

How can I protect my child using parental controls?

Although there is much adult and unsavoury content on the web, children are unlikely to encounter it unless they browse unwisely. So, in addition to technical protection such as parental control software, it's also important to educate your child about the risks and how to avoid them.



Mike Barwise | 9th September 2010

There are certainly huge numbers of adult and unsavoury websites out there. Nevertheless, it's remarkably difficult to land on such sites by accident unless you're browsing unwisely.

Parental guidance

So the first and strongest protection for your child is parental guidance and example. Ideally, you should participate in their browsing - particularly in the early days when the web will be an exciting new experience full of unknown possibilities.

School homework is an ideal opportunity for this. Explain the web's positive and negative sides, and reinforce your own standards without sounding too severe. Children are natural experimenters, and nothing is more tempting than finding out by trial and error why something has been prohibited. But if you've explained, and your explanation has been accepted voluntarily, the experiment is much less likely to be made.

But unwise browsing is more than actively seeking risqué content. Following links that might look questionable just to find out what happens is very common, as is idle browsing without paying enough attention to distinguish between safe and unsafe content.

So, providing parental guidance and teaching your child to be cautious are essential, and the benefits can go way beyond just avoiding the unsavoury - it can stand your child in good stead for the future when they progress to social networking or are faced with online fraud.

Parental control software

But you can't be there all the time, and at certain stages of their natural development all children will seek to extend boundaries. So this is where parental control software - 'PCS' - comes in. You can install it on any computer your child will use and set it up to block content you feel they should not be gaining access to.

Most PCS can be set up to record what has been viewed and blocked in a 'log', so you can tell whether your message is taking effect. The evidence provided by the log will also help you adapt the way you educate your child in safely using the web.

There are many PCS tools available, and they vary quite a lot in their capabilities and effectiveness. The only ones worth considering make use of external authoritative lists of known unsavoury and illegal websites as well as having internal rules you can set that block generic types of content.

PCS that only uses internal rules generally makes decisions that are too crude. If it's set to block enough inappropriate material it also blocks too much legitimate content as well. But the best PCS will allow you to restrict access to much more than just pornographic sites - it will also put down restrictions on chat sites, alcohol and drug-related content, extreme violence and gruesome material, gambling and illegal software sites.

PCS tools are affordable and have enormous protective value, but they are not a substitute for personal involvement in your child's web browsing. The huge value to your child of the legitimate parts of the web must not be devalued by apparently arbitrary restrictions that inhibit spontaneity and learning.

Small example of some PCS available



[WebWatcher](#)



[SpyAgent](#)



[I am Big Brother](#)



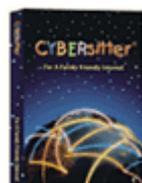
[Content Protect](#)



[Spector Pro](#)



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