

# *Online Dangers: The Threat of the Net*

Introduction: While the internet may be a tremendous tool for information and communication, it has become a dangerous place for teens. Christian families must recognize the risks and put safeguards in place to protect themselves from the threat of the net.

- I. The Importance of Christian Commitment to Decency and Morality
  - A. Recognize the potential tendency toward the flesh nature. Denial breeds disaster.
  - B. Remain faithful to a Biblical paradigm of media participation. Several key principles apply:
    1. Psalm 101:3—“I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.”
    2. Psalm 1:1—“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”
    3. Ephesians 5:11—“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”
    4. Romans 16:19—“...but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.”
    5. Ephesians 4:29—“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying...”
    6. I Thessalonians 5:22—“Abstain from all appearance of evil.”
- II. Specific Online Dangers
  - A. Exposure to Ungodly Material
    1. Internet pornography—
      - a. Pornography is ubiquitous on the internet. Frequently hard core porn is just a few clicks away from legitimate pages.
      - b. Pornographers now send sample porn pages to e-mail addresses. Without a filter, opening e-mail is risky.
      - c. The America’s attitude toward pornography is changing. The media presents pornography as humorous, often referencing it in jokes and one-liners.
      - d. Pornography is more of a temptation because it is readily available without the embarrassment factor associated with purchasing magazines in a drugstore.
    2. Ungodly philosophies
      - a. The internet is awash with weird and ungodly philosophies posted by the heathen who seek to promote their agenda.
      - b. Such sites include Wicca and witchcraft sites, sites promoting suicide, sites promoting drug use, and sites touting all manner of sexual perversion.
  - B. Fellowship with Ungodly People
    1. **Chatrooms**—Open forums where people from anywhere in the world can converse with each other by typing messages. When

in a chatroom, everything you type is displayed for everyone else in the room to see.

- a. Chatrooms allow people to build “relationships” with others at a distance.
- b. Chatrooms are frequented by child molesters and other seedy characters seeking to make contact with teens and children.
- c. Chatroom “friendships” frequently lead to personal contact—often with horrific results

## **2. Instant Messaging**

- a. Similar to a chatroom, but your message instantly appears on the screen of the person to whom you send it.
- b. While “IMing” friends and family may be useful, sending messages to strangers is as dangerous as chatting.

## **3. Blogs**

- a. A “blog” is a site designed as a contact point for individuals to post detailed information about themselves or their opinions.
- b. Many teens establish a blog profile and account which includes both personal and contact information. Frequently teens upload pictures of themselves to their blog page.
- c. Many teens incorporate an “online journal” as part of their blog page, further encouraging strangers to read their personal thoughts.
- d. Blogs have become somewhat of a status symbol among middle and high school students.

### **BEWARE OF THE BLOGS**

1. Several blog sites have become popular with teens. These include the following:
  - MySpace.com
  - LiveJournal.com
  - Xanga.com
  - Facebook.com
  - Friendster.com
2. Recently, 8 under-aged girls in Connecticut were assaulted by men they met on MySpace.com.
3. Focus on the Family’s Daniel Weiss says, “Parents need to understand that anytime they let their kid go online alone it’s as if they allowed a stranger into their child’s bedroom and the stranger closed the door.”
4. The so-called “good things” about blogging are overrated.
  - a. Increases writing skills—In reality blogging promotes poor writing and grammar usage by avoiding the standards of formal writing.
  - b. Self-expression—Internet relationships are no substitute for friendships. Too much self-expression leads to exposure. Keeping a private paper and ink journal is every bit as effective.

## **Internet Guidelines for Christian Families**

1. Use a filtered internet service such as IntegrityOnline or MayberryUSA. Faith Baptist Church of Avon uses IntegrityOnline.
2. Children and teens should NOT have internet access from a computer in their bedroom. There are absolutely no exceptions to this rule. Your “trust” of your child will prove to be his/her demise. Don’t be a fool.
3. The home computer with internet access should be positioned in a very open place in the home. It should not be stationed behind closed doors or where the approach of a parent could be easily detected.
4. The internet access computer should be under the complete control of the parents. Only parents should have access to the internet computer via a password known only to the parents. This will require the teen to have the parents log on for every internet session. Obviously, teens should NOT have access to the internet in the absence of their parents. Again, don’t be a fool.
5. Parents must insist that their children never erase the history record associated with the internet options. (See attached instructions for checking the history.) An erased record indicates a problem and should result in severe punishment.
6. NetNanny and other software offer additional parental controls. Many internet service providers offer parental controls as well. Parents should be familiar with these and should use them to their advantage.
7. Simply do not allow your children to use chatrooms or blogs of any kind. Make it clear that they are to post no personal information anywhere on the web, nor are they to communicate with anyone they don’t know in person.
8. No member of the family (including parents) should use the internet late at night while others are asleep.
9. Teens with their own e-mail accounts must agree to delete their e-mail to the recycle bin without emptying the bin. Parents should occasionally read through some of the deleted items. Yes, this is an invasion of privacy. Don’t be a fool—you pay the mortgage and internet bill—it’s your right AND responsibility!
10. Limit time spent on the internet. Some people are becoming addicted to the internet! NetNanny allows parents to set/track time their children spend on the net. The internet is a tool, not a hobby/obsession!
11. Provide your children with healthy “live” interaction with friends and family. Do not allow them to become socially oriented toward the computer, cell phone, etc.

Maintain a healthy relationship with your kids or someone else will seek to establish a potentially unhealthy one!