



SafeTeens.Com

Your Privacy: Sometimes It's OK to Keep Secrets

by Lawrence J. Magid
revised April 28, 2004

Whether you're a child, a teen or an adult, you have the right to keep your information private.

Everything about you: your name, your phone number, your age, your passwords and where you live is your private information. Sure, you share it with your family and your school and your friends but you don't have to give that information to just anyone who asks.

When you're on the Internet or an online service you may get an e-mail message, an instant message or come to a web site that asks you for this type of information. If you're a kid, don't provide it unless you first check with your parents. If you're a grownup or an older teen, consider who is asking for that information and how they might use it.

- They might want to use it so they can try to sell you things
- They might send you unwanted e-mail (spam)
- They might actually sell or trade your information with another company
- Or, they might be up to something even more dangerous.

It doesn't matter. Regardless of who asks, you don't have to provide any information that you don't want to share. Of course, they might not let you into their site or maybe you won't be able to play a game or download a program if you don't provide that information, but -- even so -- you shouldn't have to reveal information about yourself if you don't want to.

Also, you should never give out information to any web site that doesn't have a posted privacy policy. Without such a policy you have no idea what they might do with your information. SafeKids.Com has a [privacy policy](#) on its front page.

Remember:

- Never give out your full name, address, phone number to anyone you don't know
- Never give out your Internet password to anyone, even if they say they're from your Internet service (or AOL)
- Never get together with anyone you "meet" online without first checking with your parents. If they agree to the meeting, be sure it's in a public place and that your parents are present.

Spam: Mail You Would Rather Not Get

One way that people invade your privacy is to send you "spam" otherwise known as "unsolicited commercial e-mail" or "junk mail." Whatever you call it, it's mail that you probably would rather not get. Most of this mail is designed to try to get you to buy something or to get you to visit a web site which, often, is a site that contains sexually explicit material. I call this "porno spam" and have written [an article](#) about it.

While some companies use unsolicited e-mail to promote legitimate products, a lot of people use it for "scams" which might be illegal or at least misleading. The Federal Trade Commission has issued a consumer alert called "[12 Scams Most Likely to Arrive Via E-Mail](#)."

In general, it's best not to respond to spam or to follow any links or purchase any products advertised in such mail. If you're a kid tell your parents about it or forward it to your parents and do not take any other action. If you're a grown up, consider forwarding it to the postmaster@whatever.com (whatever is the domain from which it came). If you're an AOL member, go to keyword "Neighborhood Watch" for advice. [Click here](#) for additional ideas and resources for fighting spam.

Also, be on the lookout for Spyware.