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## Tools to Find Family-Friendly Content

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The Internet, is magnificent in its resources for families. Educational resources abound. Kids can easily find help for their homework blues without venturing to the library. Kids can chat with friends from far away for free; friends who, probably just a few years ago, they would never hear from again. And, of course, there's plenty of entertainment to satisfy the whole family once the chores and homework are complete.

However, the Internet can often be an inappropriate place for kids to surf unsupervised. Plenty of content is only appropriate for mature audiences. And, sadly, there are 'bad seeds', those who the children never should talk to.

Help keep your children away from these unsuitable materials. Many search engines and directories have filters and options that only return pages that have passed a particular profanity or "kid-safe" filter. These types of filters vary from web site to web site, but may do one of the following:

- \* Only allow you to search a selection of links picked by the site's editors to be "kid-safe" or free of profanity.
- \* Not show links containing profane words, these being words designated by a site to be profane. This list may not contain all possible profane words or combinations.
- \* Show links containing profane words but block out the profane words with asterisks, dollar signs, or other symbols. Again, the blocked-out words are those the site deems profane and might not include all such words.

Unfortunately, no filter can be 100% accurate.

Here are some search engines that have filters you can enable to try to weed out inappropriate content.

## **AltaVista**

<http://www.altavista.com/>

Above and to the right of the search query box you can find the link labeled “Family Filter”. Turn on this filter to cause AltaVista to filter out inappropriate content. Be sure to read the linked-to FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) before using this filter. Again, no family filter is 100% accurate, but it’s better than nothing.

## **Ask Jeeves For Kids**

<http://www.ajkids.com/>

You can provide kids with their very own search butler. Ask Jeeves for Kids is a special version of the popular Ask Jeeves web site geared towards the younger set. It is used the same way as the normal Ask Jeeves – just ask a question and click the “Ask” button.

You will notice the site design is quite different from the main Ask Jeeves. The page is colorful and includes fonts more suited for kids. There are links to games, study tools, news resources, and message boards. Be sure to check out Jeeves’ hat as you move your mouse over each resource :)

According to the “Parents” page, Ask Jeeves For Kids only searches for “G-Rated” information. However, they do warn that since web sites change, there is no guarantee that adult content cannot slip through the cracks. Still, they do a good job at trying to filter out information, so if you have children surfing the net, you may want to point them over to this popular resource.

## **Google**

<http://www.google.com/>

Visit the “Advanced Search” link and take a look at the “SafeSearch” section. Click the “Filter using SafeSearch” radio button to cause Google to only return sites that match Google’s “SafeSearch” filter. This filter attempts to remove material containing pornography or sexual content, but it is not and cannot be 100% accurate. Click the link “SafeSearch” on this page for more information about this filter.

You can also click the “Preferences” link from the front page to set preferences on how you want Google to search through documents. From here you can enable the “SafeSearch” setting by default. These preferences are placed in the form of a cookie stored on your browser, so if you disable cookies your preference choices will not stick. Be sure to press the “Save Preferences” button when you are done with your choices or they will not stick.

## **Lycos**

<http://www.lycos.com/>

Click on the “Parental Controls” link on the front page (located under the search bar), or turn on the “Adult Filter” from the advanced search page to enable the “Lycos SearchGuard”. This feature attempts to filter out sites containing inappropriate or offensive material such as “adult, violent, hate and weapons-related content”. Note that while no filter can be 100% effective this is a good start.

You may also want to visit the following family and kid-friendly Lycos sites:

**Lycos Family Zone**

<http://familyzone.lycos.com/>

**Lycos Zone (For Kids)**

<http://lycoszone.lycos.com/>

No matter which site you use, realize that no filter can be 100% accurate. All it takes is a little web browser knowledge to defeat cookie-based filters. Inappropriate sites can and sometimes will “slip through the cracks”. Thus, I recommend that you always supervise your kids’ Internet usage whenever possible. These filters, however, may make your supervision easier and your entire family’s Internet experience more enjoyable without any surprises.

This article was written by Andrew Malek, Internet Search Guru and author of Find Stuff On the Net, an e-book that can show even beginning computer users how to navigate the Internet without fear. Catch-up with your kids’ knowledge when it comes to using the net. For further information and free snippets of the book, visit <http://www.findstuffonthenet.com/>