

Wrestling with Computers: Protect Your Children from Online Predators

By W. Wrestling Brewster

In today's world, children use computers more than adults. Studies show that 93% of all teenagers use the Internet and one-third say their parents or guardians have no idea what they're doing online. According to a Teen Internet Safety Study, 61% of 13-to-17-year-olds have a personal profile on popular online social sites such as MySpace, Friendster or Xanga.

In addition to these social networking sites, children are surfing the Net with more frequency than ever before. Nearly 1 in 3 teens report unwanted exposure to sexual material online. From inappropriate content to dangerous predators, many online perils are out there.

As parents how do we make sure our children are surfing the Web safely and not being exposed to inappropriate material? Fortunately there are ways we can minimize exposure to the evils of the World Wide Web.

First and foremost: Monitor what your children are doing online. Put the computer in a public room not in their own room. Warn your child about predators, talk about inappropriate sites. Give them appropriate sites to go to. Many innocuous looking web sites are not suitable for a youngster's viewing.

Second: set up user profiles on your computer with you as the administrator and your children as limited users. This allows you to control their access to the computer. If you are the administrator on the computer, only you can make changes, add software and allow access. Making profiles gives each family member their own logon and you can restrict each user's access to the Internet. This is essential so that once you make restrictions no one but you as parents can change them.

To setup a user profile go to "**Start**" then "**Control Panel**". Select "**User Accounts**" and click "**Create a new account**". Put in a name and click "**Computer administrator**" or "**Limited**".

Once you setup the user accounts, your next step is to protect your child from inappropriate content on the Internet.

Third: If you use Internet Explorer, you can use Internet Explorer's content advisor. Simply open Internet explorer then click "**Tools – Internet Options**". When the dialog box appears, click on "**Content**" and "**Enable**".

When the content advisor dialog box appears, click "**General**" and "**Create Password**". Create your administrator password. This is your password. Don't let your

child know this password. Once you have created your administrator's password you can limit your child's access to websites by using the Content **Ratings** section.

For example any site with a rating which has violence, profanity or nudity will be blocked. When your child clicks on a website with an inappropriate rating (or no rating) a dialog box appears asking whether this site is allowed or not. Without your password this website will not open.

Finally to further secure the Internet, you might want to purchase a software program to limit your child's Internet exploration. One good program recommended by PC Magazine is Cybersitter, www.cybersitter.com. Once installed, your children will not be able to detect or disable it and it will let you

- Block access to undesirable web sites
- Record and view all web sites visited
- Record both sides of chat conversations from AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, and MSN Messenger
- block or limited access to popular but potentially dangerous services such as **MySpace** and **FaceBook**
- Set time restrictions for internet usage
- Sends reports to parents by email

Your best defense in protecting your child from predators and inappropriate content is a good offense. Be proactive. Talk to them about the dangers of the Internet. Monitor where they are surfing. Create user accounts with age-appropriate restrictions. Set up controls so they can only travel to the "safe" parts of the Internet.

With just a few added steps, you can make your child's Internet a safer environment for them to explore.

If you have any questions about Internet security or would like to implement some of the security discussed in this article please do not hesitate to call Brewster PC Solutions @508-746-6423 or e-mail me at wbrewster@brewsterPCsolutions.com