5 Tips to Keep your Kids Safe in Cyberspace

It seems to be that our world is starting to depend more and more on the Internet and its plethora of useful information, but the Internet is not only for adults. More and more recently today's youth have been exposed to media outlets including the Internet. This could be a blessing or a curse for our children. The web can be a very useful tool for the youth of today; by letting them explore other cultures, research current events, and communicate via email with relatives or friends.

The Internet is a place of great convenience in the busy lives of today's children and teens, especially when it comes to the classroom. Children are often given research reports, and while access to the Internet makes it much easier to find useful information with its endless sources, than searching the local library, surfing the web also takes much less time!

The Internet can help children to become educated but can also lead to extreme dangers if not used properly. These dangers include sexual exploitation, harassment, pornography, and other inappropriate areas of interest. Although the number of sexual predators online continues to grow, there is good news, with the knowledge of warning signs, as well as ways to monitor our children's Internet activities, we CAN protect the youth of today from the vast dangers of cyberspace. These tips will not only educate parents of the dangers their children could be exposed to online, but also deliver helpful hints to prevent harassment, and how to take action.

1. **Set firm rules and consequences**
   - Specific "Internet usage" timeframe
   - Do not talk to people you don't know
   - No chat rooms (chat rooms can be easily blocked by using a control filter given by your Internet Service Provider)
   - Keep the computer in a common, high traffic area such as the living room, to ensure that you can keep an eye on your child's Internet activity.

2. **Become comfortable with Internet filters and computer settings**
   - There are many accessible tools online to filter out adult content and monitor your child's online activities. Inappropriate content sites can be blocked and certain settings can disable any personal information from being sent out online.

3. **TALK to your children**
   - Ask your child about what they have been doing online, request to see some of the sites they have been visiting in their "history".

4. **Spend time with your children online**
   - Teach your children the appropriate behaviors that should be used when surfing the web, be a good role model.

5. **Most importantly, BEWARE of the warning signs that your child could be in danger**
   - The best way to help a child in danger is to be aware that they are in trouble in the first place. Many warning signs include withdrawn attitude, spending extended lengths of time online, being shy when asked about activities on the Internet, unknown phone calls being received.

If you fear your child may be in danger contact your local FBI office or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-843-5678

You may be wondering, aren't there any laws protecting my children online?

Yes, in fact the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) insures that all websites have well developed and thorough privacy policies protecting the identities of its users. These policies verify ages along with require parental consent before acquiring any personal information from a child, such as name, home address, or phone number. Though the law is in place, parents are still the number one source of protection for their children.

ISP 1 Internet Access Article: http://isp1.us/article/kids-safety/kids-internet-safety.pdf