

## Dangerous websites lure kids in: How parents can keep them safe

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As kids spend more time online during the COVID-19 pandemic, they may be visiting websites or viewing videos that are harmful or dangerous.

“It’s very easy for kids to access material that is not intended for young viewers, whether it’s dangerous or mature programming,” said Nusheen Ameenuddin, M.D., M.P.H., M.P.A., FAAP, chair of the Council on Communications and Media at the American Academy of Pediatrics. “They can be exposed to a lot of inflammatory media and sources that claim to be news but are actually propaganda sites that draw kids in with persuasive design and lead them down the rabbit hole to increasingly disturbing misinformation and disinformation.”

It is important for parents to be aware of what their children are doing online. Kids can access anonymous chat rooms and video-chat with strangers on websites and apps such as Omegle. Despite warnings on the sites, kids may not recognize that the person they are chatting with has bad intentions.

“Both parents and children need to be educated about these potential dangers and how they can work to set up privacy settings so that they limit their risk and can extract themselves from situations that don’t feel right,” Dr. Ameenuddin said.

She said the following are signs that a child’s internet use is unhealthy:

- Time spent on the internet takes away from other activities such as school, social connections or exercise.
- A child loses sleep due to internet use.

- A child views or engages in violent media.
- Using the internet affects a child's mood negatively or decreases attention.

Dr. Ameenuddin offered the following advice to parents:

- Be aware of what your kids are doing online. Monitor how much time they spend on the internet and what they are accessing.
- Talk with kids about how they spend their internet time.
- Set ground rules on where the internet can be used and sharing usernames and passwords.
- Recognize that the internet has positive aspects, and teach kids how to navigate it safely.

Families can use the tool at <http://bit.ly/2jVk05m> to make a personalized media use plan.

“The internet can be a powerful and helpful tool for maintaining connection while we are physically distancing to save lives,” Dr. Ameenuddin said. “But it’s very easy to overuse something, even if it was for a good purpose.”

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