

## Back to School Internet Safety Tips for Parents

*Online predators & iPredators are preparing for children & teens around the country to once again return to school and look to the Internet for their academic and social networking needs. The beginning of a new school year guarantees a significant increase in online usage, and most important to online predators, patterned and predictable times of online usage. A forensic psychologist has compiled internet safety tips for busy parents.*



Now that children will be back to class and have schoolwork, their time spent online significantly increases along with patterned and predictable times they access the Internet. [Online predators](#), [cyberbullies](#) and [cyberstalkers](#) prepare themselves for what they hope will be another year of unsuspecting groups of vulnerable, discouraged and high risk taking children. In addition to online adult predators, children and teens who are cyberbullies and cyberstalkers will fill [cyberspace](#) looking to taunt and harass their peers.

For proactive parents who plan to practice & institute Internet safety, I've compiled my quick checklist & tips to help ensure all your bases are covered. The list provided is a quick injection of [internet safety](#) awareness. I hope my checklist helps insulate your child from abuse and leads to a safe and enjoyable school year.

**iPredator™:** *A child or adult who engages in psychological and/or physical victimization of others motivated by; peer acceptance, malice, spite and criminal or deviant drives using digital communications technology, telecommunications or mobile devices.*

**1. FBI's Parents Internet Safety Guide:** Visit the FBI's website and thoroughly read their excellent overview called "*A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety.*" Before moving on to step two, make sure you've written down and have easy access to your local police department's phone numbers. Link: <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide>.

**2. Dr. Michael Nuccitelli's iPredator™ Introduction:** Visit my Scribd account and read my article titled "*Online Predators and the New iPredator.*" Its two years of research compressed into 16 pages of reader friendly information covering online predators, cyberbullies, cyberstalkers and cybercriminals. Link: [www.scribd.com/iPredator](http://www.scribd.com/iPredator)

**3. Offline Distress Dictates Online Response (ODDOR):** If you've already read my article, you'll immediately recognize this concept. A child is particularly prone to engage in [high-risk behaviors online](#) if he/she is feeling discouraged, angry or distressed. Do not move on to the next step until you're confident your child is feeling encouraged, stable or being monitored by a professional or trusted loved one. Of the hundreds of articles and studies I've researched, a child's psychological status highly correlates with their online behaviors. If there are ongoing conflicts at home, recent traumatic events or any other anxiety and/or distressing events in the home, it's very important to monitor your child's online usage.

Just as important as your child's home environment is your child's school environment. Given you can't be with your child when they are at school, it's important to maintain regular contacts with school officials regarding your child's attitudes and behaviors on school grounds. Although academics in school are a priority, your child's demeanor with teachers and fellow students speaks to their psychological and emotional welfare. Research has directly linked a child's school and home environments to their online activities.

**4. Personal Information Prevention Planning:** The number one and most important issue to address with your child is the amount of personal information they share online. Getting your child to practice minimal release of their name, contact information, photographs and passwords to their social sites is highly desirable. If I were to make an approximation of the several hundred articles I've read on internet safety and cyber security, 99% percent of

them list restriction of [sharing personal information online](#) being vital to internet safety.

It can't be emphasized enough, but children who disclose their contact information, personal information and images freely are at a much higher risk of being targeted by an iPredator. The goal as an Internet safety proactive parent is not to totally restrict or forbade your child from sharing personal information, but to educate them on being highly cautious and consistently aware when, why and what they disclose to others.



***\*\*\*Research has proven that the vast majority of taunting, abuse, cybercrime and sexual assault that children endure is most likely coming from their peers and/or known adults rather than unknown adult online sexual predators.\*\*\****

**5. Peers, Parents & the [PTA](#):** Given you can't monitor your child's online activities when they're not in your presence, its paramount to access those people who will be. Your child's friends, their friend's parents and their school are the three prime social targets you should be in regular contact with. The goal is to initiate and sustain open communication with your child's friends and their parents regarding internet safety expectations. Just because you have restricted your child from certain online activities doesn't mean your child's friends are restricted or their parents have online house rules.

Using your capacity to be cordial and polite, maintain a consistent open dialogue with your child's social circles. Regarding your child's [school](#) environment, it's important to have an open dialogue with school officials and/or the PTA to ensure internet safety and cyber security mechanisms are in place. Before the school year begins, contact school officials and investigate their internet safety measures, educational emphasis on Internet security and procedures for cyberbullying, cyberstalking, [sexting](#), mobile device usage during school hours and cybercrime related to adolescent life.

**6. Know Your Child's Social Networking Sites:** As of 2011, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [MySpace](#), [Tagged](#) and [MyYearbook](#) are among the most popular social networking sites children and teens look to for their cyber identity, digital reputation and online social relationships. Thanks to the Internet and digital technology, many children and teens look to the digital universe for their developmental milestones and self-esteem.

Unfortunately, iPredators also choose these sites as their most favored websites spending most of their free time trolling for unsuspecting, naïve, discouraged or high-risk children. Given the 400-500 popular global social sites and growing, it's of the utmost importance to spend time with your child discussing [digital citizenship](#) and cautious online communications.

**7. [Smartphones](#) & [Cellphones](#) Need More Smarts:** A smartphone is a wireless phone with voice, messaging, scheduling, e-mail and Internet capabilities. Research and marketing trend experts' project sales of smartphones will exceed personal computers by the end of 2012. In 2012, 500 million smartphones are projected to be sold. Despite the benefits of mobile digital technology, children and teens are becoming more dependent on their mobile phones more than ever before.

Recent studies have suggested children who are depressed, anxious and/or discouraged spend more time interacting with their mobile devices and less time being typical children. It's vital that as a parent you monitor the amount of time your child spends on their mobile phone and contact your phone carrier about additional security features that they may offer. If a cellphone or smartphone is in your child's future, be sure to have the store you purchase the phone from install or set up all the necessary safety and filtering devices and software.

**8. Weekly Digital Dinner:** The term may sound absurd, but making it a habit to discuss the family's digital habits at least once weekly during dinner is both proactive and helpful. In today's dual economy and single parent households, dinnertime is one of the few weekly events that are consistent, predictable and

social. As just mentioned, it's the *family's* digital habits and interactions discussed and not the child's weekly interrogation. By all family members discussing their internet activities, children will feel more comfortable to disclose information relevant to internet safety and their online activities.

During these weekly discussions, always make sure to discuss the importance of being highly cautious of [sharing personal information online](#). It's also highly recommended to discuss positive, beneficial aspects and stories about online usage to make the weekly discussions fair and balanced. Prior to every weekly digital dinner discussion, it's highly recommended to announce to all involved that any information shared regarding online activities will not cause punishment, retribution or embarrassment. This weekly announcement may be redundant, but it reaffirms to your children that they won't be punished for their mistakes or irresponsible behaviors.



**9. House Rules Include Online Rules:** Just as children have curfews, responsibilities and chores, they also should have online rules & regulations. Based on my conclusory findings, there are no universal online rules that can be applied to children of all ages. The three that I feel are relevant to children of all ages and at all times are; cautious disclosure of sharing personal information online, never meeting someone they've met online without supervision and never sharing their passwords to anyone other than their parents.

Other than this triad, parents should establish house [online rules](#) based on their child's age, developmental maturity, knowledge and persistence of internet safety. In addition to the trifecta of obvious rules I mention, research has led me to conclude that nighttime online usage and time patterns should be considered when negotiating or designing online rules. Research on iPredators have concluded that they prefer to troll for their victims during evening hours and at time intervals when the child or children they're targeting typically log on to the internet. The iPredator learns online log on habits and sets their online schedule to match the child they're targeting.

**10. Emphasize the Child's Developmental Achilles Heel:** Part of being an effective parent is being a creative parent. All children, starting anywhere from 7-10 years of age, develop what's commonly called [self-awareness](#). Once self-awareness begins, the child begins to worry how their peers perceive them. As they continue physical & psychological maturation, this fixation on self-image, popularity and peer acceptance becomes their primary driving forces until they've finished college.

Knowing your child will be experiencing these highly dramatic & emotionally charged events, you can use them to your advantage regarding their online activities. Instead of telling your child "NO," educate them on how images and information we share online can last for years. Just as rumors of friends spread, online rumors and embarrassing images can go "[viral](#)." Directly connecting your child's developmental fears to their online behaviors of disclosing information is an effective and natural internet safety technique. When done in a kind, respectful way, this method for teaching your child to be cautious of sharing personal information can be highly effective.

**11. Complete Parental Control? No Such Thing:** With the trends of today's online community and technological advancements, insulating your child from iPredators and keeping them safe online has ever been more challenging. Ranging from home computers to mobile digital technology, children have access and exposed to multiple forms of online activities and devices. Even if you use content blockers, filters, trackers or parental control software, children have ways to get around these if their heart and minds are set on engaging in high-risk online activities. If, like me, you're not a digital technology expert, it's best to rely on the professionals.

Prior to purchasing security software or hardware, contact a trusted source. In every community, someone either your friends or a colleague knows is a digital technology expert. Given the market is flooded with hundreds of products, services and methods, contact your local expert source and rely on their

recommendations. Secondly, contact your phone and internet service provider for what they recommend to protect your child.

I've provided you with a short, but thorough and effective internet safety tips checklist to help reduce the chances your child becomes a target of online predators, cyberbullies and/or cyberstalkers. The Internet, digital technology and mobile devices will continue to influence all children as their peers, advertising and cultural trends place pressure upon them to have the latest smartphones and access to the most popular [social networking sites](#).

If it hasn't happened already, I guarantee your child will approach you on numerous occasions pleading for the newest digital technology and/or wanting to join the growing number of social sites that will be in fashion in the future. The key to being a proactive parent is making the effort to learn about iPredators and Internet safety. The most important internet safety advice to protect your child can be summed up in one statement as follows:

***An iPredator will always move on to other victims when a parent takes the time to be proactive, preventative and protective.***



Dr. Michael Nuccitelli is a New York State licensed psychologist and certified forensic consultant. He completed his doctoral degree in clinical psychology in 1994 from the [Adler School of Professional Psychology](#) in Chicago, Illinois. In 1997, Dr. Nuccitelli became a licensed psychologist in New York State (License # 013009.) In 2006, he received the Certified Forensic Consultant designation from the [American College of Forensic Examiners](#) (Identification # 103110.)

In June 2011, Dr. Nuccitelli established Modern Forensics Inc. offering the private & public sectors educational, consultation and investigation services regarding internet predators, cybercrime & digital criminal psychology. By **October 2011**, Dr. Nuccitelli and his colleagues will launch their website, [www.ModernForensics.com](http://www.ModernForensics.com), which will be their first step in combatting iPredator.

Dr. Nuccitelli continues to investigate and expand his construct he has designed and trademarked called [iPredator™](#). He presently consults with the [American College of Forensic Examiners](#) to become the resource and hub for the public seeking information on digital/computer forensics, internet predators, cyber security and training programs for the professional sector and law enforcement.

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