



Internet Acceptable Use Policies and Home/School Contracts

Safe use of the Internet is important both to educators and parents. Schools and colleges providing Internet access for students must have systems and stated policies in place to ensure that students use the Internet safely, accessing only suitable information.

An Acceptable Use Policy is a document, signed by students and their parents, guardians or carers, detailing the ways the Internet can and cannot be used. The policy needs to balance the desirability of fully exploiting the vast educational potential of Internet resources for research purposes and communication with safeguards against unacceptable activity. Policies must be reviewed and updated at regular intervals.

An Acceptable Use Policy might include:

- a requirement that all potential users of the Internet understand basic conventions and navigation techniques before going on line and accessing Web pages
- information reminding students that logs are kept of sites visited and why
- an undertaking by users to act responsibly and use the Internet in school for course-related work only
- an undertaking by students to respect copyright and not to plagiarise others' work
- an agreement by users to download pages to personal floppy disks, rather than to the machine's hard disk and an explanation of why such restrictions are necessary
- permission for members of staff to check personal disks for viruses and unsuitable material
- a pledge by users not to attempt to access unsuitable material
- a reminder that the possession of certain types of unsuitable material can lead to prosecution by the police
- information on sanctions for violations of the agreed Acceptable Use Policy.

Procedures for dealing with students who misuse or abuse Internet access need to be determined at the outset. Sanctions should be built into the user guidelines and the likely penalties for violation of the rules outlined.

Minor infringements may be dealt with by enforcing a temporary ban on Internet use or by additional disciplinary action in accordance with existing school or college procedures and policies. For serious violations the police may be involved.

Examples of AUPs can be found on the Internet itself. Some of them can be freely copied and adapted for use in your own school or organisation. However, the British Computer Society and NAACE, in their booklet Promoting the Responsible use of the Internet in Schools, advise each school to set aside time to develop its own policy. They argue that this gives members of staff the opportunity to talk through the issues surrounding use of the Internet in education. This would also mean that policies reflect the local situation.

An example of a parental permission letter and AUP are included at the end of this sheet. The example given is adapted from the National Association for Co-ordinators and Teachers of IT, Acceptable Use Policy, and refers to a school context. The example would work equally well in the college context and the terms used can easily be adapted to reflect this.

At home

Although AUPs are a little formal for home use, parents will want to discuss and agree some sensible points with their children. These can range from keeping in touch with what children are doing with their computers, by asking them to show which sites they have visited and talking about what they learned there, to keeping costs to a minimum by encouraging children to read e-mails and write replies while off line. Talking to children about what is, and what isn't, acceptable use of the Internet will help them to form balanced opinions and set standards that they will apply to any new material they meet. Parents can also encourage children to use computers only as one of a range of out of school activities.





Parents can:

- keep the computer in a communal area of the home, such as a corner of the living room
- take an interest in what children are doing with the computer
- ask children to show how the computer works and explain how they use computers at school
- advise children to take care whenever they are on line reminding them never to give out any personal information about themselves, particularly full names, addresses, phone numbers, or financial information
- remind children never to give anyone else their password
- remind children that people on line may not be who they seem, and no matter how well they feel they know someone, that person is still a stranger
- ensure that children never arrange to meet someone in person that they have made contact with on line
- tell children to delete attachments from strangers without opening them; they may contain viruses that can damage the computer
- ask children to avoid responding if they see any messages which they find upsetting, and to tell them about any such message
- make sure that computing and playing video games are only two activities among many that children enjoy.

Parents need to know:

- what their children are doing
- that computers linked to telephones can quickly run up bills if used excessively or at peak times
- that children with access to credit cards could use them for on-line purchases, if not supervised
- that if they are not computer-literate themselves, they ought to learn at least the basics about computers.

Ready-made policies, user contracts and guidelines can be accessed on the following websites:

Ambleside School

The Ambleside School website includes an example of the school's Internet safety rules.

<http://www.ambleside.schoolzone.co.uk/ambleweb/ourrules.htm>

The British Computer Society Schools Committee and NAACE (National Association of Advisers for Computer Education) BCS and NAACE have produced a document that presents the issues and suggests possible strategies for headteachers, governors, and ICT co-ordinators. Promoting the Responsible Use of the Internet in Schools considers education for responsible use as well as regulation to prevent misuse. There is an emphasis on schools writing their own Internet AUPs. The document can be downloaded as a Microsoft (MS) Word document and can be copied for educational use without further permission.

<http://www.bcs.org.uk/iap.html>

Connecting Schools, Networking People 2000

Contains information on controlling access to undesirable materials on the Internet, including strategies that might be considered, as well as suggested rules for learners' Internet access at home. http://vtc.ngfl.gov.uk/reference/publications/connecting/pdfs/part4_schlsonline.pdf

DisneyOnLine

A safe surfing guide for parents produced by Euro Disney. <http://www.disney.co.uk/disneyline/safesurfing/index.html>

GetNetWise

GetNetWise is a public service provided by the Internet industry to help ensure that families have safe, constructive, and educational or entertaining on-line experiences.

<http://www.getnetwise.org>

Kent Local Education Authority: Kent NGfL Initiative

The Kent NGfL team has produced a template to help schools write their own Internet Acceptable Use Policy. The template presents issues as questions that need to be addressed in the policy with a range of possible responses. There are also examples of responsible use guidelines and letters to parents. The documents can all be downloaded as a series of MS Word files.

<http://www.kented.org.uk/ngfl/policy.html>

The Library Association

The Library Association in collaboration with UK On-Line (UKOLN) has set up an archive of policies and strategies in use in various local libraries.

<http://www.earl.org.uk/policy/local/index.html>

National Association for Co-ordinators and Teachers of IT (ACITT)

This website has useful material, which can be modified, such as a school policy, school procedures, pupil guidelines, and draft parents' permission letter.

<http://www.acitt.org.uk/>

NCH Action for Children

NCH Action for Children has produced information for parents including a set of guidelines for young people's Internet access. Children on the Internet: opportunities and hazards provides general information about the Internet, threats and opportunities, and a list of suggested house rules.

<http://www.nchafc.org.uk/internet/index.html>

NorthChadderton School

This school's AUP has a number of useful components, such as an introduction exploring the AUP's purpose. Both AUPs for teachers and students are reproduced, together with a letter for parents and a pro forma for logging Internet start time before an Internet session.

<http://www.zen.co.uk/home/page/nchadd/aup.htm>

Parents' Information Network (PIN)

PIN has produced advice on the safe use of the Internet for families, which includes a safety code.

<http://www.pin.org.uk>



Internet Permission Letter

Dear Parent

Internet Access For Pupils

As part of the school's ICT programme, we offer pupils supervised access to the Internet, the global network of computers you will have read about and seen on television. Before the school allows students to use the Internet, they must obtain parental permission. Both they and you must sign and return the enclosed form as evidence of your approval and their acceptance of the rules on this matter.

Various projects have proven the educational benefits of Internet access, which will enable pupils to explore thousands of libraries, databases, and bulletin boards. They will also be able to exchange messages with other learners and teachers throughout the world. Although Internet use is supervised in our school, families will wish to be aware that some pupils may find ways to access material that is inaccurate, defamatory, illegal, or potentially offensive to some people. We believe that the benefits to pupils from access to the Internet, in the form of information resources and opportunities for collaboration, exceed any disadvantages. However, as with any other area, parents and guardians of minors are responsible for setting and conveying the standards that their children should follow when using media and information sources. The school therefore supports and respects each family's right to decide whether or not to apply for access.

During school, teachers will guide students towards appropriate material. At home, families bear the same responsibility for guidance as they exercise with other information sources such as television, telephones, films and radio.

I enclose a copy of the Rules for Responsible Internet Use that we operate at this school. We also have a number of leaflets from national bodies that explain issues further and also cover Internet use at home. If you would like copies of these, please contact the school.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of Internet use (or to see a lesson in operation), please telephone me to arrange an appointment.

If you decide to support your child's application for access to the Internet, please complete the enclosed form and return it to me by the end of term.

Yours sincerely