



FACT book on
**Protecting Children
from Internet Abuse**

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Visit us on www.asianlaws.org/fact or email us on fact@asianlaws.org

Online Risks that Children Face

Exposure to Inappropriate Material

Due to the free availability of information on the Internet, a major risk that a child may be exposed to is inappropriate material, sexual, hateful, or violent in nature, or encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal.



Gambling and Other unsuitable behaviour

Despite being illegal, online gambling sites are flooding the Internet. It is unsuitable for children to view or partake of any activity of these gambling sites. Most online gambling sites require a person to use a credit card. This poses a potential threat to the financial well being of the family as well.

Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco and other Dangers

Some web sites and newsgroups promote the use of drugs, tobacco or alcohol. Some websites even teach how to make bombs or download "Virus Development Kits".

Physical Harm

Paedophiles seeking children as targets have used E-mail and chat rooms to gain a child's confidence and then arrange a face-to-face meeting. Once the child's confidence has been won and a meeting arranged, the child is in great danger of physical harm and permanent psychological scarring.

Persecuting Messages

A child might encounter E-mail or chat/bulletin board messages that are harassing, demeaning, or belligerent. Information sent to your child could also have a psychological impact on your child.

Legal and Financial Problems

There is also the risk that a child could do something that has negative legal or financial consequences such as giving out a parent's credit card number or committing a cyber crime.

Legal issues aside, children should be taught good "netiquette" which means to avoid being rude, mean, or inconsiderate while logged on to the Internet.

Intrusion of Privacy

A child's privacy is vital but is most vulnerable on the Internet. No one has a right to a child's personal information without due authorization from its guardians.

Such information includes

- name,
- age,
- date of birth,
- name of the school,
- details about the child's family,
- details about the child's friends
- places frequented by the child,
- interests and hobbies

Disclosing such information on the Internet may expose the child to substantial threats.

Wasting a Child's Potential

Probably the greatest risk of all is that the child, by being online for unlimited number of hours, ends up wasting a lot of valuable constructive time that he/she may have utilised for creative purposes.

A child's development suffers a great deal if he/she does not utilise their free time constructively.

Reasons for Concern

There are a number of signs that parents whose children venture online should watch out for. You know your child better than anyone else; **so follow your instincts!**



Screen Switching

If your children quickly change screens or turn off the monitor when you come into the room, it is likely they are viewing something they don't want

you to see. **Be calm** and ask them to share what they are viewing with you. If the content is inappropriate tell them politely that they should not view the material.

Do not reprimand the child without first talking to him/her.

Phone Calls

If your child suddenly starts receiving phone calls from strange adults (or even other children) you may have a problem on your hands. Install a caller ID program to determine where the calls are coming from and ask your child to explain them.

Odd Hours of the Night

If your child is up typing away in the wee hours of the night he may be chatting online. This activity should be reserved for times and places that are supervised.

A child or teenager's excessive use of online services or the Internet, especially late at night could be a cause for concern.

Prosperity

If your child suddenly has unaccounted cash or gifts, or unfamiliar clothing, there may be something for you to worry about. Offenders seeking to harm children often spend a great deal of money cultivating a relationship / friendship with a child in order to gain their confidence and trust.

Withdrawal Symptoms

If you notice that your child has of late been keeping away from friends and family especially after the use of the Internet then you should be a little careful.

Paedophiles and other offenders looking to target children work very hard to drive a wedge between children and the people who support and care for them. The larger the gap between the child and his family, the easier it is for a predator to create a relationship.

Visiting Friends

If you sense that your child has been acting strange of late and that his/her friends do not visit that often, make the attempt to speak to his/her friends and ask them if anything is wrong.

Do not interfere too much though.

Sometimes your child's friend could also visit quite often, be wary if the purpose of the visit is to view inappropriate material online.

However, you must also respect the privacy of your child.

Be tactful in handling any situation.

These are a few signs that should concern you as a parent. Getting hysterical or making accusations will not help the situation though.

It is your job as the adult to remain calm and to try to figure out what has gone wrong - and find a solution to the problem too!

Child pornography or any other illegal activities directed at children may be reported to the nearest police station.

You may also contact the ASCL FACT helpline at:

fact@asianlaws.org

Guidelines for Parents

Do not rely on a program to do your job!

Filtering and blocking programs can be a part of your Internet safety plan at home, but they don't take the place of a caring and concerned parent.

Be Proactive

Spend some time listening to and speaking with other parents. Think of ways and means to communicate with your child and inform them of the dangers of Internet surfing. It's never too early to speak to your child.



Be Vigilant

Look for graphic files downloaded - files ending in .jpg, .gif, .bmp, .tif, and .pcx format. Files with these extensions may be inappropriate material from the Internet.

Do your research on Blocking, Filtering, and Rating Programs

There are now services that rate web sites for content as well as filtering programs and browsers that empower parents to block the types of sites they consider to be inappropriate.

These programs work in different ways. Some block sites that are known to contain objectionable material. Some prevent users from entering certain types of information such as their name and address. Other programs keep your kids away from chat rooms or restrict their ability to send or read E-mail.

Participate with your Child Online

Get to know the services and programs your child uses - ask them to show you how their favourite chatroom works, or the online games that they participate in.



Make a Promise and Keep it!

Promise your children that you won't get angry if they come to you with a problem about an online situation. Stay calm and remember that your children trusted you to help them when they came to you - don't let them down! Help them deal with the issue.



Plan Ahead

Talk to your children about the things that they may encounter online. You don't have to scare them, but teach them that your values offline match your values online.

Encourage their Other Interests

Children shouldn't spend too much time online - it's just not healthy for them. Encourage them in their other activities such as outdoor sports.

Be a Role Model

If you download pirated software or other copyrighted material, don't be surprised when your child's teacher calls you in for a conference about plagiarised homework!

A Time and Place for Everything

Keep your computer in a "common" room - where you can keep an eye on it! You wouldn't allow a stranger in the bedroom with your child, don't allow them in via a computer either. Grant your children Internet access only when you are at home and awake. If they can't stay out till late at night, they shouldn't be surfing then either!

Don't be Afraid to Use your Computer

Don't be afraid of your computer or the Internet, they are wonderful tools that can enrich the lives of every member of the family. Trust your instincts and jump right in. The more you know, the better you can protect your family.

By taking responsibility for your children's online computer use, you can greatly minimize any potential risks of being online. Make it a rule to:

- ✓ **Never give out identifying information**
Home address, school name, or telephone number should not be given to strangers.
- ✓ **Get to know the services your child uses**
If you don't know how to log on, get your child to show you. Find out what types of information it offers and whether there are ways for parents to block out objectionable material.
- ✓ **Never allow a child to arrange a meeting**
A face-to-face meeting with another computer user without parental permission is a definite no-no. If a meeting is arranged, make the first one in a public spot, and be sure to accompany your child.
- ✓ **Never respond to messages**
Bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make you feel uncomfortable should not evoke any response from you. Encourage your children to tell you if they encounter such messages. If you or your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy of the message to the police and ask for their assistance. You may contact ASCL FACT helpline at fact@asianlaws.org for any assistance.
- ✓ **Report abuses**
Should you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography while online, immediately report this to the nearest police station. You may also notify us if you feel the need to do so.

Strangers Online

People online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person it would be easy for someone to misrepresent him or herself. Thus, someone indicating that "she" is a "12-year-old girl" could in reality be a 40-year-old man.

Content Online

Everything you read online may not be true. Any offer that seems to be "too good to be true" probably is.

Be very careful about any offers that involve your coming to a meeting or having someone visit your house.

Set Reasonable Rules and Guidelines

You should lay down guidelines and rules for computer use by your children. Discuss these rules with your child first and then post them near the computer as a reminder.

Monitor Compliance

Monitor your child's compliance with these rules, especially when it comes to the amount of time your children spend on the computer.

A child or teenager's excessive use of online services or bulletin boards, especially late at night, may point to a potential problem just waiting to happen.

Family Activity

Consider keeping the computer in a family room rather than the child's bedroom. Get to know their "online friends" just as you get to know all of their other friends.

Tips for Children Online

Never give out personal information

Personal information includes your name, the names of friends or family, your address, phone number, school name. It also includes pictures of yourself and your e-mail address.

Don't believe everything you read

You can't tell when a male pretends to be a female online or a 50 year old pretends to be a 12 year old online. People online may not send their own photographs either. Do not be fooled by pictures that your so-called "online friends" send you.

Passwords should be kept secret

Never tell anyone your password except your parents or guardians. Your password is for your own protection, giving strangers your password could be really harmful. If someone calls and says they're with an online service or your Internet Service Provider and need your password, get their name and number and e-mail address. Call the service and ask if such a person works there and whether they allow employees to ask for passwords.

Use Netiquette

Be polite to others online just as you would offline. If someone treats you rudely or meanly - do not respond. Online bullies are just like offline ones - they WANT you to answer (don't give them the satisfaction).

Never open strange emails

Delete strange e-mails. DO NOT open e-mails from strangers. E-mails from strangers could contain malicious codes (Viruses, Worms, Trojans etc.) that would be harmful to your computer. If in doubt, ask your parents, guardian or another adult.

It's okay to talk about what you view

While surfing the Internet, if you find something that you don't like, that makes you feel uncomfortable or scares you, turn off the computer and talk about it to an adult.

Take breaks

Give yourself a break; don't stay online for too long. Spend time with your family and friends off line.

Read website contracts

The contracts and user policies on websites are aimed at laying down guidelines for your use of the website. Read the same with your parents and ask them to explain the implications of those contracts to you. This will help you and your parents understand issues of safety on the Internet.

Copying is not cool

Do not copy things from websites to use for anything, unless you have the Webmaster's permission.

Protect yourself

Never arrange to meet with someone you met online unless your parents go with you. If you are meeting them make sure it is in a public place and you are accompanied by your parents or a guardian.

Teach your Parents

Spend time teaching your parents about your online activities - show them your favourite sites let them watch you use the Internet.

Keep them involved in your online activities. They may feel happy to know that you are secure while using the Internet.

Be careful

Some sites that offer free "virus development kits" actually cause harm to your computer by planting a virus in your computer.

Never visit these sites and also discourage your friends from doing the same.

Rules to adopt for Online Safety

1. I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, my photograph or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
2. I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that.
3. I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and take my mother or father along.
4. I will not respond to any emails that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. If I do receive such an email, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the online service.
5. I will talk to my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate websites for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules.