



Family Guide to the Internet

by Dan Klassen

How Big Is the Internet?

Today there are millions and millions of Web sites on the Internet. In a relatively short amount of time, the World Wide Web has gone from nothing to an information superhighway.

I've heard that more than 2 million new pages are added *each day*. While no one knows for sure, there are probably more than 100,000 sites created just for children. And that number is growing every day.

How can anyone sort through all the choices? How can you find Web sites that are good for you and your family? What about those that are educational and those that are just plain fun?

Help Is Here!

We hope to help in a couple of ways.

- We offer useful background information that will help you better understand the Internet and the World Wide Web. We point to Web sites containing practical tips on how to find and evaluate sites and how to find your way around the Internet. You can use this information to explore the Web on your own or with your children.
- We point out Web sites that you may want to share with your children. These links can be a starting point as you attempt to help your children get the most out of what the Web has to offer.
- We also point you to Web sites and other sources of helpful information for keeping your family safe online.

Ready? **Let's go!**

Getting Started

Not surprisingly, becoming a savvy Internet user begins online with several helpful Web sites.

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The easiest way to help you learn about the Internet and the World Wide Web is to point you to Web sites that should answer most, if not all, of your questions. On the pages that follow, we have identified a handful of sites that we think are helpful. Once you get to a site, you may also find links to additional information and educational resources.*

Using the navigational links on this page, you can continue to the next screen and visit everything in order, or go straight to the page that interests you most.

***Important note:** We have provided links to sites outside of Focus on the Family that we think you will find helpful. *When you follow a link, your computer will open a separate window that is not part of this Focus on the Family Web site.*

We have no control over what other sites offer. So by providing a link *we are not endorsing the entire contents of another site*. Be alert and use your own discretion when you and your children are on the Web.

Most important, be wary of sites that offer you or your children a chance to submit personal information or get into contact with other people. Make sure the safeguards are adequate before you ever allow such correspondence.

One final word: This tour is based on the premise that the Web offers many fine opportunities, but is only a small part of life. It should never be allowed to replace other physical or social activities. We recommend that you set a strict daily limit on *all* computer use, particularly with children.

Internet Basics

These sites make it easy to develop basic Internet skills, while discovering the history behind the Web.

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The Web at a Glance* — This site works like a slide show. Click on the arrows to get answers to most of your questions about the Internet and its uses.

Learning the Web: The Basics* — Short answers to general questions you might have about the Internet.

Master the Basics* — Learn everything about the Internet at this user-friendly site, from how to adjust computer settings, to the future of the Internet and everything in between. Since the site was launched in 1996, thousands of businesses, Internet service providers, schools, libraries and community organizations from around the world have linked to it as a way of providing comprehensive, user-friendly Internet training.

Surfing the Web

Together, parents and kids can learn to surf the Web safely, while discovering what's out there.

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Surfing the Net with Kids * — Fun links to Web sites for kids. Features "Surfing the Calendar," which links interesting Web sites regarding historical or fun facts about the month. Created by a syndicated newspaper columnist, mother, wife and "Net surfer supreme."

Searching the Web

Find out how search engines work and how you and your child can best find the information you're looking for on the Internet.

by Dan Klassen

Find Information* — Learn the basics of searching the Web, featuring an interactive tutorial.

Guide to Web Search Engines* — Learn about Internet search engines. Includes ratings of the search engines for different uses, like the best search engine for kids.

Kid's Tools for Searching the Internet* — Helps a young person try different ways to find things on the Internet.

Understanding the Language

Internet lingo and terminology can be confusing. These sites will help get you up to speed.

by Dan Klassen

Internet Dictionary * — A helpful online dictionary of "Net lingo" and Web terminology.

Glossary* — Find the definition of the key terms associated with the Internet.

Using Bookmarks and Favorites

Learn how to bookmark your favorite Web sites for quick, easy access.

by Dan Klassen

Bookmarking Web Pages * — Here are step-by-step instructions for bookmarking your favorite Web sites for faster access.

Evaluating Web Sites

Find out how to spot truly reliable and trustworthy Web sites for your needs — a skill every Internet user should have.

by Dan Klassen

It is important to think critically about what you view on the Web and evaluate each site you visit to determine if it's really a reliable and trustworthy resource for your needs. Below are links to resources that will help you develop a keen eye for what's good and what's not.

Thinking Critically About Web Sites* — Covers basic issues that will help you think critically about a Web site. Created by the Northwest Educational Technology Consortium.

Evaluating Web Sites: Criteria and Tools* — Learn to think critically about what you are viewing on the Internet. Created by Cornell University Library, this site offers clear evaluation criteria from various reputable sources.

Evaluating Web Pages* (Online Tutorial) — Particularly useful for anyone doing research on the Web. See and learn how to evaluate the quality of information you find on the Web. Created by Widener University Library.

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators* — Information about evaluating Web sites while also linking you to many other resources. This site also features a fun exercise that challenges you to evaluate specific Web sites.

Protecting Children on the Internet

Learn about the risks of cyberspace and how to protect your family with sound Internet safety practices.

by Dan Klassen

Is the Internet good or bad? Both. Despite all the horrific headlines about online isolation, violence, pornography, predators and commercialism, the Internet can be a valuable and entertaining resource if used properly.

Visit the **Next Steps page** in this series for links to relevant articles, online resources and frequently asked questions about keeping the Internet safe for your family. The following Web sites will also help you learn more about the problems associated with Internet use and how to protect your family.

Preparing Your Child for the Online World — Courtesy of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, this series offers parents information about potential dangers that lurk on the Web, and steps they can take to help protect their family.

Child Safety on the Information Highway * — This is a great place to learn about the basics of child safety on the Internet. It also offers guidelines for parents, plus **kid's rules for online safety***. Created by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Especially for Children and Their Parents * — This site offers links to privacy and safety information for parents, plus

separate links to information and online quizzes just for kids.

Cyberbully411: Prevent Cyberbullying & Internet Harassment * — Created by Internet Solutions for Kids, Inc., this Web site provides resources for youth who have questions about or have been targeted by online harassment.

10 Reasons to Keep the Computer in the Family Room

Ever wondered what your child is up to on the computer?

by Dan Klassen

Between their phones, computers, and video games, kids are always doing something that seems a bit foreign to parents. When we were kids, we played outside until dark, or at least until our mom called us inside, remember?

Things are different now. Kids don't play outside until dark (it may not be safe for them to do so); they play video games until you tell them dinner's ready. They text friends while sitting in classes at school, and get all the information they need about anything they want to know about online. Do kids even go to the library anymore?

There's all of this new technology, so it's more important than ever to keep up with it. We want to keep children safe while they're online, but it's easy for them to get lost. They may — often inadvertently — post their name, phone number, and address on their *MySpace* page. They might have an instant message conversation with a stranger. They might Google for "kids videos" but type in "kiss videos."

As parents, it's easier to try to keep up with what our kids see and do online if the computer in the family room. To expand on that thought, here are my top 10 reasons why parents should keep the computer in the family room (in no particular order):

- **Online surfing can be a family activity.** We can teach our children how to surf safely, explain why we've set up specific restrictions with software, and teach them how to find the information they need by searching from a kid-friendly Web site, instead of something more generic like Google. Be sure to explain that not all Internet data is accurate or reliable.
- **Parents can set boundaries.** It's easier to know exactly how much time our children spend online and on the computer if it's in the family room. We can then limit that time as warranted. We can also decide if the game they're playing is too violent, or if they are visiting sites we'd rather they didn't visit.
- **Parents can lead by example.** A computer can be more than a place to surf the Internet or do homework. We can lead by example by using the computer to download a dinner recipe; keep a family calendar of events, appointments, sports practices and games; and use the computer as a "refrigerator" to show off our children's accomplishments as a desktop background.
- **Kids love to talk.** Chat rooms provide one outlet for kids to talk. Chat rooms are virtual online rooms where people who share a similar interest, like *SpongeBob SquarePants*, skiing or dogs, can talk to each other using text messaging software. Yes, this software is on your computer and your kids have access to it. Unfortunately, predators linger in the background, waiting to pounce. That's the downside to visiting chat rooms. It's best if we don't let our kids use chat rooms at all, but if we do, at least we can monitor what's going on with the computer nearby in the family room.
- **Kids have personal Web pages.** They create them on *MySpace*, *Facebook* or similar sites, and generally put quite a bit of personal information there. These Web sites are like online diaries. Depending on how they're created, anyone in cyberspace can access our kids' most personal thoughts and private information (such as name, age, and address). We must ask our kids if they have a personal Web page, and make sure we have unlimited access to it.
- **Kids use the Internet to bully other kids.** So many kids have Web access now that it's easy to bully, disrespect, or spread rumors about other kids online. The bullying comes via Web pages, e-mail, chat rooms, blogs, and instant messaging. Having the computer our child uses in the family room will allow us to sense if anything like this is going on. If it is, we need to talk to our child about it.
- **Predators abound.** The University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center reported the results of a 2005 national survey of 1,500 Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17. One in seven had received "unwanted sexual solicitations or approaches in the past year." Ninety percent of the sexual solicitations happened to youths who were age 13 or older. Twelve percent reported these solicitations to their parents; the other 88 percent did not.
- **Viruses, worms and spyware are a threat.** It's still possible for your computer to become infected, even if you have installed the most sophisticated software available to protect it from Internet harm. Viruses, worms and spyware are everywhere. If your computer is hit, your child could be the unknowing culprit. Downloading and installing third-party software, screensavers, themes and music programs are often the cause. Understanding what your child is downloading will help prevent these problems.
- **Online marketing is directed toward children.** Children have a lot of power over family purchases — from food to clothing to toys. Advertisers can and do use the Internet to gather personal information from your kids for marketing purposes. They get this information by having them complete online surveys or complete Web site

membership forms to receive free games, prizes, or access to something else they'd like to see on that particular Web site. Advertisers can send e-mail messages or printed material to the home to gain more clout with the child if they have an e-mail or home address in hand.

- **Parents are in charge.** When we're in charge, we can keep anti-virus software up-to-date, run disk defragmenter and disk cleanup once a month, delete unwanted material from the computer's hard drive, and turn the computer off if we so desire.

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Popular questions, plus related resources and articles about the Internet.

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Popular questions on this topic:

- [I need help with the problem of Internet pornography; can you help me?](#)
- [How can I stop non-Focus pop-up ads?](#)

Related Resources

- [World Wide Search](#)
- [Logged On and Tuned Out](#)
- [The Seductive Lure of Internet Porn I-II](#)
- [MySpace for Moms and Dads](#)
- [Home Invasion](#)

Related Articles

- [Preparing Your Child for the Online World](#)
 - [Navigating the Blogosphere](#)
 - [What Are Your Kids Saying Online? Try Our De-Coder!](#)
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