

Summer Break Alternatives and Internet Safety Tips

Summer break is fast approaching, and students deserve the much-needed time off. It's time to have some fun and relax. But it could also mean extra time online for your kids - a lot of it happening when you're not around to supervise.

While the Internet can be a great source of fun and social interaction for your kids, it can also be a dangerous place. It feels like home is the safest place for your kids, yet the more time they spend online the more likely they will be exposed to inappropriate content (pornography, hate, violence, etc.), cyberbullying, and other online dangers.

Here are some suggestions that will help you keep your kids safe when online:

Spend some offline time with your kids daily! Try to devote some time every day to doing something with your kids that doesn't involve a computer, TV, phone, or any other kind of device. Spend time at the park in the morning, go to the beach in the afternoon, or just play an old fashioned board game at night. Your kids may decide that it's more fun to continue with similar activities during the other parts of their day, even when you are not there.

Give kids fun alternatives, even when you can't be there with them. Encourage your children to participate in "traditional" activities such as sports, dance, arts and crafts, or camp - activities that will keep them away from their computer.

Going on a family vacation? Use your vacation time for relaxing and spending time with your family and try to avoid constantly checking your phone for emails or messages. If you don't do it - your kids will be less likely to do so. Avoid posting details (dates, location) of your family vacation for the entire world to see, and make sure your kids don't do so either.

Discourage "checking-in" and geo tagging. Checking-in at certain locations on Facebook, Foursquare or other social networks is "cool" but could affect your kids' online reputation and privacy and could expose your home and family to risk. Make sure your kids turn off any geo-tracking tools, and avoid "checking in".

Cyberbullying doesn't end with spring break/the school year. Be aware of the [warning signs](#) that may indicate that your child is a cyberbullying victim. Notice any behavior that seems unusual. Does your child normally enjoy using the computer but suddenly no longer wishes do so? Is your child constantly engaged with interacting over the internet all hours of the day and night? These could be warning signs that you need to pay attention to.

Set summer online use boundaries. Set expectations early, even before the summer break begins. It is always advisable to have an [online use contract](#), but perhaps this is the time to revise the contract and create a special "Internet Use Contract" and a "Mobile Phone Use Contract" to define clear and understandable rules about what is acceptable and what is not. Make sure you and your children sign the contract and agree on the terms.

(Resource site: <http://puresight.com/Useful-tools/online-child-safety-during-summer-vacation.html>)