Keeping your family safe online

Internet filters can help you keep out undesirable content from your children's internet access

The World Wide Web is surely one of the greatest educational tools ever created, with a wealth of ideas and information easily accessible to anyone. As children increasingly use it as a knowledge resource, parents face a unique challenge: How do you help your children harness the learning opportunities on the internet while shielding them from the dangers that lurk within?

WHAT RISKS DO CHILDREN FACE ONLINE?

When considering the different measures to protect children online, it helps to be aware of the risks they may face online. Among other risks, children may log on to sites that contain inappropriate content such as pornography, explicit music and videos, violence and gambling. Often, children stumble onto these sites unsuspectingly when they are doing a search or when they click on ad banners.

Children may also innocently reveal personal information such as their phone number or home address to strangers on the internet, or even form relationships with undesirable characters they meet online. They may also become addicted to online games, videos or social media.

HOW DO I PROTECT MY CHILDREN ONLINE?

One effective way to protect children online is to use internet filters, which assess and restrict content delivered over the Internet. They are useful tools for safeguarding children from harmful online material.

Internet filters can be broadly categorised as search engine filters, and web and mobile filters – which are available from developers and internet service providers (ISP).

Search engine filters

Popular search engines such as Google, Yahoo and YouTube can filter out explicit content from your children's search results. To minimise chances of your children stumbling onto content that may be disturbing to them, such as extreme violence, horror and sexually explicit content, do turn on the strict filtering setting on these sites. The search results will be filtered to show only what is acceptable. You will have to activate the SafeSearch settings on every browser or device that your children use. *(See box below for more)*

Web and mobile filters

Web and mobile filters come in the forms of software and safe mobile browsers that you can download and install. You can get them online from well-known software developers and internet security companies, as well as from your ISP, which can bundle your internet subscription package with its filtering package.

Filtering software can do more than simply block specific websites. They can also help you monitor and track your child's internet use, if you so wish. These features are collectively known as parental controls. Here are some features that you can activate, depending on the type of filter or package you select.

- Block objectionable websites, videos and music;
- Filter according to categories and age-based settings;
- Create "black lists" of unsuitable sites and "white lists" of approved sites;
- Get logs that report all activities, including websites visited;
- Set time limits or specific time windows for your children's internet access;
- Track words and phrases that your children have used for searches;
- Enable safe search on search engines;
- Block contact with strangers;
- Monitor your children's use of social networking sites; and
- Get notifications if your children attempt to access inappropriate websites

Internet filters with parental controls direct from developers/software companies
There are many types of filtering software. Popular choices include K9 Web Protection, Net Nanny, Mobicip, Norton Family and McAfee Family Protection.

K9, Net Nanny and Mobicip also come as safe browsers for Apple and Android mobile devices, while Norton Family and McAfee Family Protection are available as apps for mobile devices.

Comprehensive Internet Security
For comprehensive security beyond parental controls, check out internet security suites from McAfee, Norton and Bitdefender. Besides parental control options, internet security suite packages also include antivirus, antispyware, antispam, firewall and phishing protection. If you are looking for all-round coverage, consider investing in an internet security suite.

Filters from internet service providers
You can also sign up for a security package or internet filter provided by your ISP. SingTel, StarHub and M1 in Singapore offer third-party security suites, which include parental controls. The Info-communications Media Development Authority has mandated that the ISPs inform customers of these packages at the point of broadband or phone subscription or renewal. *(See box below for more)*

PEACE OF MIND
Do note that no internet filter is 100 per cent accurate and fool-proof. Internet filters are also not absolute substitutes for parental supervision. That said, they are still effective in blocking most undesirable content. With the help of internet filters, you can enjoy a little peace of mind, but remember, you should still make it a point to talk to your children about their internet experiences every now and then.

How to turn on search engine filters

To turn on strict filtering in Google Search, go to Search Settings and check the box for "Filter explicit results". This will block search results for explicit text, images, videos as well as results that might link to the explicit content. Click "Save" to save your settings. You can also lock your settings with a password by using SafeSearch Look. For mobile devices, turn on SafeSearch in Settings your Google Search app.

For Yahoo SafeSearch, go to Yahoo Search and click "More" and then "Preferences". Choose the strict option, which filters out all adult content, and click "Save". You can also lock Yahoo SafeSearch.

How to turn on YouTube Safety Mode

Scroll to the bottom of any YouTube page. Choose "On" in the drop-down menu of the Safety section to enable Safety Mode. You can lock the Safety Mode by signing in to your YouTube account.

Filters from internet service providers

Contact your ISP for more details about their filters.

- SingTel's Family Protection feature for broadband internet and Mobile Internet Filter for mobile devices keep out undesirable sites and use age-appropriate settings.
- StarHub offers SafeSurf Online for broadband internet and SafeSurf on Mobile for mobile internet; both filters are aimed at blocking inappropriate websites.
- M1's Mobile Security for Android devices has parental controls that include age-based restrictions for objectionable websites.