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Security At Home

4 ways to help your kids avoid pirating online files

Published: December 14, 2004 | Updated: September 20, 2006

Online piracy is the illegal copying and sharing of copyrighted materials for business or personal use.

This can mean downloading music, movies, games, or software without the permission of the copyright owner as well as sharing music, movies, games, and software copies that you own.

If your kids are pirating digital files, you could be subject to steep fines or other penalties, and they could be exposing your computer to viruses, spyware, and other unwanted software.

Here are four ways to help you prevent your kids from downloading illegally.

1. Warn your children about the risks

Piracy is stealing, plain and simple. The sooner your children understand this, the better.

As you probably already know, sometimes simply telling a child that something is wrong is not enough. It may help to discuss the consequences.

Here are some of the penalties you or your children could be subject to if they illegally download music:

- According to U.S. copyright law, you could be fined up to $30,000 (this fine can vary by country).

- Your home computer and associated files and discs could be confiscated.

- Your child could expose your computer to viruses.

- Your child could expose your computer to spyware or other unwanted software.

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2. Supervise your child's activities on the computer

Once you've explained the risks of piracy to your children, you may still want to keep an eye on their activity. Here are a couple tips that can help:

- Keep the computer in a central room in your house. Specify certain times your child can and cannot use the computer and make sure they understand which activities are acceptable and which are not.

- Although it's not intended as a substitute for parental involvement, a Web service that allows you to keep track of your child's online activities can help you monitor what they do online.

Related Links

- Are your kids exposing you to spyware?
- Online safety tips for kids ages 9-12
- Online safety tips for kids ages 13-17

Try the Windows Vista Family safety settings, included in the newest operating system from Microsoft or Windows Live Family Safety.

Tip: Read 10 things you can teach kids to improve their Internet safety to learn more ways to help keep your kids safe when they go online.

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3. Give your child a limited user account

Windows Vista and Windows XP allows you to create multiple user accounts for your computer. Each user can log on separately and has a unique profile with his or her own Desktop and My Documents folder.

As a parent, you can give yourself an Administrator account, which allows you full control over the computer, and give your children Limited User accounts, which have restricted controls to help kids stay out of trouble.

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4. Show your children how to download legally

There are many different places on the Web where you and your children can download software, movies, games, and music for free or for a low price.

For example, MSN Music offers more than 1 million tracks from major music labels as well as independent, new, and undiscovered artists. Consider giving your children an allowance for music, games, or other software so they won't be tempted to download illegally.

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