

Internet Myths and Their Reality

My child's computer is in his bedroom, but he is a "good" kid so I don't need to worry about him online.

Kids and teens, already notoriously curious and relatively naïve, are even more at risk of victimization if they are left alone to navigate Cyberspace in the solitude of their own bedrooms. "Good" kids can stumble into inappropriate sites and the truth is, even children admit they are often untrustworthy.

18.2% of children polled by i-SAFE said the primary computer they use is in their bedroom. ¹

75 percent of girls surveyed by the Girl Scout Research Institute say their parents have rules for the Internet. **43 percent** of those girls also admit to breaking them. ²

Almost all teenagers (96 percent) say they follow their parents' rules about Internet usage at least *some* of the time but only **56 percent** claim to follow the rules *all* of the time. ³

I am anonymous on the Internet. As long as I don't actually tell someone my personal information in a chatroom I can do whatever I want to do by e-mail or on websites.

A user is never completely anonymous online so teach your children to be good cyber citizens. Additionally, because you are not anonymous online, you must take actions to safeguard your personal information.

Never give out personal information online unless absolutely necessary. Read the Privacy Policy for the site and make sure you only transmit the information on a secure server (lock icon on the bottom right of your monitor). Disable or restrict "cookies" on your computer so your browser will not give up personal information without your consent. E-mails attach a header when sent that contains detailed information about where the e-mail originated. Be selective to whom you send e-mails and what is contained in them.

Chat rooms are dangerous. Instant Messaging is safer than chat rooms.

While chat rooms are often a place that predators go to find their victims, educating your child about safe chatting rules is the best method of protection. Monitored kid/teen chat rooms can offer kids and teens a great place to chat with others with similar interests and if a monitored chat room is utilized along with Internet safety knowledge and rules, it can be safe and fun.

Instant Messaging is not safer than chat rooms. If your preferences and settings in your IM allow strangers to see your profile, or contact you, cyber predators can add your instant messaging ID to their notify list allowing them to be notified whenever you are online. Most IM providers ask for personal information that may be publicly posted in a user "profile" that others can view at any time. Check the Preferences or Settings in your IM and make sure that your IP number and Profile are not visible to other users. Also make sure that only users that you authorize can contact you via IM.

My child is not at great risk because they only play games online.

Many Internet games like chess are played in multi-player rooms where there is a chat component to the website. The chat option is usually under the game or directly within the game frames. Most of these sites are unmonitored, and the language and behavior in the chat rooms is often inappropriate.

I found it on the Web. That means it is free!

As soon as any original piece of writing or artwork is put into a tangible form it is protected under United States copyright law. A website does NOT have to have a copyright notice to be protected by the United States copyright laws. What exactly is protected? Creative work like music/sound files, art, videos, writing/wording, and even a student's work, such as a report, essay or poem.

All the information on the Internet is reliable, complete, and up-to-date.

Learn how to evaluate sources of information online. A website creator can create a website containing anything that the owner wants to include in it. What was current and reliable two months ago, or even yesterday, may not be current or accurate today. Many "last updated" statements on websites are programmed to generate the current date regardless of the last time it

was updated. False information can appear to be coming from a reliable authority, but could be from someone who is misguided, or deliberately misleading readers. Medical information and legal advice are two areas that are often inaccurate or misleading.

Pornography can only show up on my screen if I go looking for it.

We wish this were true! Unfortunately, using the Internet and having an e-mail address subjects all users to receiving pornography. Unsolicited e-mail (Spam) and pop-up ads often contain pornography. Do not respond to spam e-mails. This only verifies that an actual person is receiving the e-mails; increasing the amount of e-mail that they send you. Know how to close pop-up windows and turn off the computer if necessary to stop the inappropriate pop-up ads. Be specific when doing web searches to avoid accidentally stumbling upon inappropriate websites.

My PC will eventually be “hacked” (broken into) if I use the Internet.

This is very uncommon with a personal computer used by one person, unless the owner downloads a virus; then the gates are wide open to strangers. Do not open files that are sent to you by strangers. When receiving attachments from anyone, save them to your desktop and virus scan them before opening. Do not click on web pages or pop-up ads with offers. Also, don't leave your computer online all the time. If you are on DSL or cable modem and it has a constant connection, install a firewall.

¹ (i-SAFE America Assessment Surveys, 2002-03)

² Whitney Roban, *The Net Effect: Girls and New Media*, Girl Scout Research Institute, 2002, p. 13.

³ *Rules For Using the Internet: An Analysis of Teen and Parent Perspectives*, The Safe America Foundation, September 1999, p. 27.