## PARENT PLUS

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

# Guidelines for making children's online experience safer

The Internet is a valuable resource that enables families to keep up on current events, research information, listen to music, and e-mail friends and family. However, this helpful tool also can be a danger to children and teenagers.

Identity theft, predators, "cyberbullies," and offensive or inappropriate material is readily found on the Web and can be harmful to children who have not learned how to avoid these dangers. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends parents take the following steps to make their child's online experience safer:

- Surf the Web with your children, especially those under the age of 10.
- Put the computer in a central area like the den or kitchen to make it easier to monitor online activities. Computers should never be placed in a room where a door can be closed or a parent excluded.
- Use tracking software to monitor what Web sites children are visiting.
- Visit sites that children and teenagers go to like MySpace, Club Penguin and Facebook and understand how they work.
- Limit screen time to no more than two hours a day, which includes computer usage, television watching and video game playing. The less children are online, the lower the risk of them coming across dangerous material.

Parents also should set rules and guidelines for how their children are allowed to use the Internet such as:

- Never give out personal information, including your name, address, phone number, age, race, school name or location.
- Never share passwords, even with friends.
- Never meet an online friend in person, unless a parent says it's OK and comes along.
- Never respond to messages that make you feel uncomfortable or hurt your feelings.

Encourage your children to talk to you about any messages that are mean or make them feel uncomfortable.

— David Ma