

Instant message works by allowing you to maintain a list of people you wish to interact with. You can send messages to people on your “buddy list” if they are online. Sending a message opens a small window in which you can chat directly with your friend. Text messaging has also become 24/7 as cell phones also allow one to text a message to others.

However, the development of instant messaging has resulted in associated issues including: cyber harassment, malicious code, and unauthorized information disclosure.

So what can you do to keep safe from the above dangers? Use these protection tips!

## Instant Messaging Protection Tips

Protection begins with youth understanding the potential dangers of instant messaging. By understanding and acknowledging these dangers, you can take the steps needed to be more cautious. As a family discuss the following:

Set up rules for IM. Make sure all rules are understood. By having rules that are clear and understood, children are more likely to follow them anywhere they may have unrestricted and unmonitored access to IM, not just at home or at school.

### Set limits on use of IM:

Set rules that work best with your parenting style. Suggestions include:

- NO IM during homework time.
- NO IM late at night—when the potential for chatting with complete strangers goes up.
- Set a time limit for use of IM.

### Review the IM profile and Screen name(s) of each family member.

- Make sure the profile does not contain personal information.
- Make sure there is no picture on the profile.
- Ensure the profile does not link to a personal Web site.
- Check the IM screen name to ensure it is not similar to the real name or other personal information. Also check to make it isn't sexual in nature.

## Cell Phone Safety

Cell phone IM's are unfortunately an easy way for predators and bullies to affect their victims.

- One option is to block instant text messaging capabilities on cell phones.
- Check phone logs for text messages from anyone you are unfamiliar with.

### In addition to rules, make sure to do the following:

1. Discuss IM safety issues with the child. Learn from your children – when appropriate, let them teach you about what they know about instant messaging.
2. Teach the child good netiquette.
3. Inform the child not to respond to flames—or hateful/obscene messages.
4. Keep track of the child's IM member number, screen name, and password.
5. Make sure screen names or IM numbers are not given out to “strangers.”

Remind the child that people met online are still strangers and should not be added to buddy lists. That great friend met in a chat room might really be a cyber predator.

6. Carefully monitor online interactions of younger children and keep track of online friends. Make sure to keep avenues of communication open.
7. Stay educated—know the current messaging terminology.

**Remember**—when a child meets someone online in a chat or forum and adds that person to their buddy list—that person is forever notified when the child goes online. They will have access to the child in private instant messaging.

By keeping these rules and guidelines in mind, safe text messaging is possible!

Cell phone IM's are unfortunately an easy way for predators and bullies to affect their victims.

An option is to block instant text messaging capabilities on cell phones.

Check phone logs for IM's