

# The Interactive Contract

## The Parry's Cliff Notes Version... ...A Parental Cheat Sheet

Okay...I know only a lawyer would write up a safe surfing contract, but I am a lawyer, so what the heck. You don't need to write a contract up, but you should know why I included these rules in my form contract, and you should set clear rules and make sure your kids know what they are and what is and is not allowed. Use this as a checklist....but set your own rules. I've included some key discussion points and questions for your kids at the end of this contract. Good luck! And Safe Surfing!

### The Safe-Surfing Contract My Agreement About Using the Internet

I want to use the Internet. I know that there are certain rules about what I should do online. I agree to follow these rules and my parents agree to help me follow these rules: [this lays out that both the children/teens and the parents are bound, and let's the kids know that the Internet comes with restrictions...]

1. I will not give my name, address, telephone number, school, or my parents' names, addresses, or telephone numbers, or anything else that would help anyone find me off-line (like the name of my sports team) to anyone I meet on the computer. [How many of us tell our children not to talk to strangers or accept candy from strangers? All of us! How many teach our children not to say we're not at home when anyone calls our house? Most of us! Yet...how many of us teach our children how dangerous little bits of information can be when strung together? Think about how you might be able to find someone off-line based on bits of information. Something as simple as a Cub Scouts uniform in a picture may give away your town and state. The rest is easy to find. What about the name of their sports team? Think about this scenario, and let me know when you can find this girl off-line Here we go:

Girl's profile or web site tells you she is in seventh grade, lives in New York and plays softball for her school team. In chatroom discussions the kids are talking about sports. Here's what transpires:

**Girlsoftballplayer:** I want to pitch next year. We have the best pitching record in our league. But this year I'm shortstop.

**Anotherperson1:** Kewl! I play shortstop too. My uniform number is 12. And that's my lucky number, cause I'm 12 years old! What's yours?

**Girlsoftballplayer:** My lucky number is 15, but my uniform number is 23.

**Anotherperson2:** How good is your team? Mine stinks!

**Anotherperson1:** My team is pretty good. We play the league's champs next week. I hope we win!

**Girlsoftballplayer:**We played the state champs last week and lost. We play them again in six weeks. Hopefully we beat them next time.

BINGO!!!!!! You can find her! All you need is to find out the state champs from seventh grade in New York for last year. Then check their schedule and see who they played last week and make sure it's the same team they play in six weeks. If the girl playing shortstop wears a number 23, you found her, and know her name. If she has a listed telephone number, you can search for her address and telephone number online at [whitepages.com](http://whitepages.com), or [switchboard.com](http://switchboard.com) or a thousand of other sites. You can even click a button after you get the search results and Mapquest will print you out a map to her house!

Did she give away anything that anyone would have thought was private? No! But this is how it works. Talk about how people can be found. We have a computer game that will be available at our site soon that show you just how easy it is! Practice answers to direct questions they may face like, "what is your REAL name?" You never want them unprepared. A confused child may give away this information because they don't know what else to say. I advise children to make up a fake online name, the one if you knew what you were doing you would have given them when they were born. (That's the first of a zillion mistakes our children think we made.

Heck, I should have been a "Susan." Do you know how hard it is going through grammar school as a "Parry?" My teenangels think that by asking kids to make up a fake name I am teaching them to lie. You'll have to figure that one out, but help them know what to do if the question they are not supposed to answer comes up...)

2. I understand that some people online pretend to be someone else. Sometimes they pretend to be kids, when they're really grown-ups. I will tell my parents about people I meet online. I will also tell my parents before I answer any e-mails or instant messages I get from, or send e-mail or instant messages to, new people I meet online. [Would you let your children visit another child without knowing who they are? Of course not! What about talking to a stranger on the phone for 2 hours. Never! Why is this any different online? Get to know their online friends just as you would their off-line ones. Teach them while it may be okay for slightly older children and teens to chat with strangers online, that no matter how often they chat, or how nice they seem they are still STRANGERS!]

3. I will not buy or order anything online or give out any credit card information without asking my parents. [You'd be amazed how many kids order things on their parents' credit cards and never think their parents would notice. You would also be amazed how often their parents DON'T notice. One boy ordered a gun online and charged it to his father's credit card. I have no idea what he thought would happen when the bill arrived. Storing your credit card information on your computer isn't a good idea. It can be too tempting when the latest N\*Sync CD comes out! Check your credit card statements monthly and make sure your children aren't borrowing a little from you that month.]

4. I will not fill out any form online that asks me for any information about myself or my family without asking my parents first. This includes forms for contests or registering at a site. I'll also check to see if the sites have a privacy policy and if they promise to keep my private information private. If they don't promise to keep my private information private, I won't give them any private information. (I will talk to my parents about what "private information" is.) [There is a new law that requires web sites to get your okay before they collect information from your children online or allow them to use chatrooms, instant messaging or e-mail (interactive kinds of technology). It only applies to children 12 and under, and only commercial web sites. There are a few exceptions and ways for you to give your okay, or refuse to give them your okay, but essentially if they know they are dealing with a child, or it's a child-oriented site, the law applies. This was designed to protect your children from unscrupulous marketing practices and online predators. But, take an active interest in the sites they need your consent for. It's important that you give your consent to the good sites, or your children will visit the ones that don't care about your consent. Cyberangels and Wired Kids have a long list of recommended sites. If you're not sure whether you can trust a site, ask us, and we'll help you decide. Also, as boring as they may be, read the privacy policy on each site. Even the ones you use. If they don't have one, or you don't like their terms, shop and surf elsewhere. Also remember that unless they really need your Aunt Matilda's middle name and your blood-type, you can always lie! You have no idea how many "Bill Gates," Britney Spears" and George Washingtons" there are registered at most children's sites. This is one trick you may want to learn from your children! Also, let them know what information is okay to share and what isn't.

5. I will not get into arguments or fights online. If someone tries to start an argument or fight with me, I won't answer him or her and will tell my parents. [Online fights escalate quickly into real brawls. Often cyberstalking and death threats result from a simple online argument. The rules of courtesy that we hope our children practice off-line don't always follow online and children find themselves doing things and saying things they would never dream of saying or doing off-line. Also, remind them that ISPs, especially AOL will terminate their (and therefore YOUR) account if they violate the rules. That usually works. Everyone knows someone who lost their AOL account because of "notify AOL." (Ask your kids what that means.)]

6. If I see something I do not like or that makes me uncomfortable or that I know my parents don't want me to see, I will click on the "Back" button or log off. [Let them know what they can and can't look at online. Many crackpot sites and hate sites may appear to be real ones. Teach them to read online information critically. Evaluate the information. If it sounds too good to be true, or doesn't mesh with what they know to be true, it's probably misinformation and hype. Your school librarians and public librarians and teachers will help them with media literacy issues. Make sure they take their common sense into cyberspace with them.

Also warn them that things will pop up when least expected, and if they do, you won't blame them. An innocent search for Pokemon or Britney Spears can land them at the front page of a porn site. This is where your

promise not to overreact comes in handy. Also, most children (and adults for that matter) receive unwanted junk e-mail (called SPAM, with due apologies to Hormel ). A majority of these Spammed messages contain adult links and often pretend to be messages from someone you know. If this happens, blame the Spammers, not your children. Most children delete them without bothering to open them (Really!) Talk to them about junk e-mails. If your children are receiving them (you can learn why at our frequently asked question "What is SPAM?"), talk to your ISP and see if they provide or recommend a SPAM filter, and talk to your Congressional representatives, letting them know how unhappy you are about SPAM.]

7. If I see people doing things or saying things to other kids online I know they're not supposed to do or say, I'll tell my parents. [Sometimes the only information we have about missing children is from their friends. They know what has been going on and what their friends are doing that is risky. Teach your children to come to you, and trust you with this information. Your child may be able to save another child from being hurt. Protecting others isn't tattling.]

8. I won't keep online secrets from my parents. [This is how the bad guys operate. They start by getting your children to keep secrets from you. The best way to avoid this is to start with good and frequent communication. If that stops, you need to be careful. Remember that the worst enemy of a child predator is a good parent/child relationship. Be your child's first line of defense. And if you overreact, no child will trust you. Don't make that mistake. Remember that you are contractually bound! ]

9. If someone sends me any pictures, links to sites I know I shouldn't be going to, or any e-mail or instant messaging using bad language, I will tell my parents. [This may be the first sign that someone is targeting your child. If you suspect that, report it. Do not respond or threaten the person sending the offensive information. You should approach your local law enforcement agency first, then the FBI if you still need assistance. You can also contact [Cyberangels.org](http://Cyberangels.org) or [Cyberlawenforcement.org](http://Cyberlawenforcement.org), and we will help. In most cases, when a predator is arrested and their computer seized, law enforcement officials find that it holds e-mails from parents threatening to turn the predator in for attempting to contact their child. If they had reported them, instead of just threatening to, another child may be safe today. Remember that. You should learn how SPAM works, though. Just because your child is receiving junk e-mail with pornographic links doesn't mean they are being targeted. Check out our frequently asked questions section on What is SPAM?"]

10. If someone asks me to do something I am not supposed to do, I will tell my parents. [This only works if you promise not to overreact and rip the computer from the wall. Also, your children need to know what they are allowed to do and when they should alert you that something is wrong. That's what this is all about. Practice talking about some scenarios. What should your child do or not do? Forearm your children!]

11. I will not call anyone I met online unless my parents say it's okay. (Even then I will block caller ID by pressing \*57 on my phone.) [Online friendships move to off-line phone friendships quickly. After all, even our tech-savvy children prefer talking to typing. But before this happens, make sure you know about it. Surprises such as a \$500 long distance bill or finding out that the cute fifteen year old your child is chatting to is really 47 are unwelcome! Block caller ID as well, so that you won't receive calls back unless you want to. (You should know that many parents have been fooled into believing that a 47 year old man was really the sixteen year old they were posing as, even after speaking to them. Expectations are a funny thing. If you are expecting a sixteen year old, you may hear a sixteen year old.)]

12. I will never meet in person anyone I met online, unless my parents say it's okay and they are with me. [This one caused me endless nights' sleep. I used to say never meet anyone off-line you only know online. But if a young teen is pining over a cute fifteen year old boy, neither you nor I are going to be able to keep them apart. If they insist on meeting them, go with your teen. But make sure you follow the safe meeting tips we have here at [Wired Kids](http://WiredKids.com) and [Cyberangels](http://Cyberangels.com). Know that if you tell them that they can't go, they will be going without you. Try to remember what it was like when you were a young teen. ]

13. I will never send anything to anyone I met online, unless my parents say it's okay. [Generally this involves photos, videos and other items that can identify your child to someone else, off-line These may end up in the wrong hands, as well and be altered by attaching your child's or teen's head to naked bodies on porn sites, or used to harass them online. I advise the teens and children to tell the person asking for a picture that they don't have a scanner. It often works. If the person persists, you may not have another child or teen on the other side.]

14. If anyone I met online sends me anything, I will tell my parents. [Gifts, such as a Polaroid or digital camera are common when a predator is involved. If expensive gifts arrive, that's another strong warning. Also, note that your child will have had to give out their address for something to be sent to them. That violates the terms of this agreement! If you are going to allow your child to receive something from someone else, get a PO Box and don't give out your home address, or have it sent to your place of work.]

15. I will not use something I found online and pretend it's mine. [Stealing is stealing, whether its online or off-line With programs like Napster and other peer-to-peer sharing programs, like Morpheous, children forget that someone owns just about everything. They are getting used to taking what they find online without paying for it, and in many cases pretending it is theirs. When we were younger, and decided to "borrow" someone else's term paper, we at least had to rewrite or retype it. Now, plagiarizing what is already online saves them the bother of having to retype it. Talk to them about respecting the rights of others. It's a good time to share your values, and teach them ethical behavior in life, not just online!]

16. I won't say bad things about people online, and I will practice good Netiquette. [Netiquette is online etiquette, Instead of Miss Emily Post, we have Ms. Parry's Rules of Netiquette. (You can find those here at the site.) But if your children remember the golden rule and to treat others with respect online and off-line, and to never do anything online that they wouldn't do off-line, they will be just fine! There are some special rules like not typing in all upper-case (it's considered shouting online) and others you can read at the Ms. Parry's Rules of Netiquette. Also Disney's Surfswellisland.com site has some great netiquette tips! If your children get the questions right, Goofy doesn't get clobbered with coconuts or get pinched by sand crabs. Note that most children get them wrong on purpose. It's too much fun watching Goofy getting conked on the head and grabbed by the crabs.]

17. I won't use bad language online or threaten anyone, even if I'm only kidding. [They may know that they are only kidding, but the recipient doesn't. An FBI agent I know complained of having to serve a search warrant on an 11-year-old. With children killing children these days, online threats are taken very seriously. Teach them to include smileys, like if they are kidding. We have a long list at Cyberangels and Wired Kids. They are called emoticons, and acronyms (shorthand for commonly used terms online).]

18. I know that my parents want to make sure I'm safe online, and I will listen to them when they ask me not to do something. [If you want to have them trust you, earn their trust. Don't overreact, spend some time learning about what they do online.]

19. I will help teach my parents more about computers and the Internet. [Heck they are smarter than most computer experts, and cost far less. They also are the only ones who do house calls. What a wonderful way to get to know your child. Let them teach you something for once. They will amaze you. Just remember that those of us who are age-challenged may have to take notes.]

20. I will practice safe computing, and check for viruses whenever I borrow a disk from someone or download something or open any attachment, even from someone I know. [Get a good anti-virus software, and update it regularly (at least weekly). The new viruses make it appear that the e-mail or instant message containing the virus came form someone we know. Run all attachments and downloads through your software before installing them. Practice safe computing!]

21. I will tell my parents when something bad happens online, because they promise not to overreact if something bad happens online. And I will remember that it's not my fault if others do bad things online! [If I need to explain this to you, you skipped the important messages above. It's all about parenting. It's all about trust. They may know more than you do about technology, but you are still the parent!]

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I promise to follow these rules.  
(signed by child/teen)

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I promise to help my child follow these rules and not to overreact

if my child tells me about bad things that happen in cyberspace. [mean it if you say it! ]  
(signed by parent)

## Meeting Online Friends in Real Life

Before we start, you need to recognize that the only way to stay truly safe in meeting someone off-line is not to do it, period! Never do it or allow your children to do it. I intentionally placed this chapter after the cyberpredator chapter, hoping that you might still be frightened enough never to allow your teenagers to meet someone off-line

Even teenagers recognize the risks involved. The problems result from the conflicts between raging hormones and romanticism, and being smart and careful. They often think “this couldn’t happen to me” and take unnecessary risks gambling that their luck will hold. Not every off-line meeting ends in disaster, but many end in disappointment and enough end in disaster that our teenagers should be cautioned not to take needless risks.

When teenagers worked with me to write online safety tips for younger kids, they recommended that no one under the age of eleven meet anyone in real life they met online, even with a parent present. While they wavered a bit when teenagers were involved, they understood the seriousness of the situation.

But teens will be teens, and that means their main purpose in life is breaking the rules and taking risks. Here are some basic rules if you are either going to allow your teenagers to meet online friends in real life, or you know that they will ignore our no-meeting rule and do it anyway. (One of my elite Teenangels group is the off-line chaperone for her girlfriend when she regularly meets online friends off-line. The worst, so far, they have encountered is someone masquerading as a jock when he clearly wasn’t- instead he had multiple body piercings and was “kinda weird.”).

But think about it, and make sure your teenagers think about it seriously, too. This is where the bad stuff happens.

Remember my motto? Information doesn’t hurt people, people hurt people. This is the only real way people can hurt your children . . . by meeting them in person.

Now, I know many of your teenagers will ignore me, and although I am not condoning ignoring the firm rule of never doing it, I’ll point out some tips that will help limit the risks . . . not eliminate them! (These are good tips for parents who might consider cyberdating too- but note that there are more rules that apply there. Check out the [www.cyberangels.org](http://www.cyberangels.org) site for cyberdating safety tips for adults.)

Meeting cyberfriends (especially if there is any romantic interest, and there usually is when teenagers are involved) is a bit different from meeting anyone else for the first time. When you first meet a cyber-friend in person, off-line, you feel as though you know them- the normal first-meeting precautions are often tossed to the wind. You know their favorite actors, rock groups, sports teams, authors, and foods. What your children need to realize is that while they think they know these things about the other person, they really only know what they have been told- and that the other person may not have been telling them the truth. They don’t really know the other person. So teach your teenager to treat their online friend as a stranger, using all the normal precautions they should use with any stranger.

In addition, people aren’t always truthful online, even when they don’t actively want to deceive you. You can be anyone you want to be online- shy teens can be outgoing, heavy ones can be thin, scholars can be athletes, and athletes can be scholars. Adult women tend to lie about their weight or age, while men tend to lie about their income, level of baldness, and athletic condition. Teenagers pretend to be older than they are, and sometimes even pretend to be of the other gender. The one rule you can count on is that everyone lies a little. (And some lie a lot!) So keep an open mind and prepare your teenagers for the likely shock and surprise of reality versus fantasy.

That photo they sent your teenager may be old or heavily doctored up with Photoshop. It could be from when they used to be a teenager, when they had better skin or were thinner, or it could be of someone else altogether. The best thing about the Internet is also the most dangerous: a person's personality can show through-what you are inside gets a chance to shine without getting overpowered by what you are outside. But the cues we use in life, such as body language, dress, personal hygiene, tone of voice-the way we judge the truth of statements-are lost in cyberspace.

Please don't let your teens rush into any off-line meeting. As I said, I recommend that they never do it at all. If you are going to let them ignore me, make sure they use their head and are careful! Here are some tips you should heed and warn your teens about:

### **1. Don't believe everything you read online**

You can be anything or anyone you want to be online. I keep trying to get people to believe that I'm tall, blonde, and gorgeous. (So far, no takers.) That cute brunette sixteen-year-old guy may not be cute, may not be sixteen, and most important, may not be a guy. There is no truth-in-advertising protection when you meet someone you know online, off-line

### **2. Take your time, don't rush into things, and get a little help from your friends**

Take your time to try to get to know the person online first. Everyone can put their best cyberfoot forward in the first few e-mails. Being consistent is tougher. Make sure you keep the old e-mails to compare the information they give you. In one e-mail, he might tell you that he works for the GAP, and in another that he is a student, so make sure you check out these inconsistencies.

He could be taking night classes, or he could just as easily be lying. Trust your gut. When you start feeling uncomfortable with what you're hearing, you're usually right. Don't be rushed, and don't rush the other person. Let the relationship develop online until you are comfortable with each other. Take your time.

Ask your friends to look over the e-mail. Sometimes they aren't blinded by the same rose-colored glasses you might be. What you considered cute might ring differently to them. It helps you keep perspective.

Especially when we've been hurt before or are lonely, we think that we have now figured out a checklist for a perfect relationship (which may be the exact opposite of our last relationship). When we see these points in the other person, we forget to explore the other points. Life is more than satisfying a "how tall are they, where do they live (are they 'geographically desirable'), what clothing do they wear, what music do they listen to, what sports do they play, and whether they like MTV, Jewel, and romantic movies . . ." checklist. Values, experience, and all the emotional baggage we carry (yup-even teenagers carry emotional baggage- just think back . . . ) need to be explored, and this takes time. Give it the time it deserves.

### **3. Honesty is the best policy**

Okay, maybe you aren't as thin, tall, or athletic as you want to be. Maybe you haven't been at the head of your class. Maybe you are afraid that if you tell them the truth about you, no one will want you.

But, if you start out lying, you'll be caught eventually. If you want to shave a few pounds off, or use a doctored picture, okay. But confess once you think the person might be more than a casual e-mail. Don't bait and switch-that's the surest way to end a friendship or budding romance.

### **4. Start with a phone call**

You should move from e-mail and chatting online to a phone call before you meet off-line in person. The safest way to do this is by using a public phone. Set up a time for the call, and give the other person the telephone number of the public phone. Once you are comfortable enough, you can share real phone numbers.

I recommend that you get their number and call, but make sure you use your call block option (usually \*67). That way you can block their access to your telephone number.

Lots of personal information can be gotten online once someone has your telephone number. Reverse searches are possible, too; these provide your address and name if they input your telephone number.

But if the other person reads this, too, and knows not to give out their number either, someone will have to be the first one giving out their telephone number. So if you have to, give out your number, but only if you have caller ID. If things go sour, you can always block their calls. It also lets you know what their number really is. If they block your caller ID, don't accept their calls.

### **5. When you meet, do it with a couple of friends or, preferably, your parent (I can dream, can't I?) and only in a very public place**

The first time you meet in person, bring a couple of friends. (I would much prefer that they bring a parent, too, but I'm being realistic here.) Meet in a mall or fast-food restaurant not very close to your home. Plan for a short first-time get-together- coffee or a soda. Tell them in advance that it will just be for a few minutes, so they will understand. If they insist on meeting you alone, don't go.

Then compare what this person told you about themselves online. Does it match reality? If not, forget them-remember the honesty thing. (I'm not talking about a few extra pounds, or a worse complexion.) Ask your friends what they think; this is one time that they might have a better sense of the person, since you are blinded by online propaganda. Use your head. No matter how lonely you are, you're still safe.

### **6. Tell a friend and leave a note**

Make sure someone else knows whom you are meeting, where you are going, and when you're coming back (someone other than the person you take with you). Store all the e-mails, and let your friends know where to find them. If anything goes wrong, they will be the source of information on how to locate the person you have been chatting with.

A mother I met shared her tips about this: When her adult son meets an adult woman (at least he hopes she is a woman) he met online, off-line, he puts all the details in an envelope and gives it to his mother, in case anything bad happens. That way, if all goes right, his privacy is preserved. And if it doesn't, she can quickly access the information she needs to report it.

### **7. Never leave with them or go home with them**

If the meeting goes on longer than you planned, make sure you stay in a public place. Public is the operative word here. Remember when your mother told you never to get in a car with a stranger? Don't get in a car with them or follow them home or to a private place of any kind. Also, contact the people who know the details of your meeting, and let them know of any change in your plans. If this is a date, you should still take it slow, even if you're not used to taking dating slow-this is different. Also, don't leave at the same time, and make sure you are not followed home. The best way to do this is not to go home directly. Go to a friend's house or another public place instead.

### **8. Report any attacks or threats to law enforcement**

If things go wrong, whether you followed my rules or not, don't be embarrassed to go to the police. Give them all the facts. If you don't report them, in all likelihood they will do it again. You are allowed to say "no" and have it respected. If anything goes wrong, remember it's not your fault!

### **9. Don't be embarrassed to insist on following these rules**

Your safety is the most important thing. Anyone who cares about you will respect you for being careful. It's like defensive driving: Even if you are the best driver in the whole wide world, there are all those other drivers out there to worry about. This is defensive cyberfriendship. And it's just plain smart!

### **10. Don't be provocative online-it provokes many things you may not be prepared to handle**

Try not to make your online comments or profiles provocative. Cyberflirtation escalates quickly-and it's almost



got it! ;-)

**Timbo5:** Great! Congrats. Gotta go. Mom's calling me for dinner. See ya tomorrow.

**Shortstopteen:** k. CU L8R ["Okay....see you later," for you newbies out there.]

Tiffany chatted with a few other friends for a while and then logged off. Timbo5 was her favorite online friend. He was fourteen, just like Tiffany, and lived in Virginia. He played baseball, too. He played first base, though. He also wanted to play for the major leagues when he grew up. Tiffany hoped that by the time she grew up, women could play for the major leagues, too.

Although she didn't even know his real name, and he didn't know hers, she knew lots about him. He was much more fun than most of the other kids in the chatroom. He knew everything about baseball. She wished he lived closer to New Jersey, so they could go to Yankee games together.

And Timbo5 really cared about her, always warning her not to tell anyone her real name or address. It was nice that he cared, but Tiffany already knew not to share any personal information. Her parents and her teachers had all discussed this with her and the other kids. She was very careful never to give out anything that could help anyone find her in "rl" (real life, off-line).

Her mother called her, and she ran down the stairs to dinner to share the good news with her family about the playoffs and her lucky catch.

The following week, Tiffany had practice every day. Somehow things didn't feel right, though. It was as though someone was following her. She kept looking over her shoulder when she walked home, and it was starting to get dark earlier. She found herself picking up her pace, and was winded when she arrived home. She unlocked the door quickly and looked around. Although she didn't see anyone, she was very uncomfortable. She didn't even shout "Hello" to her Mom, and just ran up the stairs to her computer.

**Shortstopteen:** Hi Timbo . . .

**Timbo5:** Hi Shortstop, what's up?

**Shortstopteen:** I was nervous today. Must be the pre-playoff excitement. Thought someone was watching me on the way home.

**Timbo5:** Did you see anyone following you?

**Shortstopteen:** Nope. But it felt weird. Like I could feel someone watching me . . . but no one was there anytime I looked.

**Timbo5:** Are your parents home?

**Shortstopteen:** Yup. It's okay. Probably just pre-game jitters. ;-)

**Timbo5:** You haven't told anyone online where you live or your real name or anything, have you?

**Shortstopteen:** You know that I'm very careful. You lecture me all the time! You're starting to sound like my parents! ;->

**Timbo5:** oh!oh! Gotta stop that!

**Shortstopteen:** LOL [laughing out loud]

**Timbo5:** ROFLOL . . . [rolling on the floor laughing out loud]

Tiffany forgot her fear and chatted until dinner was ready. The next day was the big game. Tiffany played really well, hit the only home run, and the team won, advancing to the finals. When she got home that night, she logged on and told Timbo5 about her big win, and complained that they had practice the next day. When Tiffany was warming up, tossing the baseball around on the field at the next day's practice, she looked up at the stands and saw a man sitting there looking right at her. She felt the same fear and discomfort she had when walking home a few nights before. She glanced up at him from time to time, but soon forgot him when practice got going. When practice was over, she remembered the man, but looked up to find him gone. She took a deep breath and started the long walk home.

This time, she was sure someone was following her. She kept looking around, and although she didn't see anyone, she was really scared. She took the long way home, because it was busier and better lit, but wished she were already safe and sound in her home. Once, when she looked in the storefront window, she saw a reflection of someone she thought might be the man in the stands, but when she turned around no one was there. But she was sure she had recognized him. At one point she even heard footsteps.

As she neared her block, she broke into a run. It sounded like the footsteps were speeding up, too, and she ran even faster. She unlocked the door and slammed it shut. Her mother, alarmed at the noise, walked into the living room from the kitchen. "Are you okay, Tiff?" she asked. "You look upset." Tiffany caught her breath, and said that she was just in a rush to get home.

When she took the stairs this time, she took them slowly, thinking while she climbed. She really had to talk to Timbo5. She was very scared. But when she logged on, Timbo5 wasn't in the chatroom. She sent him an instant message, and saw that he wasn't even online. Just when she really needed him the most!

The doorbell rang. She heard her mother get it and heard a male voice. A few minutes later, her mother and father called her down. She was still trying to figure out how to tell her parents about her fear without alarming them. She was so afraid that they might take her computer away if they thought she might have given out personal-contact information online. When she climbed down the stairs, her thoughts were elsewhere.

Her parents were seated in the living room with a man-the one whom she had seen in the bleachers. She started to worry. "Tiffany, please sit down. This is Sergeant Thompson of the state police." Tiffany looked at her parents' worried faces.

"Hi, Shortstopteen:," said the sergeant. Tiffany couldn't figure out how he knew her chatroom name. "I'm Timbo5," he said. She couldn't believe her ears. Timbo5? This police officer? Timbo5 was only fourteen, and lived in Virginia.

"Let me explain," he said, and proceeded to tell her that he worked undercover in chatrooms trying to protect children from online predators. "But how did you find me?" Tiffany asked. "I never gave you my real name or any real information."

"Even though you never gave me your name, per se, you gave me lots of other information about you. You gave me the name of the team you were playing this week for the playoffs. It was simple enough for me to check and see which state had baseball champs from Randolph Township named the Tiggers. Then I called the Randolph Township school and found out which team they were playing this week in the play-offs. Then I checked the roster in the local paper and got your name as the team shortstop and confirmed that it was you by checking your name as the home run hitter at the final season game. I looked up all the Petersons online in the White Pages directory, and found your address and telephone number. I called your parents and told them what I had planned."

Tiffany was stunned. How could this forty-year-old man sitting in front of her be her friend Timbo5? Besides, the police officer said he was from New Jersey, too. How could that be when Timbo5 was from Virginia?

She knew who Timbo5 was because he told her things about himself. And she didn't take his word for it, she checked him out. He had an online profile she checked that said he loved baseball, was fourteen years old, and lived in Virginia. That was written proof! But Tiffany started paying attention when Sergeant Thompson explained how he had written his profile just to help convince her of his false identity. He then explained that he had followed her home, after spotting her on the field, as the blonde shortstop. "I did this to help you," he said. "A friend of mine had a fourteen-year-old daughter who gave out too much information to a stranger who showed up at her house one day and killed her. Since then I've vowed to teach others how to make sure they don't give away information without realizing it."

Tiffany now realized that she had fallen into the same trap as Sergeant Thompson's friend's daughter. She thought about all the little details she had given away that allowed her to be found in real life. Sergeant Thompson looked at her. "Will you help me help other kids and teach them what you just learned?" Tiffany gave her word that she would. And she and her parents were overwhelmed with gratitude that Tiffany had avoided tragedy and learned this lesson the "easy" way.

# The Basic Rules-Quick and Simple

Some basic rules for you to remember as a parent-your parental cheat sheet. (I've designed it to fit neatly on your inner wrist in case you want to talk to your kids and have problems remembering these rules. That's the big difference between being a parent and being a high school student: You can use a "cheat sheet" as a parent and not be suspended.)

- Make sure your child doesn't spend an inordinate amount of time on the computer.
- People, not computers, should be their friends and companions.
- Keep the computer in the family room, kitchen, or living room, not in your child's bedroom.
- Learn enough about computers so you can enjoy them with your kids.
- Watch your children when they're online and see where they go.
- Make sure that your children feel comfortable coming to you with questions.
- Keep kids out of chatrooms or IRCs unless they are monitored.
- Encourage discussions between you and your child about what they enjoy online.
- Help them find a balance between computing and other activities.
- Get to know their "online friends" just as you get to know all of their real-life friends.
- Warn them that people may not be what they seem to be.
- Teach them to exercise their judgment in cyberspace, just as they do off-line
- Don't overreact when they come to you with problems they encounter online. You want to encourage them to tell you things, not scare them off.
- Discuss these rules, get your children to agree to adhere to them, and post them near the computer as a reminder.
- Remember to monitor their compliance with these rules, especially when it comes to the amount of time your children spend on the computer.

## Points to Consider in Setting Your Own Rules and Drafting Your Own Safe-Surfing Contract

I have given you some basic rules to help you come up with your own family safe-surfing contract, and you should feel free to change them to suit both your and your child's needs. In the list below, I've tried to sum up the most important tips to remember. Consider it your cheat sheet in advising your child. (It also fits neatly on your inner wrist: That way you can keep the parental cheat sheet on one wrist and this on the other-a matched set!)

- People on the Internet can pretend to be anyone or anything they want. Don't let them fool you.
- Don't use bad language.
- Don't get into arguments with or answer anyone who uses bad language.
- Don't answer if someone says something that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you feel is "bad."
- If someone is doing something that makes you uncomfortable, you should tell your parents right away. But don't turn off the computer or log out of the area where the person is doing something "bad." (The adult can then find the person and report his activities as a terms of service violation.)
- Use a fun name when you're online, not your real name (not even your real first name and not a provocative name like "teen girl").
- Don't spend all your time online.
- Never give your real name, address, ICQ number, school, parents' names, friends' names, where your parents work, your sports team names, your scout troop information, anyone else's e-mail address, or any telephone number to anyone.
- If anyone asks you for this information, don't answer them, and tell your parents or the adult in charge of the chatroom. (If you are using a special secret cyberspace name, you can give them that instead.)
- Never talk to anyone you met online over the phone, send them anything, or accept anything from them or

agree to meet with them unless your parents agree and/or are with you.

- Never show your picture online or send it to someone without your parents' consent.
- Don't put any real information in your online service profile without your parents' consent. Don't say things in your profile that you know will make others angry or that will provoke "bad" communications.
- There are places on the Internet where people talk about and show pictures of things we don't agree with. If you see something like that, click the Back button and tell your parents.
- Don't do anything online that costs money unless your parents say it's okay.
- Never give out your password, even to your best friend.
- Never give out your or your parents' credit card information.
- Don't copy other people's material and pretend that it's yours.
- Don't rely on strangers you meet in a chatroom for important advice.

## **Formalizing the Rules**

I've included a sample safe-surfing contract in Appendix 3. I'll tell you what I tell my legal clients when they ask me if they should use a form agreement. If it fits all your needs, use it. Otherwise, you should use it as a guide in writing your own.

Sometimes parents think I'm being overly legalistic in suggesting drafting a written policy. It's not a legally enforceable contract, it's a guide. If you discuss these issues with your kids, you never have to write one out. You want to make sure that you've really discussed each point, that they understand what you've discussed, and that they have agreed to follow the rules. Once you do that . . . there's no need for a written policy.

Kids are the ones who like them, though-it makes them feel part of the decision-making. But remember that the issue here is communication, not your ability to sue your children for breach of contract.

## **Ms. Parry's Rules for Correct Internet Behavior**

We all teach our children how to behave properly. Although we rarely see it ourselves, once in a while we hear from other families that our children are actually polite. Online manners are no different. There are rules for proper behavior in cyberspace called "Netiquette."

And it's a good thing we have them, because people do outrageous things when they get behind a keyboard-things they would ordinarily never do in real space. Somehow, whether it's the fact that they think they're anonymous, or that the Net brings out the daredevil in us, I don't know. But please don't let your kids fall into the trap of saying and doing things online that they know shouldn't be said or done.

We need to teach them that they can be traced, and that nothing is ever truly anonymous online. Everything they say should be said with the understanding that others will know, sooner or later, that they said it. There are some other basic pointers you should know and teach your children if you want them to be good "netizens":

- Get to know the rules before you say or do anything on-line. Some discussion boards and chatrooms have special rules about what you can and can't say or do. Since some people can be very critical to those who break the rules, knowing the rules first may save you and your child needless heartache.
- Think before you type. Make sure that what you say is appropriate, won't result in flaming, and puts your best cyberfoot forward. The one thing you can count on is that everything you say online can come back to haunt you.
- Don't be critical of others, especially newbies, even if they break the rules. If you need to help or correct someone, do it by e-mail, not in a public forum like a chatroom or newsgroup. Remember, everyone was a newbie once.
- Don't waste others' time or bandwidth. Don't send chain e-mail, pass cyber rumors or hoaxes, or SPAM others (posting a message in many places at once). Don't carbon copy (cc:) people just because you can. Copy only those who need to read something.

- Protect the privacy of others. Don't openly list someone's e-mail address in a large cc: without their permission. Instead, use a bcc: to protect their privacy. Don't use anyone's password without their permission.
- Don't take things without paying for them, like shareware. These things are bad Netiquette, too:
- Using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS-it's considered shouting and is hard on the eyes.
- Flaming-inciting or provoking an argument.
- Posting false or rude information about someone else.
- Sending a large attachment without asking if it's okay first.
- Referring to someone by their real name in a chatroom or channel.
- Sending e-mail to people you don't know, advertising something. (It's another kind of SPAM.)
- Talking about something off-topic in a special topic chatroom.
- Not waiting your turn or following the chatroom or channel rules in a special online event.

These are all no-nos. Remember that just because you're hiding out behind a computer monitor, you aren't exempt from correct and thoughtful communications.

## Emoticons: Laughter in Cyberspace

Some of you may be seasoned veterans, but many of you are new to both online services and the Internet. To help, I put together a list of emoti-cons (sometimes called "smileys"), which are shortcut terms that allow the reader to understand subtleties in your online communications.

This is just a quick sampling, but you can find many more at [www.familyguidebook.com](http://www.familyguidebook.com) and at [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com).

Since people cannot communicate sarcasm, teasing, humor, or other emotions online (after all, typing is typing), people who use the Internet have developed emotion indicators. They are called "smileys" or emoticons.

<g> a grin  
 <G> a big grin  
 :- ) a smiley face  
 :-> very smiley face  
 ;- ) or ;-> a wink  
 :-( a frown  
 :-P sticking out your tongue  
 @----->---- a cyber rose  
 <):-) a clown  
 (:-0 someone who is surprised  
 : D happy and loud  
 :ox shhh! It's a secret!

If you don't understand why these emoticons mean what I say they do, turn the book sideways. (If you still don't get it, turn it the other sideways. <G>)

## **Balance: When Do You Know if They've Had Enough?**

One of the biggest challenges parents face is making sure their children don't become consumed with computers and websurfing. We all recognize the benefits of teaching our children to use computers, but we also need to recognize the risks associated with letting them spend every waking hour hiding behind a computer monitor.

A cyber-pen pal is a poor substitute for a real live friend. And fingers limbered by typing are poor substitutes for those limbered by throwing a baseball or playing Chopin on the piano. Clouds in the sky look different from clouds on a Windows 95 screensaver. Any parent faced with kids who enjoy video games-and the impossible task of trying to distract them from the video screen-understands how addictive interactivity can be. Yet knowing how to use and enjoy computers and cyberspace is an important part of our children's development.

### **How can we help our kids maintain a healthy balance?**

Set rules about how often, and for how long, your children can be online. My Teenangels group says that we need to be flexible about setting time limits, since school assignments may require more online research on some days than others. As a general guideline, we all agreed that limiting their surfing to an hour and a half daily is about right, assuming they don't have a research assignment.

While you should try to teach your children to follow your rules on their own, some software products limit the time, or may even set the hours the computer can be used and the Internet can be accessed. (These products can be used to limit the time spent playing computer games, too.) A few parents who are particularly savvy about this try to drop by their children's favorite chatrooms from their work Internet access to see if their kids are online. It's the tech equivalent of knocking on their door to remind them to get off the phone and do their homework.

### **Yes, Virginia . . . There Is a Good Side to the Internet!**

Just as you were ready to give up, having "had it up to here!" with the bad stuff online and the dark side of the Internet . . . tah-dah! Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the good side of the Internet!

A few years ago, there weren't many options available to parents who wanted to limit their children's exposure to non-child appropriate content. You could filter, or limit their surfing to rated or preapproved sites, but these methods were very restrictive. The industry responded to the need parents had identified for quality and fun content for kids. And the more great sites and services we have for kids, the less likely that they will wander off into the kind of content you might find inappropriate. Now we have a wide range of choices of fun and valuable content- and that are safe, too!

There are now many good kids-friendly search engines, hyperlinked good-site lists compiled by teachers, librarians, and community groups (which you can click on to be whisked away to the site), lots of great kids sites for all ages, safe-harbor sites designed for children and preteens (which are safe playgrounds for kids on the Web), and subscription clubs for kids (subscription closed destination sites containing kid-friendly content).

I discuss a few of my favorites here, but make sure you keep checking back at [www.familyguidebook.com](http://www.familyguidebook.com) for new ones as they are released. This is an area of serious growth as companies try to develop quality edutainment (educational/entertainment) content, services, and products. They've finally figured out that providing what parents need and kids want is good business.

# Finding Kid-Friendly Content Filtered Search Engines

There are two different kinds of filtered search engines: those that were designed from the bottom up to be kid-friendly and those that filter search results from major search engines. Most of the largest search engines have a “clean site” search option now, which screens the sites for content appropriate for children and searches only those sites. Anyone who has tried to search for “girl” sites or “toy” sites and found far more than they had expected will appreciate the filtered search engines.

I’ve listed my favorite ones below. We’ve tested all of these and are confident that they have done their homework in prescreening the sites and banner advertisers (those ads that appear at the top of a Web page) to be child-appropriate. If you use another one, I suggest you run it through its paces first.

## Kid-Friendly Search Engines

With these search engines, you are ready for a safe and kid-friendly search as soon as you get to their sites-and no registration is required:

AOL’s NetFind Kids Only  
[www.aol.com/netfind/kids](http://www.aol.com/netfind/kids)

AOL’s NetFind Kids Only searches sites that AOL considers safe for kids. It’s a webwide extension of its well-loved Kids Only section of AOL, available to AOL and all Web users alike.

Ask Jeeves for Kids!  
[www.ajkids.com](http://www.ajkids.com)

Ask Jeeves for Kids! is also an offspring of a very popular search engine, Ask Jeeves. Ask Jeeves for Kids! works differently from other standard search engines, since instead of using Boolean logic (keywords linked together by +’s and -’s), they let you use simple questions. So instead of searching for blue+sky+why, you can search for “why is the sky blue.” It also has a very helpful feature that catches common spelling errors, asking you if you really meant to spell New York “New Yook” (although whenever I search for “Parry Aftab,” they insist that I’m misspelling something). It also shows you what other kids are searching for right now, which gives your child good ideas of what kinds of questions to ask.

DIG  
[www.dig.com](http://www.dig.com)

Disney’s kid-friendly search engine searches only Disney’s web-sites, but there are so many terrific activities, games, and stories at the Disney sites that your kids may not miss the rest of the Web. Of course, I’m a bit prejudiced, but you might want to check out <http://disney.go.com/home/channels/liveevents/today/html/index.html#section5> to read a safety chat I did with Mr. Toad.

KidsClick  
<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick>

KidsClick is a search engine created just for kids by the librarians at the Ramapo Catskill Library System in New York. (I had the honor of speaking to this talented group last year about online safety.) They started with the American Library Association’s Great Site list and worked their way up from there. In addition to its being a wonderful resource for children and educators everywhere, the creators of this great search engine are warm, caring, and talented people.

Yahooligans!  
[www.yahooligans.com](http://www.yahooligans.com)

Yahooligans! was the first child-friendly search engine, launched several years ago. Yahooligans! is a special service offered by Yahoo!, one of the most popular search engines/directories, and has many wonderful categories of sites and services for kids. But it’s more than a miniaturized version of Yahoo!-it has lots of great

activities for kids, too, like their downloader page, which has sounds, videos, and pictures. Kids love to use them in their reports and on their web sites Yahoo!igans! also has a random feature that lets your children surf random kid-friendly sites.

## **Regular Search Engines with Kid-Friendly Options**

With these search engines, you first have to go to the regular site, then select or register for the safe-surfing filters they offer.

Family Filter from Altavista

<http://image.altavista.com/cgi-bin/globalff>

Altavista's Family Filter allows parents to filter out all images, videos, and audio search results. It also allows parents to filter all searches, including searches of web sites. The filter features can be set search by search or password-protected so parents can set their children's search options one time for whenever they search on Altavista.

SearchGuard from Lycos

<http://my.lycos.com/safetynet/safetynet.asp>

SearchGuard is a safe-surfing option available at the Lycos site that filters search results for adult, hate, and racist content. Registered users can easily turn SearchGuard on and off by entering their password.

SearchGuard also has an optional feature that allows parents to block access to chat, e-mail, and message boards. Approved-Site Lists

Too often we focus on the bad stuff. We lecture our children on where they shouldn't be going online. We tell them what not to do. But we need to think back a bit, to when they were toddlers. Every time we said "No!" we needed to give them a "Yes!" alternative, or they would be right back where we told them not to be. These approved site lists are a great place to start.

American Library Association

The American Library Association has several terrific good-site lists. When it comes to the Internet, no one understands it as well or can guide children better than librarians and library media specialists.

ALA's Cool Sites for Kids

[http://www.ala.org/alsc/children\\_links.html](http://www.ala.org/alsc/children_links.html)

ALA's 700+ Great Sites: Amazing, Spectacular,

Mysterious, Wonderful Web Sites for Kids and the Adults Who Care About Them

<http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/>

ALA's Internet Guide for Teens

<http://ala8.ala.org/teenhoopla/links.html>

Cyberangels

I know I'm biased, but Cyberangels' volunteer group of moms, Cyberangels' CyberMoms, has reviewed hundreds of valuable and safe sites for kids in many categories, like science and homework helpers, giving them our seal of approval. We reviewed them also to make sure they post privacy policies, and have helped many great sites develop safe-surfing and privacy policies in order to qualify for our site list. Interested in helping? Our CAST (Cyberangels Approved Site Team) director can always use more caring help. (Send her an e-mail at [CAST@cyberangels.org](mailto:CAST@cyberangels.org) or [Cybermoms@cyberangels.org](mailto:Cybermoms@cyberangels.org).) Cyberangels' Cybermoms' Approved-Site List <http://www.cyberangels.org/cybermoms/links.htm>