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ALA American Library Association

Education and the Involvement of Caring Adults Key to Protecting Children Online

The American Library Association (ALA) and its 67,000 members worldwide, believes that education and guidance provided by caring adults, rather than tools or laws blocking access, is the key to children's lifelong safe use of the Internet.

Our goal as librarians is to help people of all ages make the most of the Internet and become information literate - to be able to access information efficiently and effectively, evaluate information critically and competently, and use information accurately and creatively. While the voluntary use of technology tools by families can assist in protecting children, such technologies cannot teach critical reasoning skills to children, help children develop effective coping skills, or foster an ethic of responsible use of the Internet. Parents, librarians, and educators working together can teach children the skills they need to navigate this source of essential information.

To help librarians and parents achieve this goal, ALA provides a host of resources about safe and wise use of the Internet, all available on its website. *Great Web Sites for Kids* (www.ala.org/greatsites) contains a collection of links to Web sites for fun and learning compiled by children's librarians. *Especially for Young People and Their Parents* (<http://tinyurl.com/qb3n8>), *Tips for Parents from the Great Web Sites folks* (<http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/greatwebsites/greatsitesbrochure.pdf>) and *Online Resources for Parents and Children* (<http://tinyurl.com/8stud>) all provide ideas, facts, and resources to parents and kids alike. In addition, ALA is a charter member and longtime supporter of *GetNetWise.org*, widely recognized as the premiere resource for parents looking for tools to help them make informed decisions about their and their family's use of the Internet.

The Internet is an important information resource. It is changing how we live, learn, work and interact with one another. New Internet-based applications (also known as social networking technologies) for collaboration, business and learning are becoming increasingly important, and young people must be prepared to thrive in a work atmosphere where meetings take place online and where online networks are essential communication tools. If today's children are to succeed, they must learn information literacy skills that enable them to use fast-changing technologies.

As the National Research Council pointed out in its 2002 report, *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet*, "Swimming pools can be dangerous for children. To protect them, one can install locks, put up fences, and deploy pool alarms. All these measures are helpful, but by far the most important thing that one can do for one's children is to teach them to swim." Similarly, the more children and parents know about the Internet and Internet safety, the better equipped they will be to protect themselves and enjoy their time online.

ALA strongly encourages local libraries to adopt and implement Internet use policies that protect public access to information and promote a positive online experience.