



## Consumer Federation of America

Keeping

### Secrets About You... On the Internet!

*A kid's guide to internet privacy*



Everyone knows that you're not supposed to talk to strangers! It's simple: If someone you don't know starts asking questions, you don't say anything ...you leave!

You probably thought that the "no strangers" rule was just for when you are out playing, at school, or shopping. **WRONG!** You also should avoid the strangers that you can't see on the Internet. When you speak up in a chat room, post your ideas on a message board, use a Web site that asks you to fill out a survey, or register to play a game, you may be talking to strangers.

**Who are these strangers?** Some of them are companies that want you to give away personal information about you and your family. Stuff like your address, phone number, or your parent's credit card numbers. To get these details, companies on the Internet may offer you a free prize or the chance to join a club.

**So, what's the problem?** Companies don't give away very many things for free! They are in business to make money from you, the members of your family, and other people. They may want you to buy their products, get you to ask your parents to buy you certain brands, or even sell information about you to others. If you get something for "free" from a company on the Internet, they may be selling you something... or scooping up personal information about you.

The personal information that belongs to you... that you decide when and if to tell about... is your **PRIVACY**.

#### Why Should I Care About Privacy?

**PRIVACY is something that belongs to you.** You don't just let people take things away from you without asking, do you? You don't like it when people trick you into giving away something, right?

**PRIVACY is all about who you are.** It's the things about you that only you, your family, and maybe your grandparents should know about. Like where you live... how old you are... what you buy... that kind of stuff!

Why would anyone want to know about those things? Probably because they want to sell things to you.

Sometimes, they even want to know stuff about your parents. Like how much money they make... what kind

of car they drive... and other personal information. That would be giving away your family's PRIVACY!

Your PRIVACY is yours and it's valuable, so don't just give it away! And it doesn't grow back if you give it away. Once everyone knows about you... you can be pestered by e-mail, telephone calls and unwanted letters and other junk. So, don't talk to strangers on the Internet

## Look Out for Privacy Traps!

Here's what you need to know about PRIVACY when you are on the Web:

- **Don't get tricked** by people who ask for your name, password, phone number, e-mail address, home address, your parents' credit card numbers, or other details that could be used to rip you off! Don't give away information just because your favorite cartoon character is asking you for it!
- **Look out for surveys that ask personal questions.** Make sure you know how the information is going to be used. Remember: Your PRIVACY belongs to you ... and it should never just be given away ... even if a Web site asks for information as a condition for letting you get into a site, join a club, play a game, or move to the next page.
- **Be careful about giving away your PRIVACY for "free gifts"...** it's not going to be worth it. The gift may just be a tricky way of getting you to give more information.
- **You can give away information without even realizing it!** When you are putting something on a message board or joining in a chat room, remember that there are other people out there watching what you write. Don't slip up and mention personal information about yourself or your family!
- **Only give away the smallest amount of your PRIVACY** when it comes to filling out a form for a product upgrade or an e-mail update. Many sites let you pick and choose how much information to give. So, either give nothing ... or as little as possible!
- If you're not sure about whether something is going to be a PRIVACY problem, **ask a grown-up for help.**

## HEY! Older Brothers and Sisters...

Help out your little brother or sister when it comes to PRIVACY. You may already understand the importance of keeping important personal information PRIVATE. Maybe you could take the time to talk to your brother or sister.

If you are surfing on the Web with a younger family member and see that he or she is giving away a lot of personal facts, step in and try to explain why PRIVACY is important. You may even be doing your brother or sister a favor if you let your parents know about the problem. Remember: the PRIVACY that a younger brother or sister may be giving away could be YOURS!

## Have Fun... Protect Your Privacy!

Nobody is saying you can't have a good time when you are surfing the Web. But it's important to recognize that there's a big difference between a Web site that is trying to sell you something and one that you might use for homework, planning a family trip, and so on.

So, be a smart surfer – which means knowing how to have fun without giving up your PRIVACY in the process!

## Who We Are

**Consumer Federation of America (CFA)** is a non-profit association of some 240 pro-consumer groups, with a combined membership of 50 million, that was founded in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through advocacy and education.

**The Center for Media Education (CME)** is a national non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of electronic media, especially on behalf of children and families. Together with CFA, CME has been encouraging implementation of safeguards to protect children's privacy. To learn more, visit: [www.cme.org/cme](http://www.cme.org/cme).

**MCI**, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a leading provider of local-to-global communication services to business, government and residential users.

---

Next:

[The Internet, Privacy, and Your Child](#)  
[What you need to know as a parent](#)