# Cyber Safety and Children

by Cokesbury Kids

One of the biggest changes in the 21st century is the impact of the Internet on our everyday lives. In addition to its informative and entertaining purposes, the Internet offers new and exciting opportunities for Christians to interact and learn more about their faith. But, like many other innovations, the Internet also has a side that is dangerous and destructive.

**Tips for Churches**

- Promote cyber-safety awareness in your congregation by providing education and training for families, plus information about family-friendly sites.

- Make sure your church has current and effective anti-virus and filtering software on all computers.

- Create a Technology Acceptable Use policy for your church's staff and to post at all publicly shared computers.

- Never post an online photograph of any member of your congregation without a signed consent form, especially of children and teens.

- Do not identify individuals by name (particularly children and teens)—or use only first names if absolutely necessary.

- Use discretion when posting church newsletters online. Newsletters often contain the personal information about children and youth, including full name, grade level, and parents' names.

- Staff and volunteers should always obtain written permission from parents before e-mailing children. And always copy parents.

**Tips for Parents**

- Keep the computer in a common family room.

- Set appropriate boundaries for when and how often your child can be online.

- Educate your child about responsible Internet use and safety.

- Check out sites that your child is visiting and know your child's passwords for email, or any other sites your child is allowed to visit.

- Make sure your computer has current and effective anti-virus and filtering software.

- Older children are often able to trace computer history, so don't visit sites you wouldn't want your children to see.

- Bookmark sites that are acceptable for them to visit. Do not install peer-to-peer applications on your computer.

These allow easy access to billions of images and clips of pornography, child pornography, hate speech, and violence.

**Tips for Kids**

- Never give out any personal information online without checking with you.

- If someone ever says something online that makes you feel upset or uncomfortable, shut the computer down and tell an adult immediately.

- If meet someone online, check with a parent before continuing to communicate with him or her.

- Never meet someone you met online without a parent present.

- Don't open an email unless you know who it is from.

- If there's a new site you want to visit, ask a grown-up to visit it first so they can make sure it's safe.

- Do not respond if someone says something mean to you online. Instead, tell a parent immediately.