



FOREWORD:

This booklet was commissioned by the Tarbiyyat Department to counter the increasing dangers of the unrestricted use of the Internet. Faez Ahmad Sahib has done a good job in highlighting these in relation to the various age groups. In view of his background in IT he was able to present his piece of work with much authenticity.

The internet is in very common use today and is here to stay. It is a force that can bring immense benefits, but also cause enormous harm if misused. A net is like many holes tied with knots. On the internet, these knots are the various computers scattered around the world, numbering millions. The Holy Qur'an has already warned us of the dangers of the internet and advised us to seek Allah's protection, as observed in chapter 113 (verses 2 to 5),

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ ☆ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ☆ وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ ☆ وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ ☆

Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn. From the evil of that which He has created. And from the evil of darkness when it overspreads, and **from the evil of those who blow upon the knots.**'

Surfing the internet is dangerous for the young and naive as they can be misled into the snares of many evil sites. However even when not surfing, with pop ups blowing up onto your screen and unsolicited emails enticing you to just have a look in, the dangers are much closer than we imagine. The Holy Prophet Muhammad salallahualaihiwasallam advised the recitation of the last 3 chapters thrice every night before retiring to bed, as a means of protection against all forms of evil. Indeed, invoking the protection of Allah would be the surest means to protect ourselves against all evils, including the internet. May Allah enable us to use these new forces to the advantage of Islam, and protect us from their evil, Ameen.

Wassalam

Dr Shabir A Bhatti
Secretary Tarbiyyat, UK
May 2005

THE INTERNET

A guide for parents.

The internet is indeed an amazing resource facility. From being a luxury item only a few years ago, it has become an essential part of every household. It allows us to communicate, learn and entertain all at the same time.

The number of children online is expanding at a great rate. Soon, every man, woman and child will be on the internet. The question is, are you ready for this?

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V ayyadahullahota'ala has repeatedly warned us of the dangers of the internet. Parents ought to be worried of the dangers of the internet, but at the same time become “aware” of it. As a parent, shutting one’s eyes to the internet is not wise.

1. Safety of your child on the internet

As a parent you may have concerns about letting your child use the internet. You've heard about the harm that can come a child's way and might wonder if you should completely restrict your child's access to the Internet and email. But, while it might be easy to ban Internet use at home, use of the Internet is becoming essential to your child's education. At the same time, Internet access is more and more common in classrooms and at the local or central library. All the more reason for Web safety to start with you and in your home. By educating yourself and your child and following a few basic guidelines, you can empower your child to surf the Web safely and effectively.

Simple Steps

Know the Dangers.

Pornography may be the most visible danger, but parents should be aware of dangers from online sexual predators, financial scams, Internet addiction and internet-bullying.

Talk to your child.

Child safety experts consistently believe that open communication between parents and children is one of the best ways to keep your child safe. Have them show you their favourite sites and activities. Make sure they know that they can talk to you about anything on the Web that makes them uncomfortable. And just like in the real world advice them not to talk to strangers.

Control Access to the Internet.

One of the simplest techniques is to keep the computer in a common room, where you can see and discuss the sites they visit. If your child's computer is in a different room or you want a more comprehensive solution, consider buying software for this purpose, which can not only provide time limits and control access to sites, games, chat, file sharing, etc., it can offer different levels of control for different age children

Monitor Your Child.

Simple (and free) solutions include sharing an email account and checking the browser's history to see what sites have been visited. Even if you don't share an account, you should maintain access to their accounts. While on-line there are individuals who attempt to sexually exploit children through the use of on-line services and the Internet. Some of these individuals gradually seduce their targets through the use of attention, affection, kindness, and even gifts. These individuals are often willing to devote considerable amounts of time, money, and energy in this process. They listen to and empathize with the problems of children. They will be aware of the latest music, hobbies, and interests of children. These individuals attempt to gradually lower children's inhibitions by slowly introducing sexual context and content into their conversations.

There are other individuals, however, who immediately engage in sexually explicit conversation with children. Some offenders primarily collect and trade child-pornographic images, while others seek face-to-face meetings with children via on-line contacts. It is important for parents to understand that children can be indirectly victimized through conversation, i.e. "chat," as well as the transfer of sexually explicit information and material. Computer-sex offenders may also be evaluating children they come in contact with on-line for future face-to-face contact and direct victimization. Parents and children should remember that a computer-sex offender can be any age or sex the person does not have to fit the caricature of a dirty, unkempt, older man wearing a raincoat to be someone who could harm a child.

Children, especially adolescents, are sometimes interested in and curious about sexuality and sexually explicit material. They may be moving away from the total control of parents and seeking to establish new relationships outside their family. Because they may be curious, children/adolescents sometimes use their on-line access to actively seek out such materials and individuals. Sex offenders targeting children will use and exploit these characteristics and needs. Some adolescent children may also be attracted to and lured by on-line offenders closer to their age who, although not technically child molesters, may be dangerous. Nevertheless, they have been seduced and manipulated by a clever offender and do not fully understand or recognize the potential danger of these contacts.

What Are Signs That Your Child Might Be At Risk On-line?

Your child spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night.

Most children that fall victim to computer-sex offenders spend large amounts of time on-line, particularly in chat rooms. They may go on-line after dinner and on the weekends. They may be latchkey kids whose parents have told them to stay at home after school. They go on-line to chat with friends, make new friends, pass time, and sometimes look for sexually explicit information. While much of the knowledge and experience gained may be valuable, parents should consider monitoring the amount of time spent on-line. Children on-line are at the greatest risk during the evening hours. While offenders are on-line around the clock, most work during the day and spend their evenings on-line trying to locate and lure children or seeking pornography.

You find pornography on your child's computer.

Pornography is often used in the sexual victimization of children. Sex offenders often supply their potential victims with pornography as a means of opening sexual discussions and for seduction. Child pornography may be used to show the child victim that sex between children and adults is "normal." Parents should be conscious of the fact that a child may hide the pornographic files on diskettes or CD's or even DVD's or USB sticks. This may be especially true if the computer is used by other family members.

Your child receives phone calls from people you don't know, or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize.

While talking to a child victim on-line is a thrill for a computer-sex offender, it can be very cumbersome. Most want to talk to the children on the telephone. They often engage in "phone sex" with the children and often seek to set up an actual meeting for real sex. While a child may be hesitant to give out his/her home phone number, the computer-sex offenders will give out theirs. With Caller ID, they can readily find out the child's phone number. Some computer-sex offenders have even obtained free phone 0800 numbers, so that their potential victims can call them without their parents finding out.

Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know.

As part of the seduction process, it is common for offenders to send letters, photographs, and all manner of gifts to their potential victims. Computer-sex offenders have even sent plane tickets in order for the child to travel across the country to meet them.

Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.

A child looking at pornographic images or having sexually explicit conversations does not want you to see it on the screen. Your child becomes withdrawn from the family. Computer-sex offenders will work very hard at driving a wedge between a child and their family or at exploiting their relationship. They will accentuate any minor problems at home that the child might have. Children may also become withdrawn after sexual victimization.

Your child is using an on-line account belonging to someone else.

Even if you don't subscribe to an on-line service or Internet service, your child may meet an offender while on-line at a friend's house or the library. Most computers come preloaded with on-line and/or Internet software. Computer-sex offenders will sometimes provide potential victims with a computer account for communications with them.

What Should You Do If You Suspect Your Child Is Communicating With A Sexual Predator On-line?

Consider talking openly with your child about your suspicions. Tell them about the dangers of computer-sex offenders. Review what is on your child's computer. If you don't know how, ask a friend, co-worker, relative, or other knowledgeable person. Pornography or any kind of sexual communication can be a warning sign.

Use the Caller ID service to determine who is calling your child. Most telephone companies that offer Caller ID also offer a service that allows you to block your number from appearing on someone else's Caller ID. Telephone companies also offer an additional service feature that rejects incoming calls that you block. This rejection feature prevents computer-sex offenders or anyone else from calling your home anonymously. Devices can be purchased that show telephone numbers that have been dialed from your home phone. Additionally, the last number called from your home phone can be retrieved provided that the telephone is equipped with a redial feature. Monitor your child's access to all types of live electronic communications (i.e., chat rooms, instant messages, Internet Relay Chat, etc.), and monitor your child's e-mail. Computer-sex offenders almost always meet potential victims via chat rooms. After meeting a child on-line, they will continue to communicate electronically often via e-mail.

Should I just forbid my child from going on-line?

There are dangers in every part of our society. By educating your children to these dangers and taking appropriate steps to protect them, they can benefit from the wealth of information now available on-line.

Safety Tips by Age - 2-4-Year-Olds

According to a 2003 study on children's Internet use, pre-school children are now the fastest-growing segment of Internet users. While children at this age have a limited

attention span for online activities, Internet images and sounds can stimulate their imagination and add to their experiences.

Parents and older siblings take pre-school children on the Internet, visit Web sites and play online games. At this age, adults have an important role to play in teaching safe Internet use and monitoring their children's reactions to online material.

<p>Safety tips</p> <p>Always sit with your kids at this age when they're online.</p> <p>Create a personalized online environment for your kids by "book marking" a list of acceptable sites.</p> <p>Use kid-friendly search engines or ones with parental controls.</p> <p>Investigate Internet-filtering tools as a complement - not a replacement - for parental supervision.</p> <p>Protect them from offensive "pop ups" by disabling Java on your computer or using blocking software.</p> <p>Start teaching your children about privacy. Have them use an online nickname if a site encourages them to submit their names to "personalizing" the web content.</p> <p>All family members should act as role models for children's use of the Internet.</p>	<p>2-4-Year-Olds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will accept media content at face value • don't have the critical thinking skills to be online alone • may be frightened by media images, both real and fictional • may be frightened by realistic portrayals of violence, threats or dangers
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Safety Tips by Age - 5-7-Year-Olds

Five- to seven-year-old children have a positive outlook and an accepting nature. They take pride in their new reading and counting skills and love to converse and share ideas. They are eager to behave well; they are trusting; and they don't question authority. Kids at this age may be very capable at using computers, i.e. following commands, using the mouse, and playing computer games. They are, however, highly dependent on adults or older children to help them find Web sites, interpret online information or send e-mail.

<p>Safety tips</p>	<p>5- to 7-year-olds:</p>
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<p>Always sit with your kids at this age when they are online.</p> <p>Create a personalized online environment by limiting your kids to their list of favourite or "bookmarked" sites.</p> <p>Use kid-friendly search engines or ones with parental controls.</p> <p>Keep Internet-connected computers in an open area where you can easily monitor your kids' activities.</p> <p>Investigate Internet-filtering tools as a complement - not a replacement - for parental supervision.</p> <p>Start teaching kids about privacy. Tell them never to give out information about themselves or their family when online. Have your kids use an online nickname if a site encourages them to submit their names to "personalize" the Web content.</p> <p>Protect them from offensive "pop ups" by disabling Java on your computer or using blocking software.</p> <p>Don't let your kids use instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or message boards at this age.</p> <p>Encourage them to come to you if they come across anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened. (Stay calm. If you "freak out" they won't turn to you for help when they need it.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will accept media content at face value • don't have the critical thinking skills to be online alone • may be frightened by media images, both real and fictional • may be frightened by realistic portrayals of violence, threats or dangers • are vulnerable to online marketers who encourage them to give out personal information through surveys, contests and registration forms • risk moving from appropriate to inappropriate sites through hyperlinks • may be exposed to search results that link to inappropriate Web sites
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Safety Tips by Age - 8-10-Year-Olds

Eight- to ten-year-old kids have a strong sense of family. They are interested in the activities of older kids in their lives; they are starting to develop a sense of their own moral and gender identity; and they tend to be trusting and not to question authority.

Surfing for fun and playing interactive games are favourite online pastimes at this age. They are using e-mail and may also experiment with instant messaging, chat rooms and message boards (online forums).

Safety tips	
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<p>Create a list of Internet house rules with input from your kids.</p> <p>Sit with your kids when they are online or make sure they only visit sites that you have approved. Keep Internet-connected computers in an open area where you can easily monitor them.</p> <p>Investigate Internet-filtering tools as a complement - not a replacement - for parental supervision.</p> <p>Use kid-friendly search engines or search engines with parental controls.</p> <p>Establish a shared family e-mail account with your Internet Service Provider rather than letting your kids have their own accounts. Teach your kids to always come to you before giving out information through e-mail, chat rooms, message boards, registration forms, personal profiles and online contests. Use e-mail filters to block messages from particular people, or those that contain specific words or phrases.</p> <p>Don't allow instant messaging at this age.</p> <p>Only allow your kids to use monitored chat rooms and message boards on reputable kids' sites.</p> <p>Talk to your kids about their online friends and activities just as you would about their other activities. Talk to them about healthy sexuality because kids can easily come across online pornography.</p> <p>Encourage your kids to come to you if they encounter anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened. (Stay calm. If you "freak out" your kids won't turn to you for help when they need it.)</p>	<p>8 to 10-year olds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are curious and interested in discovering new information • lack the critical thinking skills to be online alone • are vulnerable to online marketers who encourage them to give out personal information through surveys, contests and registration forms • may be frightened by realistic portrayals of violence, threats or dangers • begin to communicate with online acquaintances they may have not met in real life • may be influenced by media images and personalities, especially those that appear "cool" or desirable • may be exposed to search results with links to inappropriate Web sites • are vulnerable to online predators when using chat rooms, message boards or instant messaging
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From pre-teen to teen, is a time of rapid change in kids' lives. Although at this age they are still quite dependent on their families, they want more independence. Also, relationships with friends become more important and they start to take an interest in the world around them. Kids in this age group use the Internet to research school projects. They also download music, use e-mail, play online games, and vote for their favourite pop stars on fan sites. Their favourite way to communicate with friends is by instant messaging.

Safety tips

Create a list of Internet house rules with input from your kids.

Keep Internet-connected computers in an open area and out of your kids' bedrooms.

Talk with your kids about their online friends and activities just as you would about their other activities.

Insist that your kids tell you first if they want to meet an "online friend."

Teach your kids to never to give out personal information without your permission when using e-mail, chat rooms or instant messaging, filling out registration forms and personal profiles, and entering online contests.

Encourage them to come to you if they encounter material or messages that make them feel uncomfortable or threatened. (Stay calm. If you "freak out" your kids won't turn to you for help when they need it.)

Talk to your kids about online pornography and direct them to good sites about health and sexuality.

Insist on access to your kids' e-mail and instant messaging accounts to make sure that they're not talking to strangers.

Teach your kids responsible online behaviour. File-sharing and taking text, images or artwork from the Web may infringe on copyright laws.

Talk to them about ethical behaviour. They should not be using the Internet to spread

11- to 13-year-olds:

- feel in control when it comes to technology
- are intrigued by subcultures beyond the world of their parents
- lack the critical thinking skills to judge the accuracy of online information
- accept entertainment and games uncritically
- are vulnerable to online marketers who encourage them to give out personal information through surveys, contests and registration forms
- are at a sensitive time in their sexual development; particularly boys, who may look for porn sites at this age
- are interested in building relationships (especially girls) with online acquaintances
- may be bullied or they may be bullying others online

gossip, bully or make threats against others.
Only allow your kids to use monitored chat rooms on reputable kids' sites.

Safety Tips by Age - 14-17-year olds

It is common that younger teens may experience periods of low self esteem, seek the approval of their friends, and be less willing to accommodate their parents' expectations. Older teenagers need both group identity and independence, and tend to reconcile their family and peer values. In late adolescence kids also mature and are ready to interact with the world on an intellectual level. Generally, all teens are open to new ideas but lack the life experience to judge their validity

Teens download music using tools such as “kazaa”, use instant messaging (IM), e-mail, and play online games. They also actively use search engines to find information on the Internet. Most of them visit chat rooms and many have participated in adult or private chat. Boys in this age group are more likely to push the boundaries - looking for gross humour, gore, gambling, or explicit adult sites.

<p style="text-align: center;">Safety tips</p> <p>Create a list of Internet house rules with your teens. You should include the kinds of sites that are off limit.</p> <p>Keep Internet-connected computers in an open area and out of your teens' bedrooms.</p> <p>Talk to them about their online friends and activities just as you would about their other activities.</p> <p>Know which chat rooms or message boards your teens visit, and whom they talk to. Encourage them to use monitored chat rooms.</p> <p>Talk to your teens about their IM list and make sure they're not talking to strangers.</p> <p>Insist that they tell you first if they want to meet an "online friend."</p> <p>Teach your teens never to give out personal information without your permission when using e-mail, chat rooms or instant messaging, filling out registration forms and personal profiles, and entering online contests.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">14- to 17-Year-olds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are more critical and selective in their media interests and activities • are more likely to receive unwanted sexual comments online • receive the highest percentage of pornographic spam • are interested in building relationships with online acquaintances (especially true of girls) • are more likely to be asked for a real-life meeting by an online acquaintance and more apt to accept • are still vulnerable to online marketers who encourage them to give out personal
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<p>Encourage your teens to come to you if they come across material or messages that make them feel uncomfortable or threatened. (Stay calm. If you "freak out" they won't turn to you for help when they need it.)</p> <p>Talk to your teenagers about online pornography and direct them to good sites about health and sexuality.</p> <p>Insist they stay in public chat room areas.</p> <p>Help protect them from spam. Tell your teens not to give out their e-mail address online, not to respond to junk mail, and to use e-mail filters.</p> <p>Be aware of the Web sites that your teens frequent, and make sure the sites don't contain personal photos and information or offensive content.</p> <p>Teach your kids responsible online behaviour. File-sharing and taking text, images or artwork from the Web may infringe on copyright laws.</p> <p>Talk to them about ethical behaviour. They should not be using the Internet to spread gossip, bully or threaten others.</p> <p>Make sure your teens check with you before making financial transactions online, including ordering, buying or selling items.</p> <p>Discuss gambling and its potential risks and remind your teens that it is illegal for them to gamble online.</p>	<p>information through surveys, contests and registration forms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (boys in particular) may look for porn sites • may be bullied or be bullying others online • are more likely to use credit cards online • may be experimenting with online gambling
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Tips for parents

Parents play an important role in teaching their kids the importance of protecting personal information while online. Teach your kids the value of their personal

information - start when they are young. This is one of the biggest challenges parents face in today's electronic age.

Teach your kids to protect their privacy on the Internet by not sharing personal details when using chat rooms, bulletin boards, instant messaging or visiting Web sites. This includes name, gender, age, home address, e-mail address, phone number, picture, credit card information or passwords.

Lead young children to high-quality non-commercial sites for kids that are fun and educational. Ask other parents, teachers or librarians for their recommendations, or use reputable online directories of recommended children's sites.

Read the privacy policies on the Web sites that your kids visit. Most responsible sites link to a privacy policy from their home page. Check to see if they also provide a link on pages where personal information is being asked for. Here's what to look for when you are reading a privacy policy:

What steps are being taken to safeguard children's privacy when they participate in chat rooms, message boards and e-mail activities on the site. Consider software for this. Create solid guidelines for your kids and teens if they shop online. Make sure that any site they use has provisions in place to ensure that transactions are safe and secure.

Sit with your kids when they're registering for instant messaging or e-mail accounts to make sure they protect their personal information and do NOT fill in an online personal profile.

Encourage your kids to use gender-neutral nicknames, so no one can tell whether they are male or female when communicating over the Internet.

Choose chat rooms on children's sites that employ adult monitors, who restrict users from releasing any personal information. Some chat rooms offer users the option of going into private rooms or sharing private messages (PMs) that no one else can see or monitor. It is important to encourage your children to never let themselves be lured out of the public Internet area.

Pornography

For parents, one of the most disturbing aspects of the Internet is the easy access it gives kids to pornography. Hard-core sexual images, which were once very difficult to acquire, are now just a mouse click away.

Trying to control porn in a global medium like the Internet is difficult at best. Most Internet pornography, while offensive and distasteful to many users, is not illegal. As well, countries have different cultural standards and legislation regarding sexual material, and content that is banned in one jurisdiction may be easily accessible on servers in another jurisdiction. Unfortunately, even if pornography is banned in a country, it can still have a significant presence. Teenagers, particularly adolescent males, develop a curiosity to seek out pornography based on what they see in the

way of life. With easy access to the Internet, kids are exposed to deviant or violent sexual content, which may have an influence on their developing attitudes towards sexuality and relationships. **This can cause serious marital problems in the future.**

Tips for parents

Regardless of the evidence that exists concerning the effect of pornography on kids, as parents, we know we don't want our children accidentally stumbling across it when they are young, or developing an appetite for it during their teen years. You can help protect your kids by taking an active role in their Internet use.

If your kids are spending too much time on the Internet, you need to establish a healthy balance between Internet use and other activities.

Look for symptoms of Internet dependency. Ask yourself if your child's Internet use is affecting his or her school performance, health, and relationships with family and friends.

If your child is demonstrating strong signs of Internet addiction, consider seeking professional counselling. Compulsive Internet use may be symptomatic of other problems such as depression, anger and low self-esteem.

Examine your own online habits. Do you have trouble controlling your Internet use? Remember, you are your child's most important role model.

Don't ban the Internet - it is an important part of most kids' social lives. Instead, establish rules about where your kids can go online and what they can do there - and stick to them. Such rules might include: a limited amount of time online each day; no surfing or instant messaging until they complete their homework; no chat rooms or online pornography.

Keep your computer in a public area of your house, not in a child's bedroom.

Encourage and support your child's participation in other activities - particularly physical pastimes with other children.

If your child is shy or socially awkward with peers, consider a social skills class. Encourage activities that will bring your child together with others who have similar interests, such as computer classes or hobby groups.

Investigate software that monitors and restricts Internet use. Although these tools are helpful, keep in mind they can be easily disabled by a savvy computer user. Your ultimate goal should be helping your kids to develop self-control, discipline and accountability with the Internet.

The Holy Qur'an teaches us

“Say to the believing men that they restrain their looks and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. And say to the believing women that they restrain their looks and guard their private parts.” (24:31,32)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, has said on the topic of modesty: “Verily modesty and faith are related to each other; when one of them is taken away, the other also is taken away.”

May Allah save our children from the dangers of the internet. You as a parent will have to play an important role in achieving this. If it means that you have to learn how to use a computer, then for the sake of your children, please do so.

Produced by the Tarbiyyat Department, UK

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