



## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME... FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION

### Can Internet filters protect kids from online dangers?

Volume 6, Issue 1  
Summer 2003

A publication for families on sexuality education edited by the Education and Training Department staff.

If you would like further information on any topics discussed in this newsletter, please contact our Resource Center at 317-927-3644 ext. 142 or at [betsy@ppesi.org](mailto:betsy@ppesi.org), or visit us on the internet at [www.ppin.org](http://www.ppin.org).

Planned Parenthood®  
of Greater Indiana, Inc.  
Education & Training  
3209 North Meridian Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46208  
317-927-3644 1-800-421-3731

**Planned Parenthood** strives to ensure that sexuality is understood as an essential lifelong aspect of being human, and that it is celebrated with respect, openness, and mutuality.

Nine in ten school-age children have access to the Internet at school, and two-thirds have computers at home. While youth can use the Internet in many positive ways, from researching school reports and developing useful computer skills, to chatting with online friends from around the world, parents are aware that the Internet also has dangerous aspects, from the proliferation of pornographic and violent material, to adult child molesters posing as youth in online chat rooms.

How can you allow your children to explore the vast array of useful information on the Internet, while still protecting them from harm? Internet filtering software (including programs like NetNanny, Cyber Patrol, CYBERSitter and AOL parental controls) has been proposed as one way to block access to inappropriate content. These programs work by blocking specific website addresses, or by blocking sites containing prohibited keywords.

Both of these methods have been proven insufficient by recent studies, including a 2002 study from the Kaiser

Family Foundation, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. This study found that the most restrictive filtering software incorrectly blocked one-fourth of websites containing legitimate health information. For instance, software that blocks websites containing the keyword "breast" might block a porn site with topless photographs, but would also block a site containing information about breast cancer. Other blocked sites in the study included the Center for Disease Control, the National Institute of Health, various HIV/AIDS prevention sites, and PlannedParenthood.com.

The results of the Kaiser study on filtering software are especially worrisome in light of another recent Kaiser study, called "Generation Rx.com," which found that 68 percent of teens use the Internet as a primary source of health information on topics including relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual identity.

**Sexuality is an  
important part of life.**

**Help your kids  
understand it.**

Child safety experts agree that active, informed parents are children's best defense against the potential dangers of the Internet. According to the American Library Association, "The only lifelong Internet protection for children is to teach them to use the Internet properly and to teach them to be information literate, so they can make informed choices." Here are tips on keeping kids safe online:

- Set reasonable rules and guidelines for Internet and computer use by your children, including amount of time spent online, and types of sites that are appropriate to visit. Discuss these rules with your children, and post them by the computer.
- Make computer time a family activity, especially with younger children. If you don't know much about using the Internet, your local public library may offer a workshop to help get you up to speed. Encourage your children to share with you what they've learned about computers at school.
- Ask your child's teacher or librarian for a list of educational, age-appropriate websites to visit.
- Teach children that on the Internet, people may not be who they seem, and everything they read may not be true.
- If your child receives an e-mail that is harassing or obscene, report it to your Internet service provider.



By stressing your family values when it comes to Internet use, you can help children become responsible, savvy consumers of information. Like swimming pools, the Internet can be a dangerous place for unsupervised children. We can try to protect them by putting up fences and installing locks, but the best way to keep children safe is to teach them to swim.

*For more information, visit "Child Safety on the Information Highway" at [http://www.safekids.com/child\\_safety.htm](http://www.safekids.com/child_safety.htm).*

## Six Rules for Online Safety

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that the meeting is in a public place and that I bring along my mother or father.
- I will never send my picture or anything else to a person without first checking with my parents.
- I will not respond to any messages that are mean or that in any way make me feel uncomfortable. I am not to blame if I get a message like that. If I do, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the online service provider.
- I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide on the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate sites for me to visit. I will not access other sites without their permission.
- Source: U.S. Department of Justice

## Helpful Web Sites for Parents

### **Sex Ed Mom** [www.sexedmom.com](http://www.sexedmom.com)

Sexuality educator, trainer and mom Erica Neuman helps parents raise sexually healthy and responsible youth. She shows parents how to talk to their kids about healthy sexuality, body image, abuse prevention and many other important issues related to raising children. She answers the questions every parent has about which topics to cover and the best age to begin each discussion.



### **Talking with Kids about Tough Issues**

[www.talkingwithkids.org](http://www.talkingwithkids.org)

This web site is maintained jointly by Children Now and Kaiser Family Foundation to encourage parents to talk with children ages 8 to 12 about tough issues: sexuality, HIV/AIDS, violence, drugs and alcohol. In addition to accessing their 10 tips for discussing any difficult subject with your child, you can click on individual topics, such as sexuality and HIV/AIDS, for tips specific to that subject.

### **Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)** [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

Many friends and families of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons have some difficulty understanding and accepting their loved one's sexuality or gender identity. PFLAG offers support and education about sexual orientation and gender identity. Its web site is an excellent resource for anyone wanting to know more about sexual diversity, and especially for those who are trying to understand the sexuality of someone close to them and how that will affect their relationship with that person.

### **Planned Parenthood Federation of America** [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

The Planned Parenthood web site is a good source of factual information on sexuality issues. When you feel you just don't have the answers to some of the questions your children are asking, the fact sheets posted on this site are a great place to start. They also have articles online for more in depth coverage of various topics. If you feel you need even more information, links to other web sites are provided.



### **SIECUS** [www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)

SIECUS believes that parents are the primary sexuality educators of their children. To help parents with that task, its web site has suggestions on how parents can communicate with children about sexuality. In addition SIECUS has an online newsletter, *Families Are Talking*. Each issue discusses one topic (such as puberty or sex education) in depth and is available in both English and Spanish.

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Be An Askable Parent

Just Say Know

#### TEEN FRIENDLY WEB SITES

**American Social Health Association** [www.iwannaknow.org](http://www.iwannaknow.org) Answers to your questions about teen sexual health and sexually transmitted diseases.

**Coalition for Positive Sexuality: Sex Ed for Teens** [www.positive.org/cps](http://www.positive.org/cps) Honest answers for teens who ave questions about sexuality.

**Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation** [www.itsyoursexlife.com](http://www.itsyoursexlife.com) Public education campaign aimed at teaching young people about pregnancy and contraception, HIV and STIs, and communicating with partners.

**SEX, etc.** [www.sxetc.org](http://www.sxetc.org) Teen produced web site that answers questions you'd only ask another teen.

**Teen Advice Online** [www.teenadvice.org](http://www.teenadvice.org) Provides support for teenage problems through a network of peers from around the world.

**Teenwire** [www.teenwire.com](http://www.teenwire.com) Sexuality and relationship information for teens from Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

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We're on the Internet! [www.ppin.org](http://www.ppin.org). Check us out!