issues, key dates, and how your child can actually get involved.

Since schools are the best way to make sure all children have access to technology, one valuable place to start is to find out how your state stacks up with the number of students per computer in school. Chart A shows these averages by state for each of the 50 states. As taxpayers, parents can command attention and should contact members of the state legislature and local school boards to make the case, where necessary, for increased investment in school technology.

Why It Matters

Parents can be an especially powerful force in the decisions made around the information superhighway because children are its first travelers. In addition, if parents joined together—all 63 million of us—our views would matter a great deal to officials concerned with reelection.[27]

With clear and vigorous leadership from parents, we can all help "ensure" that decisions will be guided by what's best for children and families.

PARTNERSHIP

THE CHILDREN'S

CHART A

Students per Multimedia Computer*, by State

National Average...16

Generally, a computer that can display graphics and sound (specifically, a "386" or better)

State	Value
WA	10
MT	12
ND	9
MN	9
NH	13
ME	17
VT	8
OR	11
ID	17
SD	8
WI	18
MI	12
NY	23
MA	29
WY	9
IA	17
RI	18
NV	12
NE	10
IL	23
IN	17
OH	35
PA	26
CT	26
UT	14
CO	7
NJ	12
CA	28
KS	12
MO	24
WV	21
VA	10
DE	27
MD	13
KY	16
DC	17
AZ	20
NM	8
OK	16
AR	19
TN	21
NC	16
SC	15
MS	16
AL	29
GA	15
TX	17
LA	35
AK	6
FL	10
HI	26

Data source: Quality Education Data, 1997, as quoted in the CEO Forum on Education and Technology's *School Technology and Readiness Report: From Pillars to Progress,* 1997.

Resources

Below is a starter list of printed materials, organizations, and other places you can turn to for help. These are some of the resources we found most helpful, though there are many others.

Books/Manuals

America's Children & The Information Superhighway, The Children's Partnership, 1994 and 1996 Update. An overview of how the information superhighway and related technologies affect children in terms of job preparation as well as life at home, at school, and in the community. 48 pages. $10.00. Write or call: 1351 3rd Street Promenade, Suite 206, Santa Monica, CA 90401; (310) 260-1220; also available online at http://www.childrenspartnership.org.

Child Safety on the Information Superhighway, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 1994. A brochure explaining the risks to children on the Internet and guidelines for avoiding them. 10 pages. Write or call: 2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 550, Arlington, VA 22201-3052; (703) 235-3900; also available online at http://www.missingkids.org.

A Parents' Guide to the Internet… and how to protect your children in cyberspace, Parry Aftab, Esq., SC Press, New York, NY 1997. A guide written by an attorney—and a parent—with practical information and advice on getting your family online and teaching your children to be cyber-smart and cyber-safe. 328 pages. $22.95. Available at bookstores and online at http://www.familyguidebook.com.

The Internet Kids & Family Yellow Pages, Second Edition, Jean Armour Polly, Osbourne McGraw-Hill, Berkeley, CA 1997. A compendium of over 3,500 engaging and authoritative Internet resources for children and families. 608 pages. $19.95.

Available at bookstores; excerpts online at http://www.netmom.com.

Leadership & Technology: What School Board Members Need to Know, National School Boards Association, 1995. A book that provides answers to important questions about technology planning, designed to help school board members with the development of technology plans. 179 pages. $35.00. Write or call: NSBA Distribution Center, PO Box 161, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0161; (800) 706-6722; Fax (301) 604-0158.

Making the Net Work for You: How to Get the Most Out of Going Online, Interactive Services Association and National Consumers League, 1996. A short, practical guide about how to help ensure online activities are inviting, rewarding, and secure places to visit. 15 pages. Write or call: 8403 Colesville Road, Suite 865, Silver Spring, MD 20910; (301) 495-4955; also available online at http://www.isa.net/project-open.

Parents Guide to the Internet, U.S. Department of Education, November 1997. A straightforward introduction to the Internet, along with tips on how you can support school use of technology. 16 pages. Call (800) 872-5327 to receive the Guide free of charge or visit http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/internet.

Web of Deception, Threats to Children from Online Marketing, Center for Media Education, 1996. An analysis of marketing practices now used online, including samples of those available to or directed at children. 33 pages plus extensive attachments. $25.00. Write, call or fax: 1511 K Street, NW, Suite #518, Washington, DC 20005;

(202) 628-2620; Fax (202)-628-2554; excerpts available online at http://www.cme.org/cme.

Nonprofit Organizations

American Library Association
The association's mission is to promote the highest quality library services to ensure that all people have access to the information they need. "Kids Connect @ The Library" is a campaign to inform parents of how libraries can help connect their children with ideas, learning, and fun through computers, books, and other resources.
50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611; (312) 280-5044; http://www.ala.org.

Benton Foundation
Benton's Communications Policy and Practice project works to define the public interest in the information age by documenting the effective uses of new communications tools, building a network of activists and equipping them with policy analysis, case studies, and other information. Benton's KidsCampaigns supports the "Who's Side Are You On?" national public service campaign in partnership with the Advertising Council, Inc. and the Coalition for America's Children.
1634 Eye Street, NW, 12th Floor, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 638-5770; benton@benton.org, http://www.benton.org.

Center for Children and Technology

The Center aims to improve education by altering the circumstances of teaching and learning through basic, applied, and formative research and technology development. Much of its work is done in collaboration with schools and other institutions concerned with learning, teaching, and technology design.
96 Morton Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10014; (212) 807-4200; cct@edc.org, http://www.edc.org/CCT/ccthome.

The Center for Democracy and Technology

The Center's mission is to develop public policies that preserve and advance democratic values and constitutional civil liberties on the Internet and other interactive communications media. CDT relies on a combination of staff expertise in relevant law and technology, along with a unique consultation process that brings together diverse interests from across the spectrum to address critical public policy issues.
1634 Eye Street, NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 637-9800; info@cdt.org, http://www.cdt.org.

Center for Media Education

The Center for Media Education is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of electronic media, especially on behalf of children and families. CME's Universal Service program helps advocates to fully participate in the development of state-level policies that provide telecommunications to rural and low-income citizens. CME publishes *Infoactive Kids*, a quarterly print and online publication.
1511 K Street, NW, Suite 518, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 628-2620; cme@cme.org, http://www.cme.org/cme.

Center for Media Literacy

The Center for Media Literacy, with national offices in Los Angeles, CA, is a nonprofit organization established to develop educational projects and materials that promote critical thinking about the media: television, movies, advertising, print and the Internet. The Center provides leadership, training and a mail order clearinghouse of books, videos and teaching materials.

4727 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 403, Los Angeles, CA 90010; (213) 931-4177; cml@medialit.org. http://www.medialit.org.

The Children's Partnership

The Children's Partnership (TCP) educates policy makers and parents about technology issues affecting children. TCP also publishes briefing materials and operates a Web site for parents.
1351 3rd Street Promenade, Suite 206, Santa Monica, CA 90401, (310) 260-1220; and
4000 Albemarle Street, NW, Suite 306, Washington, DC 20016; (202) 362-5902; frontdoor@childrenspartnership.org, http://www.childrenspartnership.org

Community Technology Centers' Network

CTCNet serves as a catalyst to strengthen community involvement with technology. It is creating an actual and electronic national members' network of computer access and learning centers.
c/o Education Development Center, Inc., 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02158; (617) 969-7100, extension 2727; ctcnet@edc.org; http://www.ctcnet.org.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation

The Electronic Frontier Foundation seeks to find out how and to what extent new digital media fit into existing frameworks. While the free flow of information is generally a positive thing, serious problems can arise. Problems such as how to protect children and undesiring adults from exposure to sexually explicit or potentially offensive materials, how to protect intellectual property rights, and other difficult questions are the purview of this group.
1550 Bryant Street, Suite 725, San Francisco, CA 94103; (415) 436-9333; eff@eff.org; http://www.eff.org.

KIDSNET

KIDSNET is an educational nonprofit clearinghouse of information on children's media. The group generates a monthly database of audio, video, radio, educational software, television, and related multimedia programs for children which is available in both print and electronic formats.

6856 Eastern Avenue, NW, Suite 208, Washington, DC 20012; (202) 291-1400; kidsnet@aol.com, http://www.KIDSNET.org

National Parent Information Network

NPIN provides an extensive library of family involvement resources on the Internet, including PARENTS askERIC, a question-answering service that links parents with experts. (800) 583-4135; ericeece@uiuc.edu, http://www.npin.org.

National Council of La Raza

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) is the nation's largest Hispanic constituency-based, private, nonprofit organization representing over 200 community-based groups that provide housing, education, employment, immigration, and social services to more than two million Hispanics annually.
1111 19th Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 785-1670; http://www.nclr.org.

National PTA

The National PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer association in the United States working exclusively on behalf of children and youth. For 100 years, the National PTA has promoted the education, health, and safety of children and families.
330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60611-3690; info@pta.org, (312) 670-6782; http://www.pta.org.

National School Boards Association

The National School Boards Association supports school boards in their work to introduce technology in schools. The association publishes guides and resource materials.
1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3493; (703) 838-6722; itte@nsba.org; http://www.nsba.org/itte.

National Urban League

The National Urban League is the premier social service and civil rights organization in America. The League is a nonpartisan, community-based organization headquartered in New York City, with 115 affiliates around the country. The League's Technology Programs and Policy department works with industry, government, and other community-

based organizations to bring the benefits of information and communications technologies to underserved communities.
120 Wall Street, New York, NY 10005; (212) 558-5300; info@nul.org, http://www.nul.org.

Organization for Community Networks
OCN is a central repository for information regarding Free-Nets and Community networks.
PO Box 32175, Euclid, OH 44132; (216) 731-9801; jmk@ofcn.org, http://ofcn.org.

Public Access Network Directory
The Directory helps citizens, community service groups, and others locate and connect with public access networks in the United States. http://www.clir.org/pand.

Project OPEN
Project OPEN is a joint effort of the National Consumers League, the Interactive Services Association, and leading online/Internet service companies. Its primary mission is to help the American public learn how to use online and Internet services in an informed and responsible way.
c/o Interactive Services Association
8403 Colesville Road, Suite 865
Silver Spring, MD 20910;
(301) 495-4955;
project-open@isa.net,
http://www.isa.net/project-open.

Federal Government

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology
The U.S. Department of Education seeks to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence. The Office of Educational Technology develops and coordinates policy for technology in education.
600 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202; (202) 401-1444; http://www.ed.gov.

Federal Communications Commission
The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the federal body that regulates telecommunications. The FCC oversees important issues such as the pricing structure for delivering new technologies to the nation's schools, libraries and other entities. The FCC encourages parents and citizens to become involved in these important regulatory proceedings.
1919 M Street, NW, Washington, DC 20554; (202) 418-0200; fccinfo@fcc.gov. http://www.fcc.gov.

BROWSER
A **software** product that lets you find, see, and hear material on the **World Wide Web**, including text, graphics, sound, and video. Popular browsers are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Most **commercial services** have their own browsers.

CD-ROMs
A computer disk that can store large amounts of information; generally used on computers with CD-ROM drives. CD-ROM stands for Compact Disk Read Only Memory. That means it can only play back information, not record or save material.

CHAT ROOMS
They allow users to communicate with each other in "real time" (or "live"), as opposed to delayed time as with **e-mail**. A user enters a chat room (usually defined by topic), types a message into the computer, and sends it, and it is instantly displayed on the screens of the other users in the chat room. Admission is generally not restricted. You never know who's going to be reading your messages or responding to them, so it is best to be cautious.

COMMERCIAL SERVICE
General term for large online services (e.g., America Online, CompuServe, Microsoft Network, Prodigy). These services are like special clubs that require membership dues. Besides providing access to the **Internet**, commercial services have lots of content, games, and **chat rooms** that are available only to members.

CYBERSPACE
General term used to refer to the electronic "areas" and communities existing on the **Internet** and other computer networks, as well as to the culture that is developing around them.

DISCUSSION GROUP
An area online focused on a specific topic where users can read and add comments. You can find discussion groups for almost any topic!

E-MAIL
"Electronic Mail." A way of sending messages electronically from one computer user to another. Users can send memos, letters, and other word-based messages, as well as **multimedia** documents. This requires having a **modem**, a telephone line connected to your computer, and an e-mail address (recognizable because of the "@" symbol, such as president@whitehouse.gov).

FAQ
A list of "Frequently Asked Questions" about a specific **Web site**, mailing list, product or game. Reading the FAQ is a great idea when you are new to a site, mailing list, or product.

FREE-NET/COMMUNITY NETWORK
A community network that provides free or substantially reduced online access, usually to local residents. Free-nets originally focused on providing text-based access to local information and discussions; now more are providing additional services, such as full access to the **Internet**.

HARDWARE
The nuts, bolts, and wires. The actual computer and related machines such as scanners and printers.

HOME PAGE
The site that is the starting point on the **World Wide Web** for a particular group or organization. Also used to refer to the default page for your own **browser**.

HTML
"Hypertext Markup Language." A document format used on the **World Wide Web**. Text documents must be converted to HTML in order to be readable on the Web.

HYPERLINK (like HYPERTEXT)
An easy method of retrieving information by choosing highlighted and underlined words in text on the screen. The words link to other documents with related subject matter.

INFORMATION LITERACY
The ability to find, process, and evaluate the information individuals need to be lifelong learners equipped for the workplace in the Information Age. As information increasingly is stored and transmitted electronically, information technology skills are becoming more important.

INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY (ISH)
A term popularized by Vice President Al Gore. The information superhighway is envisioned as a global high-speed network of computers that serves thousands of users simultaneously, transmitting **e-mail**, **multimedia** files, voice, and video. The system links homes, offices, schools, libraries, and medical centers, so that textual and audiovisual information can be instantly accessed and transmitted from one computer screen to another. (See **NII**.)

INTERNET
The largest network of computer networks in the world.

ISP
Internet Service Provider. A generic term for any company that can connect you directly to the **Internet**, usually for under $20 per month. Distinguished from the **commercial services** which link to the **Internet**, but also offer additional services only available to their subscribers.

MODEM
A device which allows computers to communicate with each other over telephone lines or other delivery systems. Modems change digital signals to telephone signals for transmission and then back to digital signals. Modems come in different speeds: the higher the speed, the faster the data are transmitted. The fastest commercially available modems are "56K" (or 56 kilobits per second).

MOUSE
A small device attached to your computer by a cord, which lets you give commands to the computer.

MULTIMEDIA
A combination of two or more types of information such as text, audio, video, graphics, and images.

NET, THE
A colloquial term that is often used to refer to the entirety of **cyberspace**, the **Internet**, **commercial services**, **Free-Nets**, etc.

NETIQUETTE
The rules of **cyberspace** civility. Usually applied to the **Internet**, where manners are enforced exclusively by fellow users.

NII
"National Information Infrastructure." The U.S. Government's official term for the "**information superhighway**." In some ways, "infrastructure" is a more accurate description of a wired, interconnected world than the more linear "superhighway."

ONLINE COMMUNICATION
Communicating over the **Internet** or through a commercial network, usually via a telephone line.

POSTING
The sending of a message to a **discussion group** or other public message area. The message itself is called a post.

RATING SYSTEMS
Rating systems are used to assess **Web site** content on a number of different adult themes (e.g., sex, violence, profanity, intolerance). You can limit your child's access to sites with specific ratings by changing the settings on **browsers** such as Microsoft Internet Explorer. Most parental control products have their own rating systems. Remember, if you are using a rating system, sites that have not been rated may not be accessible.

SEARCH ENGINE
A program found on certain sites that performs searches for information on the **Internet** based on the words or phrases you supply. Some sites have search engines that only search within their site.

SERVER
A host computer that stores information and/or **software** programs and makes them available to users of other computers.

SOFTWARE
A computer program; loosely defined, a set of instructions to be used on your **hardware**. There is "system software" that operates the machine itself (such as Windows and MacOS), and there is "application software" for specific uses—e.g., word processing, playing games, managing your money.

TECHNOLOGY PLAN
A blueprint that guides the building of a technology program in a school, district, or community.

URL
"Uniform Resources Locator." The **World Wide Web** address of a site on the **Internet**. For example, the URL for the White House is http://www.whitehouse.gov.

USERID (or User ID)
The unique name given to (or chosen by) a user on some **Web sites** and commercial systems. The User ID and sometimes an accompanying password is used by the service to allow access to the system and/or to track information about you.

WEB SITES
A location on the **World Wide Web** that may incorporate graphics, sounds, and links to other sites. Web sites are identified by an online address that starts with "http://" (e.g., http://www.pta.org).

WORLD WIDE WEB
A hypertext-based navigation system on the **Internet** that lets you browse through a variety of linked resources. Also known as WWW and the Web.

Sources:
(See Resources for full citations)
Leadership & Technology: What School Board Members Need to Know; America's Children and The Information Superhighway: A Briefing Book and National Action Agenda; NetGuide: Your Complete Guide to the Internet and Online Services, A Michael Wolff Book; and online computer dictionaries.

FOOTNOTES

1 Gore Jr., Albert, Keynote Address, Connecting All Americans for the 21st Century: Telecommunications Links in Low Income & Rural Communities Conference, February 25, 1998.

2 Mandel, "The Digital Juggernaut," *Business Week/The Information Revolution*, 1994.

3 FIND/SVP, *American Internet User Survey*, May 1997; FIND/SVP/Grunwald Associates, *The American Learning Household Survey*, Fall 1995.

4 National Center for Educational Statistics, *Internet Access in Public Schools,* February 1998.

5 Microsoft/Intelliquest, *National Computing Survey*, January 1995, p. 83.

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7 See, for example, *Kids First Directory*, Coalition for Quality Children's Media, http://www.cqcm.org.You can contact the Coalition at 535 Cordova Road, Suite 456, Santa Fe, NM 87501, (505) 989-8076.

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