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Cheat Sheet for Parents of Teens

Here are some basic guidelines to get started on setting rules for your teen to follow when online. Think of these as your "cheat sheet."

And remember that social networks/profile sites are very popular with young teens and older teens. All their friends have them, and it's what they do to stay in touch, have some fun and express themselves.

Cheat Sheet for Parents of Teens 13 to 15 Years

Most of the teens (especially teen girls) are using interactive technologies and many have cell phones. They are also in the prime of their cyberbullying life. (Cyberbullying is any type of bullying that is accomplished online or by using interactive technologies, such as e-mail, IM, chat or social networks.) This is when strangers are the biggest problem. They admit to meeting them in real life and don't think they are at risk.

Guidelines

- Raise the bar on parental controls and filtering programs to allow them to access websites they need for school, or use a parental control software that allows you to unblock sites from a remote location, by e-mail override. If you think they are both careful and trustworthy, consider abandoning parental controls entirely.
- Start using full-sized search engines with filters applied (check their advanced settings) or use a toolbar (Google's comes preset with a medium filter). It keeps out the stuff neither you nor your teen wants to stumble upon.
- Cyberbullying is a serious problem at this age, watch for the signs. If they are suddenly more anxious when going online, answering their cell phone or playing interactive games, or if they are the target of an offline bully or had a recent breakup with a boyfriend or their best friend, you may want to start asking questions.
- Teach them about personal information and predators. Prepare for them to roll their eyes. (This is what teen girls especially do best. :-)) But they might listen if you tell them some of the stories about real teens who were just like them, but were tricked by online predators.
- Watch for "away messages" for their IM programs. Teens often post their cell phone numbers there.
- Websites and profiles they build should be reviewed carefully, as should screen names. Tell them to find a "wirebuddy" to look over theirs and they can do the same for their "wirebuddy." There's safety in twos.
- Make sure that you control the family account password and have their passwords too. Expect some push-back. But promise not to spy on them. This isn't about finding out what boy they like. This is about safety. Remember how you would have felt when you were fifteen if your parents could read everything you wrote and hear everything you said to your friends.

- Give them privacy as long as it is with people you trust or people they know in real life.
- Watch for media piracy (such as music, movies and game illegal downloads), and teach them not to steal online or offline.
- Advise them to change their passwords often and make sure that they aren't using a provocative screen name.
- Search regularly on your computer for images (of porn or of your kids), and any music, movie or media files you don't know about.
- Spyware is a serious problem at this age, since they often access game sites and music download sites riddled with spyware and malicious code.
- Lock your private files with a password they don't know.
- Get them started in online safety education, check out Wiredteens.org or Teenangels.org. Consider joining WiredMoms (a program of Wiredsafety.org) to try and stay one step ahead of them. Check out starting a [Teenangels](http://Teenangels.org) chapter at your local school. (For more information visit teenangels.org.)
- Watch cell capabilities. These may include phone gaming, adult content and spending capabilities, and think about limiting their cell phone usage in a way that shuts it down when they exceed it, instead of just charging you extra. Disney Mobile has a teen phone that gives you many of the tools parents want. (Check into filtering products for cell phone Internet access.)
- Remember that your teens are able to get connected at their friends' houses. So building the "filter between their ears" is crucial by this age.
- Some bad sites will get through any filtering or sometimes from a search engine or a pop-up. So talk about this kind of thing beforehand.
- Give them more leeway on people they can accept IMs or e-mails from. But check and account for everyone, in real life, on their buddy list. No friends of friends.
- Block peer-to-peer technologies and get your kids an account with iTunes or another legal music download site, or even better, one of the new subscription services, like Yahoo!.
- Teach them to guard their passwords. Password theft is a serious problem at this age. And their best friends are often the biggest risk.
- Limit their online use (including text-messaging) so they don't forget to have a life in the real world.
- Make sure you review and talk about social networking, and encourage them to use on sites that you both approve, like Flip.
- Talk to them about not meeting strangers offline, and agree to go with them or teach them large group safe meeting tips.

- Try to keep the computer in a central location, if it has Internet access, and watch new interactive devices, like cell phones, text messaging devices and interactive gaming devices, like X-Box Live. Use parental controls if they come with them. (X-Box Live got an award from us for their safety devices and parental controls.) But note that even with parental controls, these games are risky for young teens when they chat with strangers.
- Pick your battles! Not all risks are created equal online. Let things like their use of inappropriate and even sometimes lewd language go, understanding it's how kids talk online, and focus on their sharing too much personal information or meeting strangers.
- Talk to them about protecting their friends' privacy too.

Cheat Sheet for Parents of Teens 16 Years and Older

Here are some basic guidelines to get started on setting rules for teens 16 years of age and older to follow when online. All bets are off here. If they aren't ready by sixteen, they will never be ready. It's time to take off the training wheels and be around with the first aid kit when they take the inevitable spill. Good luck! You'll need it :-).

Cyberbullying also turns into sexual harassment at this age. Watch for the signs. Make sure your teen knows to not respond to any harassing messages they receive. It only makes it worse. Teach them to "Think Before They Click." Our campaign is called "ThinkB4uClick."

They are meeting Internet "friends" in real life at this age. Talk about it and make sure that if they are, they know how to do it as safely as possible. Consider going with them. (They'll be outrageously embarrassed, but safe!) Otherwise teach them to bring a few sumo wrestler-type friends. :-)

Guidelines

- Focus on teaching them to be responsible cybercitizens and to use the filter between their ears.
- Emphasize the risks of sharing personal information and meeting strangers offline.
- Do they really need a webcam? Probably not.
- Make sure they Google themselves often and report what they find. Have them set an alert on themselves as well. (Learn more at WiredSafety.org.)
- Teach them to use anti-virus programs, not believe everything they read online and to respect others. Check for adware or spyware often, use a firewall and teach them to come to you if anything goes wrong online. (Maybe they will.)
- And get their help in keeping their younger brothers and sisters safe online.
- Remind them that you're still around if they need your help.
- Pick your battles! Not all risks are created equal online. Let things like their use of inappropriate and even sometimes lewd language go, understanding its how kids talk online, and focus on their sharing too much personal information or meeting strangers.

- Report situations if you discover them. For every potential cyber-predator you report, another teen will be safer.
- Teach them to respect the privacy and personal information of their friends, by not posting too much of their information on their site, and remind them to check out their friends' profiles to make sure they have pre-approved anything about them posted there. Protecting our teens from their well-meaning friends is a serious problem these days.
- Remind them not to post anything online that their "parents, principal, a predator and the police shouldn't see."
- Remind them that everything online is tracked, and even if they think they can't be found online, they can!
- Teach them not to do anything online that they wouldn't do offline and to respect others online and offline.
- And last but not least, remind them that the very competitive college, scholarship, sports team or internship may be jeopardized by what they post online. What they post online stays online - forever! You never know who has copied it, printed it, cached it or what the search engines have picked up before they deleted it.