Chat rooms

When someone is posting a message in a chat room, other users have no way of knowing who that person really is. Though the anonymity of a chat room can be liberating—it's cool to create a different identity—some use it as a way to meet people they want to harm. Never say anything in a chat room that you wouldn't say in public. Many chat rooms have monitors or speakers who maintain order. These monitors can kick people out of the room for inappropriate behavior.

If you meet someone online and strike up a good relationship with them, they may want to go to a private chat room. Most of these rooms are unmonitored. There will be no filter for inappropriate conduct.

Harassment

Not everyone online minds their manners. When you are in chat rooms or bulletin boards there is a chance that you'll get messages that are harassing, demeaning, or just plain mean. Just ignore them. Some messages, however, may constitute harassment, which is a crime under federal law. If someone sends you messages or images that are obscene, lewd, filthy, or indecent, with the intent to harass or threaten you, report it to your Internet service provider. One trick to avoid harassment is to choose a gender-neutral name to use in a chat room and other public places on the Internet.

Take Action

- Educate your parents. Take the time to show your parents what you do online. Show them your Web site, if you have one. Tell them who you are communicating with on a daily basis. Most likely you will be teaching your parents some new tricks.
- Talk to your parents about where you can go online and how long you can stay online. Also, tell them about activities you participate in online.
- Teach other teens about keeping safe on the Internet.
- Know your rights—where to report crimes and what you can report.

TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME®

Crime Prevention Tips From
National Crime Prevention Council
1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 13th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
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BJA

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Safe Surfing

TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME

National Crime Prevention Council

Cyberspace is a gigantic community of millions, where people research information for school, learn about movies, shop, listen to music, watch video clips, even develop sites of their own. As in any community, there are people and places you should avoid to reduce your crime risk.

Rules of the Road on the Internet

The best tool you have for screening material found on the Internet is your brain. If you come across sites that are pornographic, full of hate literature, or excessively violent, move on.

Here are a few reminders for safe browsing on the World Wide Web:

- **Never** give out your name, address, telephone number, password, school name, parent's name, pictures of yourself, credit cards, or any other personal information to others online.
- Never agree to meet face to face with someone you've met online without discussing it with your parents. Only if your parents decide that it's okay to meet your "cyber-friend," arrange to meet in a familiar public place, and take an adult with you.
- Never respond to messages from unfamiliar persons.
- Never enter an area that charges for services without getting your parents' permission first.
- If you receive pornographic material or threatening e-mail, save the offensive material, tell your parents, and contact that user's Internet service provider and your local law enforcement agency.

The Sites You See (and Visit)

E-mail

E-mail is a great way to communicate with your friends and family. Sometimes you may receive messages trying to sell you something or encouraging you to visit a Web site. It is probably best not to respond to e-mail from people or groups you don't know. These sites might be a scam to sell you something you don't want. Remember, the sender might not be who he or she seems to be. If you respond, you are confirming that you have a valid e-mail address. That information can encourage the sender to forward inappropriate e-mail or put your address on even more lists.

Assessing a Web Site

Aside from the fun ways to keep in touch with people, the Web can be a powerful research tool. But you need to be able to evaluate the pages you visit to know whether the information is accurate. As you visit new sites keep these pointers in mind:

- Look for Web pages that have a proper title, additional resources, a contact person with his or her e-mail address, an announcement of the last time the page was updated, and current links.
- Know who are the authors or sponsors of the site. What gives them the authority to discuss the issue at hand?
- Know the code. Check the URL (Web site address) to see what the domain name includes: a .com (commercial), a .gov (government), an .org (organization), .net (network), an .edu (educational organization), or a two letter country code (country of origin). This will provide an idea of the author or sponsor of the site. Not all commercial sites want to sell you something and not all educational sites will educate you. Be an educated consumer as you sort through the information.
- Know what's happening. Is the main purpose of this site to sell, inform, or persuade you?
- Check with the author first, if you find information that you want to use for your research, about copyright privileges and permission.