

Protecting your child from strangers online

Simple surfing and instant messaging with friends are common activities for children — and generally safe, if you've discussed some rules of use with them. Chatting with strangers, however, may be a different story. Although there's no way to know the actual risk, the police cautions that children whose internet activity isn't monitored are most at risk for being exploited.

Urge your child to introduce you to any new "friends" they meet online and to tell you if they ever feel uncomfortable about conversations that take place. Most important, talk to them about the dangers of interacting with strangers online and remind them that people online often don't tell the truth. We recommend that parents maintain access to young childrens' online accounts and randomly check their email.

Warn children never to give out their personal information (phone number, name, address, school name, etc.), agree to meet in-person anyone they meet in a chat room, or share any photographs.

Remember, regardless of whether your child is talking to a stranger in the street or a stranger online, or if it is a trusted online community or trusted "real life" community, they carry the same risks and the same safety rules apply.