

The Internet and Your Family

Suggestions for Safer Surfing and Other Things to Consider

Quick Intro: Internet & World Wide Web

The Internet is THE global network of computers sharing information all around the world.

The World Wide Web is the most popular part of the Internet. On the Web there are “websites,” which are places you can go to get information or engage in various activities, such as doing research or playing games.

The Web is as vast and complicated as “the real world,” and there are some things you should know about, especially if you are a parent, guardian, or family member and plan to (or already) have Internet access at home.

Information on the Web

Anyone can post information on the Web. While many websites can be trustworthy, many others can contain misleading or offensive information. It can often be difficult to tell “good” websites from “bad.”

You and your family must exercise critical thinking skills, evaluating all information you encounter by asking key questions, such as is the information complete, up-to-date, unbiased, and provided by an authoritative source.

Thrall has some free informational handouts at Reference and at our website (<http://www.thrall.org/docs>) if you would like to learn more about critical thinking and what to watch for in websites.

Instead of relying entirely on web search engines, you might want to consider using our web guides as well. We regularly review websites we catalog and remove any site failing to meet our strict selection criteria. Our guides can save you time and spare you from the frustration of searching the Web!

To explore out our web guides, please go to our home page at <http://www.thrall.org> and click on “Web Guides.”

If you or a family member need to do serious research, please consider using our Article Databases and Encyclopedias at <http://www.thrall.org/databases>. They contain information that is often better and more in-depth than what you might typically find on the Web.

Also consider our free “Ask a Librarian” service on the Web. If you have a question, our librarians are eager to help! Just go to <http://www.thrall.org/ask> or call Reference at (845) 341-5461.

E-mail & Instant Messaging

E-mail is “electronic mail” sent from one computer to another. You get an e-mail account when you subscribe to an Internet Service Provider (ISP). You can also get a free e-mail account at websites such as Yahoo.com. Anyone can get or send e-mail or “instant messages.”

“Spam” (junk e-mail) is a part of the e-mail experience, and many such messages can contain misleading or disturbing information. Most “spam” shows fake user names, so, even if a message appears to be from someone you think you know, you should be cautious.

Also be careful if a message has “file attachments.” These often contain viruses – programs that can harm your computer or steal your personal information!

Copyright & Intellectual Property

It is best to assume any information you encounter is copyrighted unless otherwise stated. Be cautious if any site offers “free downloads,” as these can be viruses or could be illegally provided.

Games, Virtual Worlds, Social Networks

Many computer games involve the Internet, especially MMORPG (“Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games”). Such games will place family members playing that game in direct communication with people of all ages and backgrounds from all around the world.

There are also entire virtual reality worlds out there, such as SecondLife.com, where people, disguised as “avatars” (computer characters) can socialize and interact.

“Social networking” sites, such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com, are popular destinations for many young people. Since virtually anyone can join and converse with your family members, you should be mindful of the risks.

See our “Social Networking” handout at Reference or at <http://www.thrall.org/docs> to learn about potential issues, such as “cyberbullying” (where one Web user might attempt to intimidate or threaten another through electronic messages).

Scams, Privacy, & Security Issues

“You just won the lottery!” “I wish to transfer several million dollars into your account.” These and many other ploys run rampant across the Web. As the old saying goes, “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!”

You can protect yourself and your family against potential scams simply by disregarding any such outrageous offers, tempting as they might sound.

If you plan to purchase anything over the Internet and have not done so before, you are a prime candidate for exploitation if you are not aware of the possible issues.

If you are ever asked to provide credit card or any other personal information, such as your date of birth, proceed with extreme caution! “Identity theft” can happen quickly under such circumstances, as someone can use the information you provide to exploit (and later ruin) your good name and credit.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Better Business Bureau (BBB), FBI, New York State Attorney General’s Office, and other agencies in and beyond the government offer a number of consumer advisories on these subjects.

Please check out our Consumer and Government Information blogs at <http://www.thrall.org/blogs> and also visit our Consumer Information web guide at <http://www.thrall.org/consumer> to educate yourself more about Internet fraud and other topics.

Topics in the Library Catalog

Middletown Thrall Library offers a number of books you can check out to help you and your family make the most of your Internet access. Either in the library or from our home page (<http://www.thrall.org>), you can search our library catalog for these related subjects:

Computers and children
Internet and children
Video games and children

Computers and family
Internet and teenagers

Our Children’s Department and adult circulating collections have books for parents and guardians interested in learning more about various Internet activities and related issues as well as opportunities to use the technology for educational purposes, career development, and other positive and constructive purposes.

For More Information...

For even more information, advisories, and guidance (for consumers, children, and parents) on these and other important topics, please visit the U.S. Government’s website OnGuard Online at <http://www.onguardonline.gov>