

## Caring for Your Children in Various Situations

Here are the basics of child care:

- Know where your children are and whom they are with at all times. Make sure that they return home promptly at appointed times.
- Have them check in with you when they arrive at or depart from a particular location and when there is a change of plans.
- Never let your young children go anywhere alone. Make sure another trusted adult is present if you cannot.
- Make sure your older children, who have more freedom, always go out with a friend and that they fully understand all safety rules.
- Know what your children wear every day. Avoid putting their names on the outside of their clothes. Children may respond more readily to a stranger who calls them by name.
- Never leave your child alone in a vehicle, restroom, store, playground, or other public place.
- Have your child play in a supervised area with friends you know.
- Let your child know where you will be at all times and how to get in touch with you.
- Keep a record of your children's friends and their phone numbers.
- Post a list of important phone numbers near your phone. Include the numbers of your work phone, a neighbor or trusted friend to call for help in a non-emergency, a family member or trusted friend to call in an emergency, family doctor, etc.
- Keep an updated information file on your children. Include pictures, fingerprints, footprints, physical characteristics, identifying marks, medical and dental records, etc.
- Find out why your child doesn't want to be with someone or go somewhere. The reason may be more than a personality conflict or a lack of interest.
- Notice when anyone shows an unusual amount of interest in your child or gives him or her gifts. Ask your child why he or she is acting that way.
- Before leaving your child alone at home make sure he or she is not afraid to be alone and is able to follow your instructions about dealing with various situations that might arise.
- Have a way to contact your children if you will be late in picking them up, meeting them somewhere, coming home, etc.
- Attend your children's activities so you can observe how other adults who are involved interact with them. Talk to the person in charge if you become concerned about anyone's behavior.
- Make time every day to discuss the day's events with your children. Encourage them to tell you about anything that makes them uncomfortable, or scares or confuses them. Listen to what they say and never underestimate their fears or concerns. Show them that you are always concerned about their safety and security. Effective communication is the most important factor in child safety.
- Be alert for any changes in your child's behavior. Look and listen for things that indicate something is troubling him or her. Children are often uncomfortable in disclosing disturbing events or feelings because they are concerned about your reactions to their problems. When they do talk about their problems be calm, compassionate, reassuring, and nonjudgmental as you work with them to resolve the problem.
- Discuss the safety and security tips in this paper with your children in an open calm, reassuring manner so as not to frighten them. Analyze situations in which they apply and create what-if scenarios make sure your children understand how to react quickly and appropriately in them.
- Make sure your home is secure with deadbolt locks on outside doors, locked side-yard gates, secondary locks on sliding glass doors and windows, burglar and smoke alarms, etc. Additional tips on controlling access, providing visibility, and maintaining a safe

home are available on the page entitled *Home Security* in the Crime Prevention and Education section of the SDPD website at [www.sandiego.gov/police](http://www.sandiego.gov/police).

- Report any suspicious persons or activities involving your children to the SDPD on its non-emergency number, **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**.

When shopping or in a public place:

- Have your children stay with you at all times. Tell them not to wander off, leave the store, or hide. Don't get distracted by the sights, sounds, and crowds when shopping during holidays.
- Tell them to go to the nearest clerk or person with a nametag and ask for help if they become lost. Show these people to them when entering the store.
- Accompany younger children to restrooms.
- Never leave your child at a video arcade, movie theater, food court, toy store, or mall play area as a convenient "babysitter" while you are shopping. Personnel in those areas are not there to watch children.
- If you allow an older child to go to without you, have him or her go with a friend and set a time for them to return.

When moving to a new neighborhood:

- Meet your neighbors and introduce your children to them.
- Take your children on a walking tour of the neighborhood.
- Show them safe places to go if they need help, e.g., neighbor's or friend's homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- Show them places to avoid, e.g., deserted or abandoned buildings, dark or isolated areas, etc.
- Make a map of safe routes to the school, playground, stores, and other places where they would be allowed to go.

When going to and from school:

- Walk your child to and from school, and point out dangerous spots and safe places to go if he or she needs help.
- Have your child walk or bike to and from school with a friend. There is safety in numbers.
- If your child takes a bus to and from school, visit the bus stop with your child and make sure he or she learns the bus number. Have your child stay with a group while waiting for the bus.
- Ask the school to notify you whenever your child is not in class.
- Make sure that the school will not release your child to anyone but yourself or a person previously designated by you, and that the school will call you back to verify any call saying that some person will come to pick up him or her.

When using the Internet and cell phones:

Although the vast majority of online services and Internet material is legitimate and benign, there have been numerous incidents of children receiving pornographic material, providing personal information under the pretext of possibly winning a prize, or sending money for promised benefits or products. Warning signs of these dangers include excessive late-night computer use, secretive behavior about computer associates, hidden files or directories, and password-protected bios, files, or logical drives.

If you are not familiar with computers, the Internet, and social networking you should visit [www.NetSmartz411.org](http://www.NetSmartz411.org), the premiere Internet-safety helpdesk and hotline, to help educate yourself. You should also sit down with your children to have them show you the websites they visit, how they navigate through the Internet, and how they use social networking sites. To better understand the latter you should try networking yourself. This is a great way to connect with your children on computer-related matters.

You should do the following to minimize Internet dangers that your children may encounter:

- Start early. Talk to your children about online behavior, safety, and security as soon as they start using a computer, cell phone, or any mobile device. Supervise closely the choice of websites for young children. Continue to monitor online activities as your children get older and more independent.
- Set reasonable guidelines and time limits for Internet and cell phone use, and social networking. Prohibiting Internet use is not a good idea because it is too easy for children to establish accounts at a friend's house or many other places. But do set time limits on computer use. People, not computers, should be their best friends and companions.
- Keep the computer in the family room or other area where its use can be monitored. Don't allow computers and mobile devices such as laptops and smart phones to be used in your children's bedrooms. And don't allow your children to have separate passwords and log-on names.
- Post clear, simple, easy-to-read rules for Internet use on or near the computer. Discuss these rules with your children and make sure they understand the reasons for them. Visit [www.NetSmartz.org](http://www.NetSmartz.org) for examples of rules and safety tips. Your supervision and attention is the best way to protect your children when using the Internet.
- Know what Internet access your children have away from home, i.e., at a friend's home, libraries, schools, and cell phones and other wireless devices, and have a plan to monitor their online activities there as well as at home.
- Initiate conversations with your children about their Internet use. Communicate your values, be patient and persistent, and don't rush through conversations. Encourage your children to come to you with any problems they encounter online.
- Make sure they understand the importance of password and privacy protection, and not to share passwords or log-on names with anyone else. And don't let them use their pet's names as passwords.
- Have your children request your permission to exchange phone numbers or meet another child they have "talked" to online. Consider talking to the other child's parents about a meeting and accompanying your child to the meeting, which should be in a public place. Tell your children that caution is needed because people online are not necessarily who they might seem to be.
- Discourage your children from visiting chat rooms, especially those with video, even if they claim to be child friendly. Persons who would harm children use these websites to entice children.
- Use filtering software to scan for offensive words and phrases in chat rooms and then end the conversations by signing off.
- Install a browser that limits the websites that your younger children can visit to those vetted by educational professionals. Some will send you periodic e-mails that detail you children's Internet activity.
- Install a monitoring service like McGruff SafeGuard. It's free and also scans any chat or text conversations for bad language and other inappropriate communications. Go to [www.gomcgruff.com](http://www.gomcgruff.com) for details of this service.
- Have your children promise not to turn off any programs you might install to monitor their computer use.

- Understand how online services work.
- Check the computer's cache and history to see what websites have been accessed.
- Ask your children for their passwords and log-on names, and to share their blogs and online profiles with you. Be aware that they can have multiple accounts on multiple services. Search for your children's identifying information and monitor their screen name(s) and websites for inappropriate content. Also monitor their texts to make sure they are not receiving any threatening or harassing messages, or are sending, receiving, or saving any sexts.
- Learn the meaning of the acronyms your children use in texting. Go to [www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php](http://www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php) for a list of acronyms and their definitions, e.g., PAL means parents are listening.
- Make sure your child's screen name does not reveal any identifying information such as name, age, location, school. A screen name should be benign and innocuous, e.g., the first letter of each word in an easily-remembered phrase.
- Prohibit your children from downloading any games, movies, programs, etc., trying to win "free" things, or buying things without your permission.
- Tell your children it's not safe to put photos or any type of personally identifying information on a personal website without privacy settings, even if they promise to give the website address to people they know. Anyone in the world can access such a website. Also, personally identifying information should not be published on a group website or in an Internet yearbook. Group photos are preferable to individual photos only if no names are published.
- Have your children ask permission before listing any adults as "friends" online, even if they are teachers, relatives, or your friends.

Children who use social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace should be warned about online predators and harassers. They should be taught to do the following to prevent and deal with any problems that might arise:

- Never to give out your name, address, phone number, or any other personal information that can identify you. Avoid posting anything that would enable a stranger to find you, e.g., school names. Members' profiles become public information.
- Never say you are home alone.
- Don't post anything that you wouldn't want the world to know, especially anything or language that might embarrass you later, e.g., in applying for college or a job. What's uploaded can be downloaded and passed around by others and be posted online forever. It can't be taken back even if it's deleted from a site.
- Never send out any pictures of yourself, family members, or friends.
- Be careful about adding strangers to your list of "friends." People aren't always who they say they are.
- Come to me to discuss any harassment, hate speech, and inappropriate content you receive.
- Check comments regularly. Ignore and don't respond to any that are mean or embarrassing. Just log off if the harassment bothers you.
- Avoid misleading people into thinking you are older or younger than you are.
- Don't talk about sex or use any sexually explicit language.
- Block people from sending you messages or e-mail, or delete them from your "buddy list" if they harass you.
- Change your password if someone hacks into your profile. Change you username and e-mail address if someone repeatedly bothers you.
- Contact the company that runs the site to have any your profile deleted if it was created or altered without your knowledge.

- Talk to someone you trust if you are upset about what is being said about you. If you are scared or threatened contact a Juvenile Service Team officer at your nearest SDPD area station and inform your Internet Service Provider.

Children also need to be given rules for using cell phones and be warned of dangers in their use. Rules should deal with when and where phones can be used, what they can and cannot be used for, and etiquette and safety in texting. You need to set good examples in the use of phones, e.g., not while driving. One thing that phones should not be used for is sexting, i.e., the sending or forwarding of sexually explicit photos, videos, or messages. In addition to risking their reputation and friendships, they could be breaking the law if they create, forward, or even save this kind of message. The following are some good rules for texting.

- Be polite and respect others. Avoid using shorthand that might lead to misunderstandings. Think about how a message might be read and understood before sending it.
- Ignore messages from people you don't know.
- Block numbers of people you don't want to hear from.
- Don't post your cell phone number on the Internet.
- Never provide personal or financial information in response to a text message.
- Use Cc: and Reply all: with care.

Cyberbullying is another problem you should talk to your children about. You should tell them that they can't hide behind the messages they send or pictures they post, and that hurtful messages not only threaten the victim, but they make the sender look bad and can bring scorn from peers. Such messages are also a misdemeanor under California law for which the sender can be punished by up to one year in a county jail, by a fine of not more than \$1,000, or both. Also, you should also make sure your own conduct does not encourage bullying, i.e., that you don't make mean-spirited comments about others or act unkindly to them.

You also need to be prepared to help your children if they become a victim of bullying. You should encourage them to show you any online messages or pictures that make them feel threatened or hurt. If you fear for your child's safety you should call the SDPD on its non-emergency number, **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. Otherwise tell your child not to respond, save the messages and pictures for evidence, and keep you informed. Call the SDPD again if the bullying persists. Here are some other things your child should do:

- Report the bullying to the website or network where it appears.
- Delete the bully from your list of "friends" or "buddies," or block the bully's username or e-mail address.
- Share these measures with a friend who is a victim of bullying. Bullying usually stops quickly when peers intervene on behalf of the victim.

Any suspected online sexual exploitation or attempt by an adult to meet your child should be reported immediately to the San Diego Internet Crimes against Children Task Force at **(858) 715-7100** and the Cyber Tipline at [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com) or **(800) 843-5678**. The former is the local law-enforcement agency that deals with these matters. The latter is managed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and is mandated by Congress to forward your information to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. If your children or anyone in your home receives pornography depicting children or your children receive sexually explicit images, report the imagery to ICAC and keep it open on your computer until an investigator comes to see it. Do not copy or download it. In the meantime you can use your computer for other things or turn your monitor off.

Children should also be warned about virus creators, identity thieves, and spammers. These cyber-criminals are increasingly targeting users of social networking sites in an effort to steal their personal data and the passwords to their accounts. One of the tactics they use to gain access to this information involves sending social networking users e-mails that appear to come from online “friends.” For example, some Facebook users have been receiving e-mails from “friends” that claim to contain a video of them. When they click on it they download a virus that goes through their hard drives and installs malware (malicious software). The virus, known as Koobface, then sends itself to all the “friends” on the victim's Facebook profile. A new version of the virus also is affecting users of MySpace and other social networking sites. Cyber-criminals are tricking social networking users into downloading malware by creating fake profiles of friends, celebrities, and others. Security experts say that such attacks, which became widespread in 2008, are increasingly successful because more and more people are becoming comfortable with putting all kinds of personal information about themselves on social networking sites. They warn that users need to be very careful about what information they post because it can be used to steal their identities.

To avoid these problems on social networking sites or anywhere in the Internet, you should warn your children to:

- Not to click on any links, videos, programs, etc. provided in messages, even if a “friend” encourages you to click on them.
- Not to visit any sites that promise ways of bypassing parental controls or blocks set up by schools to prevent users from visiting sites such as Facebook. These sites are full of scams, malware, and offers for other services.
- Get program updates directly from the company’s website, not through a provided link.
- Customize your personal privacy settings so only your “friends” have access to the information you post.
- Read your network’s privacy policy regularly to stay informed on how it uses or discloses your information.
- Scan your computer regularly with an anti-virus program. Make sure the program is kept up to date, preferably automatically.
- Be suspicious of anyone, even a “friend,” who asks for money over the Internet.
- Don’t open or forward chain letters. Just delete them. They are nuisances at best and scams at worst. And many contain viruses or spyware.
- Watch out for “free” stuff. Don’t download anything unless it’s from a trusted source and it’s been scanned with security software. “Free” stuff can hide malware.
- Don’t respond to pop-ups. Delete them immediately.
- Avoid all online games and quizzes that request personal information, including your e-mail address. Providing this information can put your identity at risk.

Additional information on Internet dangers to children and how to keep children safe online is available on numerous websites. These include the following:

- San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force at [www.sdillac.org](http://www.sdillac.org)
- National Cyber Security Alliance at [www.staysafeonline.org](http://www.staysafeonline.org)
- San Diego County District Attorney at [www.sdcda.org](http://www.sdcda.org). See the Protecting Children Online page under Protecting the Community.
- GetNetWise at [www.GetNetWise.org](http://www.GetNetWise.org)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation at [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov). See A Parent’s Guide to Internet Safety under Cyber Issues on the Reports and Publications page.
- NCMEC at [www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org). See resources for parents and guardians.
- NET CETERA: Chatting with Kids about Being Online at [www.onguardonline.gov](http://www.onguardonline.gov)