

# Protect Your Child's Privacy – and Your Own

It's no secret that our personal privacy is threatened, especially on the Internet. Everyone – from legitimate marketers to scammers, spammers, and predators–wants to know more about us. As an adult, you probably have a pretty good idea to whom you should or shouldn't give your personal information. But does your child?

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## Threats take many forms

Threats to your child's privacy on the Internet are numerous. Any Web site, email, or instant message that asks a child to provide personal information can put them (and you) at risk. Based on the online activities that are popular with kids, here are some of the places your child is likely to be asked for personal information.

### Joining Web sites

Many Web sites, particularly those that children visit, ask or require that kids join or register to gain full access to the site. Some will ask only for a name (or screen name) and an email address. Others may ask for more complete information, however, including a physical address and phone number. Social networking sites and instant messaging services may entice, if not require, children to post profiles that include much more personal information, including their age, gender, a photo, likes and dislikes, and more. These profiles can be accessed by anyone, including predators. And when your child navigates to a familiar Web site, they may be intercepted and re-directed to a fake or "phishing" Web site designed to elicit or steal personal information.

### Contests and giveaways

Kids are likely to encounter contests and giveaways that entice them to register to win prizes or earn rewards. These contests and giveaways are promoted on Web sites, product packages, in magazines, and on TV. All of them require your child to provide personal information.

### Email

Kids get spam and junk email, too. And they are likely to be more susceptible to it. Some of it may be legitimate advertising or promotional email that they receive because of personal information they have divulged on Web sites. While such email is annoying, it doesn't present a risk, per se. The email that does present risk is unsolicited spam. It may include attachments containing viruses that will damage the information on your computer. Or it may include spyware that makes it possible to steal your personal or financial information and passwords. Some emails may direct your child to a Web site which may appear to be familiar, but is actually an illicit fake site.

### **Music sharing Web sites**

There are many popular music sharing Web sites that allow your child to download free music and also require them to share the music on their (or your) computer. This not only creates traffic on your computer, it may also enable hackers and identity thieves to access your computer. The music they download may also include viruses or other malicious code.

### **Playing games**

Interactive game Web sites often require registration, which includes giving up personal information, before your child can play games.e site.

## **What you should do**

Talk to your children. Establish rules regarding giving personal information online. We suggest the following, which you should refine according to the age and maturity of your child.

- Your child must ask you before they provide any personal information, even an email address, to any Web site.
- They should show you any profile that they post on a social networking site or instant messaging service. Make sure it doesn't include your child's age, sex, address, phone number, or other identifying information.
- If they go to what they think is a familiar Web site and it asks for information that they have already provided or don't understand, they should ask you before proceeding. It may be a fake Web site.
- They must not enter a contest or giveaway, even those sponsored by familiar Web sites or products, without your permission.
- They should never open or answer email from someone they don't know, and never open the attachments in such email without asking you first.
- They shouldn't download or share music online. In addition to opening up your computer to malicious software, downloading and sharing copyrighted music is illegal.
- They shouldn't register on game sites without your approval.

## **Know your child's privacy rights**

By law, every Web site that is directed to children must include a stated privacy policy that tells you how they will use your child's information and whether they will share it with other companies. It should also give you an option to remove any information your child may have entered.

## **Be informed**

In addition to talking to your child and setting rules for their time on the Internet, pay attention to what they're doing online. The Internet is a great place to learn, explore, communicate, and socialize. With your help, your child can easily avoid giving up his or her privacy and safety.



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