



## **Computer-Savvy Families: Action Items to Secure Your Home Computer**

**Introduction:** Many children today spend a significant amount of time on the computer, so it is important that all family members understand and practice safe computing. These “Action Items to Secure Your Home Computer” provide practical advice on ensuring the safety of your home computer.

**For Families:** “Action Items to Secure Your Home Computer” is a companion to “A Story about Cyber Security for Children.” Please read the story with your children, and discuss how your family is practicing safe computing in your home. Use the “Action Items to Secure Your Home Computer” to find practical suggestions about improving your home computer use and care, and also how to keep your children safe and secure in the online world.

**About NetDay:** NetDay's mission is to connect every child to a brighter future by helping educators meet educational goals through the effective use of technology. NetDay ([www.NetDay.org](http://www.NetDay.org)), a national non-profit organization known for its successful school wiring programs, today manages community and web-based programs that promote enhanced student achievement through the effective use of technology.



## NetDay Cyber Security Kit for Schools Computer-Savvy Families

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### Action Items to Secure Your Home Computer

The story of GROK the robot illustrates the importance of being aware of how your children are using computers and the Internet in your home. Use these action items to develop a “Computer Use Plan” that includes computer security policies as well as guidelines for home computer use by your children.

Establishing a family “Computer Use Plan” is just as essential as having a fire safety or earthquake plan. Every member of your family should understand how to care for your computer, such as backing up files on a regular basis, and making sure your computer is protected with anti-virus software. It is equally important for adults to set very clear guidelines about how children use the Internet and what kind of information they are accessing online. Adults should also recognize that computer use policies will be different for each child depending on age, and as a child grows older, these guidelines may change.

The story of GROK uses the acronym “C-O-M-P-U-T-E-R” to illustrate 8 important points about computer use in the home. Use this supplementary information to talk to your family and establish a plan for computer use at home.

- C – Central location:** Locate your family’s computer in a central location, like the living room, family room, or kitchen, so that everyone can view the computer screen. This is the easiest way for adults to monitor how children are using the computer. Computers that are placed in quiet spaces should not have Internet access and should only be used for specific activities like writing papers or computer games.
- O – Only open email from friends:** Email is a very efficient and easy way for both adults and children to keep in touch with friends and family. Just as a child should not talk to strangers, they should not be emailing or instant messaging with people they do not know. It is a good policy to review your child’s list of email buddies to make sure you recognize all the names. If you are using a commercial Internet Service Provider, ask the company if their software allows parents to set controls that limit email, instant messaging and online access for children.
- M – Monitor your child’s computer use:** Adults should limit Internet, email, instant messaging, and chat room access for children. Make sure that you understand how your children are using the computer, what web sites they are visiting, and who they are communicating with online. There are software products you can purchase that will help you monitor your children’s online access. Active monitoring limits your children’s ability to misuse the computer.
- P – Passwords and other Personal information are secrets:** Be sure to explain to your child that passwords are very private pieces of information. Children should never



***(Continued: Action Items for Families)***

share passwords, their address or phone number, or their age or appearance over the phone or the Internet. However, parents or guardians should know their children's passwords so they can monitor online communication.

Families should practice the three "golden rules" for passwords:

1. A password should have a minimum of 8 characters, be as meaningless as possible, and use uppercase letters, lowercase letters and numbers, e.g., xk28LP97.
2. Change passwords regularly, at least every 90 days.
3. Do not give out your password to anyone!

- U – Use available anti-virus software:** Protecting your home computer from viruses is an important part of keeping your computer operating properly. Anti-Virus software protects your computer from viruses and other dangerous files that can damage your computer system. Anti-Virus software works by "reviewing" every email or file that you receive or try to open to make sure it is safe. You can purchase any commercially available anti-virus software at a computer store, or download it from the Internet.

Most computer viruses are attached to new emails you receive. It is very important to setup your anti-virus software to scan all your folders, files AND incoming emails so that you can catch the viruses before they download to your computer. Hackers create new viruses every day that can harm your computer. To make sure you keep your computer protected from these new viruses, you must download the latest anti-virus information once a week. Most anti-virus software packages will let you download these virus updates automatically through your browser.

While anti-virus software is a great tool for protecting your computer, it is not always foolproof. Even if your computer is protected with anti-virus software, your family should be very careful about opening email attachments, or downloading files off the Internet that are from an unfamiliar web site.

- T – Take the Time to backup your files:** Backing up important computer documents on a regular basis protects you in case your computer breaks or you get a computer virus. You can back up your files using a re-writable CD-rom, or onto diskettes. Store these backups in a safe place so that everyone in the family knows where they are located.

- E – Email Safety Tips:** Email is one of the most popular online communication tools for both children and adults. It is also the easiest way to spread email viruses that can damage computers and computer data. Your family should only open emails from people that you know. If an email address is unfamiliar, you should delete the email without reading the message. If an email with an attachment is received, make sure to verify that the attachment is safe and virus-free before opening it. Just to be safe, you



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### ***(Continued: Action Items for Families)***

should only open email attachments if you are expecting to receive an email from the sender.

If your family uses instant messaging, which is like “real-time” email, be sure to communicate only with people you know. Adults should also know that viruses can be transmitted via instant messaging, just like email, so be very careful about only opening attachments you are expecting to receive.

- R - Responsible parents model good computer use*** - Responsible parents know the web sites their children are visiting and track the work done on the computer. Responsible parents also model good online behavior to set a good example. This means that parents do not view inappropriate web sites or download any web content, like music, without permission from the publisher.