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# About.com Teens

## What Parents Need To Know About Teens and Internet Usage

By [Denise Witmer](#), About.com

### Know the Benefits:

#### Vast Resources

When you were studying the Civil War in 9th grade American History, wouldn't it have been nice to have the [Library of Congress](#)<sup>1</sup> at your finger tips? Our children do. They can read any newspaper in the world, and learn to make the best paper airplane from the Guinness record holder for time aloft, Ken Blackburn. The list of excellent sites goes on and on.

#### Eye Opening Experiences

Teenagers these days have the opportunity to prove just how small the world we live in is. The forums at [About's Teen Channel](#)<sup>2</sup> are a wonderful example of this. Teenagers at these sites post their experiences to their peers from all over the world.

**Note:** While I will go on to the risks of Internet usage by our children, I do want to say that I feel the positives of the experience far outweighs the risks involved, as most of the risks can be avoided by knowing some simple rules of the road.

### Know the risks:

#### Invasion of Privacy

Children have the right not to give out private information to anyone, including reputable companies, for any reason without the expressed permission of their parents. This information includes, but is not limited to name, email, address, age, and school they attend.

#### Exposure to Inappropriate Material

The Internet is a vast information resource... of all types of information. Sites that contain explicit sexual, violent, and hateful information can be found with little and sometimes no effort. There are also sites on how to build bombs, make designer drugs, etc.

#### Being Harassed

Chat rooms and message boards are chuck full of people who are just plain nasty. This can hurt a teenagers self esteem. Also, there are those on the net that will harass in email.

#### Financial

A teenager with a credit card can do major damage to their credit, or yours. You should not allow any purchases for anything on the Internet without your permission. Then it should only be done on a secure server and NEVER through email.

### Know What To Do:

Obtain Safe Surfing Programs

The Family Internet Guide at About.com has reviewed them in her [Guide To Filtering Software](#)<sup>3</sup>.

**It's Okay to Keep Secrets**

Let your teen know it is ok not to tell things to people on the Net. Teach them to protect their privacy, that things aren't always what they seem.

**Have an Internet Contract**

Make a behavior contract with your teenager. This will enable them to know what you expect of their behavior while online. One can be found [here](#).

**Obtain a Free Email Account**

Do not allow your teen to use your ISP email account for message boards, chat, or anything really. Obtain a free email account for them. These types of accounts keep the SPAM level down and do not point out where your teen lives, like a local ISP can.

**Report Sexual Exploitation**

If someone sends you messages or images that are obscene, lewd, filthy, or indecent with the intent to harass, abuse, annoy, or threaten you, report it to your Internet service provider and the CyberTipline online or by calling 1-800-843-5678.

**Use Family Filters on the Search Engines**

Many companies on the internet, especially the search engines, are getting into the swing of online safety for our kids. Check out your favorite search engines filtering capabilities before your teen uses it.

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<http://parentingteens.about.com/cs/sitesforteens/a/internetusage.htm>

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