

Libraries & the Internet Toolkit

Tips and guidance for managing and communicating about the Internet

<http://www.ala.org/oif/iftoolkits/internet>

Contributors: Office for Intellectual Freedom, Public Information Office and Washington Office

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Libraries & the Internet Toolkit

Foreword

Libraries play a unique and vital role in our democratic society—they provide access to the information people need and want, without regard for economic or social position. The American Library Association (ALA), the world's oldest and largest library association, supports libraries in their efforts to meet this important responsibility by promoting the highest quality library and information services and public access to information.

ALA's policies oppose anything or anyone that prevents access to constitutionally protected speech in libraries. Because filters cannot distinguish between protected and unprotected speech, ALA opposes the use of filters in libraries.

Although ALA did not prevail in having the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) declared unconstitutional (for the latest information on CIPA and post-CIPA, see ALA's CIPA page at <http://www.ala.org/cipa> and the CIPA section of the Libraries and the Internet Tool Kit), ALA's efforts yielded important and tangible benefits to libraries and library users; the Justices ruled that CIPA is constitutional only if the mandated filters can be readily disabled upon the request of adult library users. Adults do not have to explain why they are making the request.

Most importantly, despite the CIPA ruling, which permits the government to require libraries receiving certain kinds of federal funding to filter Internet content, ALA policy is unchanged. ALA does not recommend the use in libraries of filtering technology that blocks constitutionally protected information.

The American Library Association

- Protects the First Amendment rights of all library users.
- Protects the First Amendment rights of children to use libraries and supports the rights of parents to decide with their children how to use libraries.
- Acknowledges that the role of parents in our society is to care for, instruct, protect and monitor the behavior of their own children.
- Supports parents in taking an active role in carrying out their parental responsibilities in libraries, but not at the expense of other people's rights, or the rights of other people's children.
- Protects equitable access to the Internet for all, and provides the necessary education to make that access enriching and safe.
- Urges libraries to become partners with their respective communities to do the best job they can to provide resources to serve the needs of all of their patrons.

Introduction

The Internet is a rich and educational resource for information, ideas and entertainment. No other medium provides us with so much information so easily. At the same time, the Internet has raised concerns about privacy and children's access to information. As the number one point of entry to the Internet outside of work, school or home, libraries, especially public libraries, address these concerns every day.

The American Library Association (ALA) has produced this “toolkit” to assist librarians in managing the Internet and educating their public about how to use it effectively. ALA encourages all libraries to implement policies that protect both children and public access to information and to take an active role in educating their communities about this important resource.

ALA has a brochure for parents called *The Librarian’s Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids* (formerly called *The Librarian’s Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids*; telephone: 800-545-2433. ext. 5044/5041 or e-mail pio@ala.org for more information), which includes online safety tips and some of the great Web sites for kids. ALA’s “Great Web Sites for Kids” (<http://www.ala.org/greatsites>) is a comprehensive resource of links to a wide array of information, organized by topic and category by children’s librarians. “Especially for Children and Their Parents” (<http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>) provides links to “Online Safety Rules and Suggestions,” “Designed-for-children Search Engines,” “Additional ALA Web Sites for Parents, Children, and Librarians,” “Other Educational Sites,” and “Privacy Issues.”

Key Messages

- The Internet is one of many important information resources. Our goal as librarians is to help people of all ages make the most of it and become information literate (http://www.ala.org/aasl/ip_nine.html)- to access information efficiently and effectively, evaluate information critically and competently, and use information accurately and creatively. We encourage everyone to go to the library and learn how to use this incredible and valuable resource!
- Librarians care deeply about children.
- The only lifelong Internet protection for children is to teach them to use the Internet properly and to teach them to be information literate, so they can make informed choices.
- Parents need education, too, for themselves and their children.
- Librarians answer questions and guide children to quality Web sites the same way they recommend books and other resources.

Fast Facts

- Internet access in public libraries is as common as books. Almost all public library outlets offer public access to the Internet.
- Public libraries offering Internet access have Internet use policies.
- For people without computers at home, work or school, libraries are the number one point of access to the Internet.
- Research has shown filters block at least one out of five sites containing legal, useful information. They failed to block an average of 20 percent of material defined as undesirable.

Checklist for Creating an Internet Use Policy

The ALA strongly encourages all libraries to adopt, publicize, and implement a written Internet use policy in the same way they adopt other library use and access policies. This policy should be in keeping with your library's mission statement, other access policies and community needs.

In light of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) decision, ALA urges any library using mandatory filtering software to consult with legal counsel to reevaluate its Internet Use Policy and assess the risk of future litigation.

Traditionally, the children's and young adult sections contain materials selected for these groups, although children are not restricted to those areas. The same holds true for the Internet.

Here are a few suggestions to consider when creating or updating your policies:

- Ensure that policies speak to access for all.
- Involve your library staff, board and Friends group in the policy writing process.
- Keep it simple. Avoid jargon. Making the policy too technical will confuse people.
- Make policies readily available and visible to the public.
- Provide an up-to-date code of conduct or etiquette guide for using the Internet at your library. Include specific suggestions for positive action. Also list prohibited behavior and the consequences of such behavior.
- Include a statement addressing patron privacy.
- Communicate clearly that users are responsible for what they access online; parents are responsible for their children's Internet use.
- Update your policy regularly; make sure it reflects the Supreme Court CIPA decision.

The following documents should be consulted when preparing or revising an Internet Use Policy:

- ***Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights***
(<http://www.ala.org/oif/policies/interpretations/privacy>)
- **Privacy Policies and Statements** (<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/privacypolicies>)
- ***Questions and Answers on Privacy and Confidentiality***
(<http://www.ala.org/oif/policies/interpretations/privacyqanda>)
- **Useful Sources on CIPA** (<http://www.ala.org/cipa/kranichsources>)
- ***Guidelines for Developing a Library Privacy Policy***
(<http://www.ala.org/oif/iftoolkits/privacy/guidelines>)

More tips and sample policies can be found at **Internet Use Policies**
(<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/internetusepolicies>).

Please send copies of your Internet use policy to the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611, to keep on file. To receive samples of policies and materials from other libraries or other intellectual freedom materials, contact the Office for Intellectual Freedom at 800-545-2433, ext. 4223, or send an e-mail to oif@ala.org. All of ALA's intellectual freedom policies and statements can be found on the OIF home page at <http://www.ala.org/oif/>.

What You Can Do

Librarians can take many proactive measures to address concerns about children's Internet access. Be strategic. Be creative. Most of all, be prepared.

- Make sure your community is as knowledgeable about the Internet as possible. Instruct your staff, your library board and Friends about how the Internet works and what it offers. Encourage parents and children to take advantage of the wealth of information available online.
- Establish time limits on the use of computers, if necessary. Regardless of the method you choose—a sign-in sheet, an honor system or advance registration—always keep in mind the privacy of your users. You also may wish to create a daily limit for those users who like to “hop on and off” the computer. This reduces a potential monopoly by a handful of users.
- Establish a procedure for quickly destroying your sign-up sheets.

Link children's computers to preselected, recommended Web sites such as ALA's Great Web Sites for Kids.

- Preset selected computers to search engines designed especially for children, such as KidsClick! (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick!>) or Yahoooligans! (<http://www.yahoooligans.com/>).
- Provide copies of ALA's *The Librarian's Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids* (formerly titled *The Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids*; telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5044/5041 or e-mail pio@ala.org for more information) or other brochures with tips and resources to help parents guide their children's Internet use.
- Offer Internet classes for parents, children and others that focus on different aspects of the Internet, such as search engines, Internet safety or what makes a great Web site. Or put your classes online so the public has access to the material at its convenience. Make sure the classes include information about your Internet use policy, time limits on the computer and other pertinent instructions. Provide handouts.
- Recruit volunteers to teach Internet classes and assist users at their computer workstations. Make sure these volunteers are trained on your library's Internet use policy, privacy policy, and state and local confidentiality statutes.
- Create special displays of books and materials related to the Internet. Include information specifically geared for parents and children. Prepare a list of Internet-related resources (books, magazines, videos, reference materials, Web sites) that people can take home with them.

- Encourage your users—including children—to recommend sites to your staff. You can ask them to vote on their favorite Web sites and print their top choices on flyers or bookmarks and distribute them.
- Include Internet resources in library displays. For example, highlight information available online in your display for Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Banned Books Week, or your summer reading program.
- Consult “Checklist & Ideas for Library Staff Working with Community Leaders” at <http://www.ala.org/oif/challengesupport/dealing/checklist> for a useful checklist of ideas for working with community residents.
- Develop Web sites for children and young adults that link to material especially recommended for them.
- Teach children how to use the Internet and to be critical users of information.
- Provide opportunities for parents and children to learn together. (For example, see “Additional ALA Web Sites for Parents, Children, and Librarians” found at <http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>.)
- Inform parents of strategies they can use with their children regarding Internet use, such as informing them about the “rules of the road.” A variety of rules for different age groups can be found at ALA’s “Especially for Children and Their Parents” (<http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>). Another strategy parents can use is writing a contract together with their children on appropriate Internet conduct. For an example of this, see GetNetWise’s “Make an Internet Use Agreement with Your Child” (<http://www.getnetwise.org/tools/toolscontracts.php>).
- Use privacy screens or position terminals to prevent inadvertent or accidental viewing.

Librarians across the country have taken steps to ensure that members of their communities have positive, safe experiences on the Internet. For a list of real life examples of how librarians successfully use the Internet every day, see Best Practices: How Librarians Are Managing the Internet at <http://www.ala.org/oif/iftoolkits/bestpractices>.

Educate! Inform! Promote!

Reach out to your community. Find creative ways to spread the word about library policies and programs to ensure a positive online experience.

- Seek opportunities to talk about your library’s Internet use policy and computer/online resources. This may include speaking engagements with the PTA, your local school board, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce or other organizations. Provide handouts such as *The Librarian’s Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids* (formerly titled *The Librarian’s Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids*; telephone: 800-545-2433. ext. 5044/5041 or e-mail pio@ala.org for more information) brochure.

- Tie in Internet classes to “back-to-school” night, National Library Week, Teen Read Week or other promotions.
- Host an “open house” or other special demonstrations of your library’s computer workstations and Web site to help users become more familiar with your online offerings.
- Create flyers or bookmarks with your library’s Web address and computer training schedule. Make these available at the check-out desk and in locations outside the library. Work with schools to provide information to parents.
- Invite the mayor, state and federal legislators, journalists and other VIPs to tour the library and learn about your Internet policies and services. Provide a photo opportunity and encourage the newspaper to run the photo.
- Feature your Internet policy, classes and other online resources on your library’s home page.
- Pitch feature or consumer stories to local media about what parents should know about the Internet and how librarians can help.

What Makes a Great Web Site for Children?

Make sure children and parents know what to look for in a Web site.

Several resources to help determine what’s a good Web site for children can be found at “Especially for Children and Their Parents” (<http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>). One such resource is from the Multnomah County Library Homework Center—”Evaluating Web Sites: What Makes a Web Site Good?” (<http://www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/homework/webeval.html>).

The Children and Technology Committee of the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the ALA, suggests the following criteria for selecting quality Web sites for children.

- The purpose and content of the site are clear. A source is clearly identified. Contact information is provided.
- The content encourages exploration and thinking. It is appealing to, and suits the age level of, the children for whom it was designed.
- The site is easy to access. It loads quickly and essential information comes up first. Information is accurate and up to date.
- The site takes advantage of the Web’s capabilities - it does more than can be done with print. It contributes something unique or unusual.

Current law requires commercial Web sites to verify parental permission before collecting personally identifiable information from children. For up-to-date information, visit “Especially for Children and Their Parents” (<http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>), and “Privacy Resources for Librarians, Library Users, and Families” (<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/privacy/resources>). All great sites will include a privacy policy.

Tips for Parents

The following tips can be reproduced or edited for your library. Print them on flyers or bookmarks and distribute during Internet training classes, back-to-school nights, library open houses and other events.

- Make time to learn about the Internet and how it works. Every computer with Internet access has search engines designed specifically for children that lead to sites selected especially for kids. It's important to become familiar with the Internet so you can use this medium with your children. Many schools and libraries offer classes that teach how to guide your children on the Internet.
- Set rules and instill values. Until children are taught how to use the Internet properly, which includes how to conduct a search, how to know the difference between an Internet pal and an unsavory stranger, how to protect private information, and so forth, it would be best if their Internet use were supervised by a responsible adult or guided by for-children Web pages. There are many common sense tips that can ensure children have a positive online experience:
 - Children should be taught not to give personal information, such as their names and addresses, to strangers online as well as off. They must agree not to meet someone they meet online without a parent or guardian present. Teach your children to value privacy—theirs and yours.
 - Teach your children values and guidelines to use in selecting what they read and view. Not every Web site is right for every child, anymore than every book in the library is suitable for every person. It's up to you to let your children know what subjects and Web sites are off limits and to explain why.
 - Encourage your child to ask the librarian for help when seeking information on the Internet.
- For an example of how to set rules and values with your children, see GetNetWise's "Make an Internet Use Agreement with Your Child" (<http://www.getnetwise.org/tools/toolscontracts.php>).
- Check out "Especially for Children and their Parents" at <http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>. This page includes links to online safety rules and suggestions and great sites for parents and kids.
- As the National Research Council pointed out in its 2002 report, "Youth, Pornography, and the Internet" (http://books.nap.edu/html/youth_internet/), "Swimming pools can be dangerous for children. To protect them, one can install locks, put up fences, and deploy pool alarms. All these measures are helpful, but by far the most important thing that one can do for one's children is to teach them to swim." Similarly, children taught to use the Internet wisely and effectively will be more capable of traversing the Internet than those relying solely on technology.

ALA and Filtering

The role of ALA is to recommend policies that uphold the highest ideals of our profession and nation—the freedom to read and receive information as defined by the United States Constitution and courts of law. Local libraries adopt their own policies to uphold this ideal and address the specific needs of their communities.

Although ALA did not prevail in having the Children’s Internet Protection Act declared unconstitutional (for the latest information on CIPA and post-CIPA, see ALA’s CIPA page at <http://www.ala.org/cipa> and the CIPA section of the Libraries and the Internet Tool Kit), ALA’s efforts yielded important and tangible benefits to libraries and library users. The Justices ruled that CIPA is constitutional only if the mandated filters can be readily disabled upon the request of adult library users. Users do not have to explain why they are making the request.

Most importantly, despite the CIPA ruling, which permits the government to require libraries receiving certain kinds of federal funding to filter, ALA policy is unchanged. ALA does not recommend the use in libraries of filtering technology that blocks constitutionally protected information.

Numerous studies, including those by the National Research Council, the U.S. Children’s Online Protection Act Commission, and the Kaiser Family Foundation, have documented that filters fail to block many sites banned under CIPA as well as overblock hundreds of thousands of perfectly legal, useful sites. Expert witnesses representing both the plaintiffs and the government in the CIPA case corroborated these findings that are well documented in the Court findings. In addition to underblocking and overblocking, the Kaiser Family Foundation study also found that filters set above the lowest settings block another 50 percent of legal sites but only an additional 4 percent of sites banned by CIPA. Therefore, ALA urges libraries that choose to install filters to set their filters **at the least restrictive level** in order to minimize the blocking of Constitutionally protected speech. ALA also recommends that all libraries educate the general public on this issue, as well as library staff.

As with every other challenge to the First Amendment rights of library users, ALA encourages libraries to contact the Office for Intellectual Freedom:

- For assistance and advice regarding the installation of filters; and
- To report incidents of problems related to filters in their libraries.

This information will help ALA to document the effect CIPA has on access to information and to lobby for changes in the law. In addition, states will be able to use this information in their efforts to limit similar state legislation.

It is important to remember that a major purpose of libraries is to empower their users by providing them with the information they want or need. To fulfill this responsibility, libraries must provide access to the broadest range of information. The Internet allows librarians to do this better than ever before.

ALA strongly encourages local libraries to adopt and implement Internet use policies that protect public access to information and promote a positive online experience. The ALA has prepared several documents to help local libraries develop policies and programs that address these concerns (see section on Helpful Resources).

ALA upholds the right and responsibility of parents to guide their children's library use, including their Internet use. ALA encourages parents to learn about this important resource so they can guide their children and encourages local libraries to offer instruction for children and adults in how to use the Internet safely and effectively.

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

Congress added the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act (NCIPA) to a major spending bill (H.R. 4577) on December 15, 2000. President Clinton signed the bill into law on December 21, 2000 (Public Law 106-554). The Acts place restrictions on the use of funding that is available through the Library Services and Technology Act, Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and on the Universal Service discount program known as the E-rate. These restrictions take the form of requirements for Internet safety policies and technology which blocks or filters certain material from being accessed through the Internet.

ALA filed a lawsuit to overturn CIPA, because the law fails to protect children while limiting access to legal, useful information for all library users.

On May 31, 2002, a three-judge panel of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania unanimously held that "we are constrained to conclude that the library plaintiffs must prevail in their contention that CIPA requires them to violate the First Amendment rights of their patrons, and accordingly is facially invalid"; the three-judge panel ruled Sections 1712(a)(2) and 1721(b) of the Children's Internet Protection Act to be facially invalid under the First Amendment and permanently enjoined the government from enforcing those provisions.

The government appealed this decision, and on June 23, 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the lower court decision (*United States v. American Library Ass'n, Inc.*). The Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment does not prohibit Congress from forcing public libraries—as a condition of receiving federal funding—to use software filters to control what patrons and staff access online via library computers.

ALA's CIPA efforts yielded important and tangible benefits to libraries and library users. (See ALA and Filtering section above.)

For the latest information, see the CIPA home page at <http://www.ala.org/cipa/>.

For information on the Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act (NCIPA), see <http://www.ala.org/ncipa>.

For information on Schools and the Children's Internet Protection Act, see <http://www.ala.org/cipa/schools>.

Tough Questions on CIPA

Why did ALA challenge CIPA in the federal courts?

As written, the Children's Internet Protection Act failed to protect children while limiting access to legal, useful information for all library users.

No filtering or blocking technology exists that blocks access only to speech that is obscene, child pornography or harmful to minors. In addition, no filtering technology protects children from all objectionable materials. Filters, therefore, provide a false sense of security, suggesting children are protected when they are not.

Filters are contrary to the mission of the public library, which is to provide access to the broadest range of information for a community of diverse individuals. Filters have been shown to block access to medical information, political information and information related to the arts and literature.

The American Library Association believes strongly that CIPA may still be found unconstitutional, especially in situations in which adults are not provided unfiltered access to the Internet.

If libraries oppose CIPA and filters so much, why don't they just give up the federal money? What's the big deal?

Some libraries have chosen to forego federal funds because they oppose filters, others will be forced to forego funding because the filtering requirements are cost prohibitive. For many libraries, especially those serving low income or rural populations, there is no choice. Without federal funding they will not be able to provide Internet access for their communities.

The E-Rate and LSTA target low-income communities, helping libraries bridge gaps not just in access to technology, but also in the availability of useful content and in the learning of skills necessary to utilize information successfully. Regrettably, forcing libraries to choose between funding, equitable access, and censorship means millions of library users will lose, particularly those Americans who reside in the most poverty-stricken areas of the country.

- The federal e-rate program (the Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism) provides discounts to assist most schools and libraries to obtain affordable telecommunications and Internet access. The annual e-rate fund of \$2.25 billion allows eligible schools and libraries to purchase networking equipment, telecommunication services, internal connections, and Internet access at substantial discounts.
- The Library Services and Technology Act. On September 25, 2003, President Bush signed H.R. 13, the Museum and Library Services Act of 2003 into law (Public Law 108-81). The legislation sets the authorization level for library programs at \$232 million. If funding is achieved at that level, the new formula distribution would take place and the base amount given to each state would double. Since the formula was first set in 1971, this change would help small states, while holding harmless large states. The legislation reauthorizes the Museum and Library Services Act until 2009.

Debate Over Filters

Public concerns about Internet access at the library should not be ignored. Many local libraries are experiencing increased pressure to limit Internet use by groups that believe filters are necessary to protect both children and adults from “undesirable” material.

In order to prepare for dealing with such concerns, libraries should consider taking the following steps:

- Inform elected officials, board members, Friends and library users of issues and concerns related to library Internet use. [See “Checklist & Ideas for Library Staff Working with Community Leaders” (<http://www.ala.org/oif/challengesupport/dealing/checklist>)].
- Designate an official library spokesperson who is able to communicate the library’s position in a caring and understandable way.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Listen to and acknowledge all concerns.
- Be prepared to demonstrate and document the policies and procedures your library has in place to address concerns. If your library has experienced problems with inappropriate Internet use, explain how you have dealt with it—in accordance with your Internet Use Policy.
- Make copies of ALA’s *Libraries, the Internet and Filters* fact sheet or prepare your own fact sheet explaining what filters can and cannot do; pertinent legislation and court rulings; and other background.
- Be prepared to describe in layperson’s terms the concerns librarians have about the limitations of filters, the false sense of protection filters may give and their impact on free access to materials that benefit library users.

If a local decision is made to use filters, it’s important to keep in mind the following:

- Consider providing a choice of filtered and unfiltered access to the Internet in keeping with court rulings that adults should not be limited to materials appropriate only for children and in recognition that the intellectual needs and maturity levels vary greatly from a six-year-old to a 16-year-old.
- Provide notice to library users when they are using a computer with filtered access to the Internet.
- Inform library users about which computers offer a filtering option in a way that does not infringe on their privacy or cause embarrassment. It should be clear to users when filters are on or off.
- Inform library users that their choice of sites or filtering options might not be confidential, depending on the system in place. Ideally, library computer technology should be programmed to maintain user confidentiality.
- Inform library users about the method by which they may request a site be unblocked.
- Set filters at the least restrictive level and block only categories consistent with the limitations detailed by CIPA.

- Provide adults a mechanism for overriding and/or disabling filters that is as obvious and unobtrusive as possible.
- Be vigilant in monitoring developments in technology that best provide privacy, respect for First Amendment rights and freedom of choice for library users.

If your library is subject to a filtering mandate, the following are additional suggestions to consider:

- Inform yourself about the extent and details of the mandate. Know what choices your institution has within the mandate.
- Inform your library users about what restrictions are being placed on their Internet access and about what legal body is responsible for the restrictions.
- Document the impacts the mandate has on your library users and library services that you offer.
- Share the stories of how filtering impacts your library with library users, legislators, the press and ALA.

Handling Tough Questions

The best way to deal with tough questions from library users, board members, the mayor or a reporter is to be prepared. The following are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Listen—don't judge.
- Anticipate questions you might be asked and practice answering them.
- Acknowledge: "You obviously have strong feelings. I respect your views. Let me give you another perspective."
- Reframe the question—Why do you think students should be allowed to view pornography on the Internet? "You're asking me about our Internet policy...."
- Be honest. Tell the truth as you know it. "My experience with the Internet is...."
- Remember, it's not just what you say but how you say it. Speak simply, sincerely and with conviction.
- Less is more. Keep your answers short and to the point.
- Stick to your key message. Deliver it at least three times.
- Avoid use of negative/inflammatory words such as "pornography."

- Don't fudge. If you don't know the answer, say so.
- Never say "No comment." A simple "I'm sorry I can't answer that" is preferable.

Sample Answers to Tough Questions

Why do librarians allow kids to have access to pornography?

- We don't. Librarians care deeply about children. Libraries already have policies and programs to ensure children have an enriching and safe online experience. And librarians are there to help guide them. In our library, we find kids use the Internet the same way they use the library. They work on homework assignments, read about sports, music and other interests, and communicate with their friends.
- Librarians guide children to quality materials, whether in books or on the Internet. We also provide classes to help teach children and parents about the Internet. In an information-rich society, librarians are information smart.
- The Internet is good for kids. The Internet is changing how we live, learn, work and interact with one another. If today's children are to succeed, they must learn information literacy skills for ever-changing technologies.
- Few libraries report having difficulties with people looking at pornography. The vast majority of children and adults continue to use the library and the Internet responsibly and appropriately.

My neighbor told me she saw a group of teenage boys looking at nude pictures, and she had to walk by them with her four-year-old. Why would my library allow this?

- I'm sorry if your neighbor was uncomfortable. Libraries have policies that deal with disruptive behavior the same way they have other library policies. If the boys were causing a disturbance, this should be reported to the librarian. The fact is the vast majority of children and adults use the Internet responsibly.

What can parents do to help protect their children?

- Education is the key. Parents don't need filters to protect their children online any more than they need a bodyguard to protect them in public. Filtering won't help kids understand there are certain people they shouldn't talk to on the Internet, and it won't teach them how to avoid negative sites.
- Parents should teach their children practical safety—that online or in public, the same rules apply: "Don't talk to strangers" and "Don't reveal information about yourself or your family just because you were asked for it." Most libraries offer Internet safety classes and tips online.
- This is a good opportunity for parents to discuss their family values with their children.
- We're concerned filters give parents a false sense of security that their children are protected when they aren't. Education is more effective than filters—kids need to make good decisions about what they read and view, no matter where they are.

What affect does the Internet have on children’s privacy?

- The Internet provides children with increased opportunities to access information and resources. Children’s safety depends on their being taught to be responsible for the protection of their own personal information. In libraries, librarians continue to assist children to find sound, credible materials, while helping them to understand the need to protect their privacy.

How do I know my child is safe at the library?

- Libraries are very safe, but they are open to everyone. Parents should accompany young children to the library and establish rules and expectations for older children. It’s important to teach children how to make good decisions about what they read and view, no matter where they are.

My library uses privacy screens on its Internet terminals. Why has my library provided what amounts to private “peep show booths” for viewing Internet pornography?

- Your library has decided that privacy screens are the best way to ensure that its users have the privacy they need to research and study topics of interest to them, for instance, information on sensitive medical problems. Some users report being uncomfortable when they see other users viewing classical works of art or photographs of the Holocaust. Regardless, every library user has a right to privacy. While reading a book in the library, you don’t expect a librarian or other user to be looking over your shoulder. When you are at an Internet terminal, you don’t expect—or want—someone looking over your shoulder either. In the same way people have a right to access the information they want or need, they have a right to read or view that information in private.

What’s wrong with filters anyway?

- Filters aren’t effective. Filters were developed for home use, not for use in public institutions like libraries. Tests show filters block a lot of information many people find useful.
- Numerous studies, including those by the National Research Council, the U.S. Children’s Online Protection Act Commission, and the Kaiser Family Foundation, have documented that filters fail to block many sites banned under CIPA as well as overblock hundreds of thousands of perfectly legal, useful sites. Expert witnesses representing both the plaintiffs and the government in the CIPA case corroborated these findings that are well documented in the Court findings. In addition to underblocking and overblocking, the Kaiser Family Foundation study also found that filters set above the lowest settings block another 50 percent of legal sites but only an additional 4 percent of sites banned by CIPA. Therefore, ALA urges libraries that choose to install filters to set their filters **at the least restrictive level** in order to minimize the blocking of Constitutionally protected speech. ALA also recommends that all libraries educate the general public on this issue, as well as library staff.
- We’re concerned that filters give parents a false sense of security that their children are protected when they aren’t. Education is more effective than filters.

Don’t some libraries already use filters?

- Many libraries offer some kind of filtering technology as part of their local Internet use policy. According to a 2002 study referenced in the “Internet Use in Libraries: ALA Library Fact Sheet Number 26,” 52.1 percent of libraries do not filter, 17.5 percent filter some computers, and 24.4 percent filter all their computers. Outlets in urban areas are most likely to have filters on all computers and outlets in rural areas are most likely to have no filters.

Isn't some protection better than none?

- Filters create a false sense of security without actually protecting anyone. Filtering technology won't help kids understand there are certain people they shouldn't talk to on the Internet, and it won't teach them how to avoid negative sites. Filters are neither the best nor the only way to ensure a safe and enriching Internet experience. Libraries use many approaches to help their users find the best resources online. One key element is education. Many libraries offer classes for adults and children. They also have rules and policies promoting an enriching and safe online experience for everyone.

If a perfect filter was created, would libraries object to using it?

- Of course not. The perfect filter would block only unconstitutional speech, such as obscenity and child pornography. It also would provide full access to all other information and ideas, so people can decide for themselves what they want to read and view.

Won't computers and the Internet put libraries out of business?

- Not at all. In fact, if we didn't already have libraries, we would have to invent them because libraries have something very important the Internet doesn't—librarians. The Internet is a wonderful resource and a great convenience, but it's far from perfect. Librarians have been collecting and organizing information for centuries. We can help you find the best source of information, whether it's online or in a book or pamphlet. Libraries also are places where people connect not just with books and computers, but with other people.

Why is the ALA forcing its policies on local libraries?

- The ALA's role is to recommend policies that promote the highest quality library and information services for the public. ALA respects the right of local libraries to adopt policies that uphold this ideal and meet the needs of their library users. Our association believes filters are not the best way to protect children.

Why should my tax dollars go to fund peep shows in the library?

- Your tax dollars and those of your neighbors support access to information. They buy picture books, encyclopedias, magazines, computers, and all the other materials available for you and your neighbors. They also provide access to the Internet—the most important new information technology of our time. The community funds library service to ensure everyone has access to the information they need.

Libraries don't carry Hustler, why do they allow Internet porn?

- Librarians bring people together with the information and ideas they want or need. To do this, library collections must contain the broad range of information on topics across the political and social spectra. People can then choose what they want to read or view or listen to. Since libraries provide information for all of the people in their community, librarians quickly learn that not all their users agree with all that information. Some users find materials in their local library collection to be untrue, offensive, harmful, or even dangerous. Nevertheless, if the material is legal, it can legitimately be in the library.
- In contrast, censors aim to separate people from certain information and ideas, more often than not to promote a particular point of view—their own.
- So, just as librarians do not monitor the books or periodicals people bring into or check out of the library, allowing people to decide for themselves what they wish to read and study, the Internet

empowers users to choose for themselves the information they wish to view. Librarians can—and do—help guide searches, but they do not advocate limiting access to legal speech, because blocking access to constitutionally protected speech is unconstitutional.

Kids can't rent R-rated movies at the video store, or buy Playboy at the newsstand. Why won't you use the same common sense restrictions at my public library?

- Those types of rating systems are voluntary, and libraries make them available to assist parents and others in making decisions for their families and themselves. As librarians, we strongly encourage parents to take an active role in monitoring what their children see and view, but as public employees, it's not appropriate for librarians to make those decisions for them.

What are some examples of Web sites that have been filtered?

- Research conducted by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) and the Online Policy Group (OPG) on blocking or filtering in schools shows that schools that implement Internet blocking software with the least restrictive settings will block between a half percent and five percent of search results based on state-mandated curriculum topics. Schools that implement Internet blocking software with the most restrictive settings will block up to 70 percent of search results based on state-mandated curriculum topics. See http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Academic_edu/Censorware/net_block_report/20020918_eff_pr.html and http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Academic_edu/Censorware/net_block_report/.
- Other recorded examples of blocked sites include the Progressive Review, the FBI, eBay, NASA, Planned Parenthood, Beaver College (forced by overzealous filters to rename itself Arcadia University), Superbowls XXX-XXXIX, gay and lesbian sites, and political sites, to name a few. For lists of blocked sites, see Peacefire (<http://www.peacefire.com/>) and "Sites Blocked by Internet Filtering Programs Edelman Expert Report for Multnomah County Public Library et al., vs. United States of America, et al." (<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/people/edelman/mul-v-us/>).

What's wrong with having filters if all someone has to do is ask a librarian to "unblock" a site?

- As written, CIPA did not require filtered sites to be unblocked on request. In fact, the law allowed librarians to unblock sites only for "bona fide research and other legal purposes." However, the Supreme Court decision yielded important and tangible benefits to libraries and library users, in that the Justices ruled that CIPA is constitutional only if the mandated filters can be readily disabled upon the request of adult library users. Adult users do not have to explain why they are making the request. However, since adults do not know what is being blocked, it would be best to always ask for unblocked access. Indeed, ALA agrees with the Third Circuit's decision in the CIPA case. Even if the "disabling provisions permit public libraries to allow patrons to access speech that is constitutionally protected yet erroneously blocked by the software filters, the requirement that library patrons ask a state actor's permission to access disfavored content violates the First Amendment." Libraries cannot—and should not—violate the First Amendment.

Helpful Resources

ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom

<http://www.ala.org/oif>

The Office for Intellectual Freedom provides a wealth of information regarding intellectual freedom and censorship, sample library policies, the *Library Bill of Rights* and its Interpretations, intellectual freedom statements and more. Excellent resource for librarians dealing with Internet access issues. 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4223. Fax: 312-280-4227. E-mail: oif@ala.org

Children and the Internet: Guidelines for Developing Public Library Policy

<http://www.ala.org/alsc/childreninternet>

Association for Library Trustees and Advocates, Association for Library Service to Children, Public Library Association, divisions of the ALA, 1998. Handbook designed for library trustees and others who are involved in setting public library policy and procedures. Sample Internet use policies and guidelines, resource lists and articles about intellectual freedom and censorship issues.

Children's Internet Protection Act

<http://www.ala.org/cipa>

Visit here for the latest information on CIPA. Includes links to questions and answers, resources, headlines, and more.

Coping with Challenges—Strategies and Tips for All Types of Libraries

<http://www.ala.org/oif/challengesupport/dealing/copingstrategies>

ALA, 1999, second edition. Tips and resources for developing and administering intellectual freedom policies, and communicating them to the public. Free. Contact: ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4223. Fax: 312-280-4227. E-mail: oif@ala.org.

Filters and Filtering

<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/filters>

The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom offers links from its Web site to Internet use policies, court cases, pending legislation, intellectual freedom statements and more.

Final Report of the COPA Commission Presented to Congress, October 20, 2000

<http://www.copacommission.org/report/>

“After consideration of the information gathered through hearings and comments filed by a wide range of parties, the Commission concludes that no single technology or method will effectively protect children from harmful material online. Rather, the Commission determined that a combination of public education, consumer empowerment technologies and methods, increased enforcement of existing laws, and industry action are needed to address this concern.”

Guidelines and Considerations for Developing a Public Library Internet Use Policy

<http://www.ala.org/oif/policies/other/internetusepolicy>

The Office for Intellectual Freedom wrote these guidelines to assist libraries in writing an Internet use policy.

Guidelines for Developing a Library Privacy Policy

<http://www.ala.org/oif/iftoolkits/privacy/guidelines>

Privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, free thought, and free association. The right to privacy is the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one's interest examined or scrutinized by others. Confidentiality exists when a library is in possession of personally identifiable information about users and keeps that information private on their behalf.

Intellectual Freedom for Children: The Censor is Coming

<http://www.ala.org/alsc/ifchildren>

Association for Library Service to Children, 2000. This packet includes tips on how to deal with challenges and how to develop selection policies. It also includes a chapter on filtering and the Internet. \$28; members \$25.20. To order, call 800-545-2433, press 7.

Internet Filtering Software Wrongly Blocks Many Sites

http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Academic_edu/Censorware/net_block_report/20020918_eff_pr.html

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) and the Online Policy Group (OPG) released a report in December 2002 that examines the effects of filtering software in schools. They found that schools that implement Internet blocking software with the least restrictive settings will block tens of thousands of web pages inappropriately. Schools that implement Internet blocking software with the least restrictive settings will block between 1/2 percent and 5 percent of search results based on state-mandated curriculum topics. Schools that implement Internet blocking software with the most restrictive settings will block up to seventy percent of search results based on state-mandated curriculum topics.

Internet Filters and Public Libraries

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/PDF/Internetfilters.pdf>

David Sobel, general counsel of the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), examines the effects of the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2003 ruling in *U.S. v. American Library Association*, which declared the Children's Internet Protection Act constitutional. CIPA mandates that libraries accepting federal funds install filtering software to block access to material that is "obscene," "child pornography" or "harmful to minors." The Court assumed that librarians would automatically and unconditionally disable filters upon request by adult patrons and permanently unblock erroneously blocked sites. This assumption puts the burden of ensuring access to constitutionally protected speech upon librarians through a process that is complex and uncertain at best. Furthermore, the Court failed to confront the privacy implications and practical difficulties of such a disabling scheme.

Lester Asheim in Cyberspace: A Tribute to Sound Reasoning

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/basics/lesterasheim.htm>

For over 50 years, "Not Censorship But Selection" (Wilson Library Bulletin, Sept. 1953) by Lester Asheim (1914-1997) has remained the definitive statement on the distinction between these two aspects of library collection development. This article relates Asheim's statement to the Internet.

Library Advocacy Now!

<http://www.ala.org/pio/libraryadvocacy>

Training programs on how to be an effective spokesperson on library issues including children's access to the Internet. Little to no cost for local and state library groups of 25 or more. Contact: ALA Public Information Office. Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5041/5044. Fax: 312-280-8520. E-mail: advocacy@ala.org.

The Nine Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning

http://www.ala.org/aasl/ip_nine.html

These standards, which anyone can use, outline the process for becoming information literate, defined as being able to access information efficiently and effectively, evaluate information critically and competently, and use information accurately and creatively.

Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

<http://www.ala.org/oif/policies/interpretations/privacy>

Privacy is essential to the exercise of free speech, free thought, and free association. This Interpretation was adopted by the ALA Council on June 19, 2002. See also **Questions and Answers on Privacy and Confidentiality** below.

Privacy and Confidentiality

<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/privacy>

Includes links to ALA's privacy policies and other resources on privacy and confidentiality.

Privacy Policies and Statements

<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/privacypolicies>

The American Library Association has developed policies, guidelines, and resources to assist librarians in preserving privacy and confidentiality for library users.

Privacy Resources for Librarians, Library Users, and Families

<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/privacy/resources>

This resource is intended to help librarians and all library users understand the issue of privacy and confidentiality.

Privacy Tool Kit

<http://www.ala.org/oif/iftoolkits/privacy>

The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee is developing a Privacy Tool Kit to assist libraries in protecting the privacy of their users.

Questions and Answers on Privacy and Confidentiality

<http://www.ala.org/oif/policies/interpretations/privacyqanda>

The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee developed this Q&A to work in conjunction with **Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights**. See also **Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights** above.

Sites Blocked by Internet Filtering Programs: Edelman Expert Report for Multnomah County Public Library, et al. vs. United States of America, et al.

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/people/edelman/mul-v-us/>

Ben Edelman designed and implemented ways to identify Web sites blocked by four filtering programs.

See No Evil: How Internet Filters Affect the Search for Online Health Information

http://www.kaisernet.org/health_cast/uploaded_files/Internet_Filtering_exec_summ.pdf

A report published in December 2002 by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Useful Sources: Children's Internet Protection Act

<http://www.ala.org/cipa/kranichsources>

A useful list of sources for understanding the Children's Internet Protection Act, compiled by Nancy Kranich, chair of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee (2002–2004).

Why Filters Won't Protect Children or Adults

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/issuesrelatedlinks/whyfilterswontprotect.htm>

By Nancy Kranich. First published in *Library Administration & Management*, volume 18, number 1, Winter 2004, pp. 14-18.

Youth, Pornography, and the Internet

<http://www.nap.edu/books/0309082749/html/>

A report published in May 2002 by the National Research Council.

Online Resources for Parents and Children

America Links Up

<http://kids.getnetwise.org/americalinksup/index.shtml>

America Links Up was a broad-based public awareness campaign to ensure that every child in America has a safe, educational and rewarding experience online. The site is no longer active and is being hosted here by GetNetWise for archival purposes.

Child Safety on the Information Superhighway

http://www.safekids.com/child_safety.htm

Larry Magid, a syndicated columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, gives tips for becoming street smart on the Web. His "Guidelines for Parents" explains how to deal with everything from suggestive or misleading content to the danger of online-arranged meetings with strangers.

Especially for Children and Their Parents

<http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>

This page includes links to online safety rules and suggestions, designed-for-children search engines, all ALA great sites, and other great sites for parents and kids. Also includes links to privacy pages.

GetNetwise

<http://www.getnetwise.org>

An online service of companies and non-profit groups concerned about child safety on the Internet. The Web site provides a comprehensive "Web-wide" resource with safety tips, ways to report online trouble, tech tools for families, great Web sites for kids and a glossary of Internet terms.

Great Web Sites for Kids

<http://www.ala.org/greatsites>

Links to Web sites for fun and learning. Recommended and organized by topic by children's librarians. Sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the ALA.

Kids' Safety (GetNetWise)

<http://www.kids.getnetwise.org/>

Learn about the risks kids face online, based on age levels or types of activities. Concerns about privacy are addressed as well. Quick tips for kids, teens, and families.

The Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids

See **The Librarian's Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids** below.

The Librarian's Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids

Formerly titled *The Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids*. Telephone: 800-545-2433. ext. 5044/5041 or e-mail pio@ala.org for more information.

The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway

<http://www.childrenspartnership.org/bbar/pbpg.html>

Rules and tools for families online from The Children's Partnership. Comprehensive look at the information superhighway and what parents should know to help their children use it safely and wisely.

Parents' Guide to the Internet

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/internet/>

From the U.S. Department of Education (archived information; 1997), this guide suggests how parents can help their children tap into the wonders of the Internet while safeguarding them from potential hazards.

Privacy (GetNetWise)

<http://privacy.getnetwise.org/>

As the Internet has grown in complexity, many consumers feel they may be disclosing information about themselves and their online travels that they'd rather keep private. GetNetWise provides information about tools and techniques to better control how much personal information you share with online stores, Web sites, emailers, chatters and other people who may use your computer.

Privacy Resources for Librarians, Library Users, and Families

<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/privacy/resources>

This resource is intended to help librarians and all library users understand the issue of privacy and confidentiality.

Safety Tips for Kids on the Internet from the Federal Bureau of Investigation

<http://www.fbi.gov/kids/k5th/safety1.htm>

Site focuses on online safety and ways to report abuses.

A Safety Net for the Internet: A Parent's Guide

<http://www.nypl.org/branch/safety.html>

What parents should know about the Internet from the New York Public Library.

Libraries, the Internet and Filtering

“Swimming pools can be dangerous for children. To protect them, one can install locks, put up fences, and deploy pool alarms. All these measures are helpful, but by far the most important thing that one can do for one's children is to teach them to swim.”—National Research Council, “[Youth, Pornography, and the Internet](#)“ (2002)

In the effort to close the digital divide in the United States, one institution has led the way in ensuring that all people have access to this important resource called the Internet: the library.

Congress recognized this essential role when it designated public libraries as universal service providers for online information in the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Since then, the number of public libraries online has tripled. Libraries are one of America's great democratic institutions, providing access to books and other resources to people of all ages and backgrounds regardless of their ability to pay. Today, libraries play a critical role in bridging the digital divide. Research shows that for people without Internet

access at home, school or work, public libraries are the number one point of access (Falling Through the Net, NTIA 2000; <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/digitaldivide/>).

Laws pertaining to illegal materials and activity on the Internet should be enforced. ALA does not endorse the use of filtering technology in public libraries, however, because it is known to block legal material that library users may find valuable and useful for their jobs, studies, health and other needs.

The association strongly encourages local libraries to adopt policies and practices that govern Internet use in the same way they adopt other policies to ensure a positive library experience. The association also takes an active role in educating the public about how to use the Internet and encourages local libraries to play a leadership role in their communities. Almost all libraries offering Internet service have such policies and programs.

Most importantly, despite the CIPA ruling, which permits the government to require libraries receiving certain kinds of federal funding to filter, ALA policy is unchanged. ALA does not recommend the use in libraries of filtering technology that blocks constitutionally protected information.

Numerous studies, including those by the National Research Council, the U.S. Children's Online Protection Act Commission, and the Kaiser Family Foundation, have documented that filters fail to block many sites banned under CIPA as well as overblock hundreds of thousands of perfectly legal, useful sites. Expert witnesses representing both the plaintiffs and the government in the CIPA case corroborated these findings that are well documented in the Court findings. In addition to underblocking and overblocking, the Kaiser Family Foundation study also found that filters set above the lowest settings block another 50 percent of legal sites but only an additional 4 percent of sites banned by CIPA. ALA, therefore, urges libraries that choose to install filters to set their filters **at the least restrictive level** in order to minimize the blocking of Constitutionally protected speech. ALA also recommends that all libraries educate the general public on this issue, as well as library staff.

Finally, ALA believes that filters do not protect children, education does. As the National Research Council pointed out in its 2002 report, *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet*, "While both technology and public policy have important roles to play, social and educational strategies to develop in minors an ethic of responsible choice and the skills to effectuate these choices and to cope with exposure are foundational to protecting children from negative effects that may result from exposure to inappropriate material or experiences on the Internet." Similarly, the more children and parents know about the Internet and Internet safety, the better equipped they will be to protect themselves and enjoy their time online. Libraries have a long tradition of providing quality service to children and adults in a safe place, and they continue to do so. Parents and children should still exercise common sense in the library as they do in any public place.

Role of the American Library Association

The mission of the American Library Association (ALA) is to promote the highest quality library and information services. This includes recommending model policies for local libraries to use in developing their own policies and procedures. ALA policies, such as the *Library Bill of Rights* adopted in 1940, are intended to protect the rights of library users to read and receive information as defined by the U.S. constitution and courts.

Fact: Local libraries are responsible for adopting their own operating policies and procedures.

Fact: The association does not endorse the use of filtering technology in public institutions, such as libraries, because it blocks legal information to which users are entitled under the Constitution.

How librarians manage the Internet

Librarians have developed and continue to develop Internet management techniques with the goal of ensuring public access to information and a positive online experience for people of all ages. Some libraries use filters on some computer terminals, generally in children's areas.

Some libraries are experimenting with special library cards with computer chips that allow individual library users to control Internet access for themselves and their children. Unlike filters intended for use in the home, this technology can cost many thousands of dollars and must be integrated into other library computer systems. Other considerations for libraries are ease of maintenance, protecting library user privacy, respecting First Amendment rights and providing a choice for library users.

Frequently used strategies for managing the Internet include:

- Codes of conduct that define appropriate use of library computers and the Internet (e.g., no participation in illegal activities).
- Internet training classes for children and parents to teach them techniques, including how to search effectively, to ensure a positive online experience.
- Links to preselected sites such as the ALA's Great Web Sites for Kids (<http://www.ala.org/greatsites>) and search engines specially designed for children such as KidsClick! (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/kidsclick!/>) or AOL's AOL@School (<http://www.aolatschool.com/>).
- Privacy screens on workstations.
- Time limits and other rules for computer use in keeping with the library's mission statement and customer service practices.

Libraries, Children & the Internet

Why is the Internet important for children?

The Internet is changing how we live, learn, work and interact with one other. If today's children are to succeed as adults, they must learn information literacy skills for every resource—new and old.

What is the role of libraries?

Libraries provide access to the information people need or want, regardless of the format in which that information appears. The Internet is another medium through which libraries meet this mission. The latest figures show that almost all public libraries, including branches, now provide Internet access to the public.

What are the roles of librarians?

Librarians are partners with parents. They are there to help their community—adults and children—become information literate by teaching them how to access, evaluate, and use information. They are there to answer questions and guide children to quality Web sites in the same way they recommend books and other resources.

What is the role of the American Library Association?

ALA provides guidance for libraries in developing and implementing policies to ensure the highest quality library and information services. It also takes an active role in educating parents and the public about the Internet through its Web site (<http://www.ala.org>) and through participation in joint initiatives such as GetNetWise (<http://www.getnetwise.org/>).

ALA resources for parents and children include “Especially for Children and Their Parents,” “Great Web Sites for Kids,” and *The Librarian’s Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids* (formerly titled *The Librarian’s Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids*; telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 5044/5041 or e-mail pio@ala.org for more information). ALA also encourages local libraries to offer instruction for children and adults in how to use the Internet safely and effectively.

What is an Internet filter? How does it work?

Filtering or blocking technology restricts access to Internet content through a variety of means. Two basic types of filters currently dominate the market: filters that block content containing disapproved words (keyword blocking) and filters that block access according to a list of disapproved sites (site blocking). In either case, the filter manufacturer, in its own way and according to its own standards, determines which words or sites will be blocked. Regardless of their methods, filters underblock and overblock, and all block constitutionally protected speech.

What is the American Library Association’s position on filtering?

The American Library Association (ALA) does not endorse using Internet filters in libraries, because they block access to information that is legal and useful. Filters are known to block a wide range of sites, including the FBI, eBay, Planned Parenthood, The Bible and others with information many people find helpful for school, work, health and other needs.

The ALA also is concerned that the use of filters may give parents a false sense their children are protected when this is not the case. Filters are not effective in blocking all “objectionable” material, and they do not protect against pedophiles and other interactive aspects of the Internet.

The ALA strongly believes that educating children to use the Internet wisely is their best protection, now and in the future.

For greater detail, see *Filters and Filtering* at <http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/filters> and *Children’s Internet Protection Act Web Site* at <http://www.ala.org/cipa/>.

What about the Children’s Internet Protection Act, doesn’t it require libraries to filter?

No. In 2000, Congress passed the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the Neighborhood Children’s Internet Protection Act (NCIPA) as part of a major spending bill (H.R. 4577). These Acts require libraries receiving specific federal funds (e-rate and LSTA) for Internet access to adopt Internet safety policies and technology that blocks or filters certain material from being accessed through the Internet. For up-to-date information, check the CIPA Web site at <http://www.ala.org/cipa/>.

What type of guidance does ALA provide to libraries on this issue?

The ALA strongly encourages local libraries to continue to adopt and implement Internet use policies in the same way they develop other policies based on the needs of their communities. Almost all have or are developing such policies.

Some policies require a guardian's signature to use the Internet. Some require parents to be present when children use the Internet. Some set time limits. Some revoke Internet privileges for viewing materials that are offensive to others. Some link computers in children's rooms only to pre-selected search engines or sites recommended for children. Some use filters. ALA strongly encourages local libraries to offer instruction for children and adults in how to use the Internet safely and effectively.

In addition, the American Library Association

- Defends the First Amendment rights of all library users.
- Defends the First Amendment rights of children to use libraries and supports the rights of parents to decide with their children how to use libraries.
- Acknowledges that the role of the parent in our society is to care for, instruct, protect and monitor the behavior of their own children.
- Support parents in taking an active role in carrying out their parental responsibilities in libraries, but not at the expense of other people's rights, or the rights of other people's children.
- Supports equitable access to the Internet for all, and provides the necessary education to make that access enriching and safe.
- Urges libraries to become partners with their respective communities to do the best job they can to provide resources to serve the needs of all of their patrons.

For up-to-date information, check the CIPA Web site at <http://www.ala.org/cipa/>.

How many libraries have experienced problems with children viewing inappropriate material on the Internet?

Few libraries report difficulties with children viewing inappropriate material online. The vast majority of children and adults continue to use the library responsibly and appropriately.

What if a library decides to install filters? Would the ALA object?

ALA's role is to recommend policies that promote the highest quality library and information services for the American people. ALA respects the right of local libraries to adopt policies that uphold this ideal and meet the needs of their library users. Our association believes filters are not the best way to protect children.

How can parents ensure their children have a positive online experience?

There are several things parents can do. The most important is to **learn about the Internet** and how it works. For example, every computer has access to child-friendly search engines such as KidsClick! (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick!>), developed by the Ramapo Catskill (N.Y.) Library System. Many libraries, schools and community groups offer classes and materials to assist parents with what they need to know to guide their children.

Set **rules** and instill **values**. Until children are taught how to use the Internet properly, which includes how to conduct a search, how to know the difference between an Internet pal and an unsavory stranger, how to protect private information, and so forth, it would be best if their Internet use were supervised by a responsible adult or guided by for-children Web pages. There are many common sense tips that can ensure children have a positive online experience, such as not using their real names online and never agreeing to meet with someone they meet online without a parent or guardian present.

Third, **teach children** how to use the resource properly and to make good decisions about what they view at the library or wherever they may be.

Fourth, **introduce children to the librarian** and encourage them to ask for help when seeking information on the Internet.

Fifth, **teach children** to value their privacy and that of those around them.

There are many excellent sources of advice for parents. These include *The Librarian's Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids* (formerly titled *The Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace for Parents & Kids*; telephone: 800-545-2433. ext. 5044/5041 or e-mail pio@ala.org for more information) and "Especially for Children and Their Parents (<http://www.ala.org/oif/youngpeople/children>)," which provides links to "Online Safety Rules and Suggestions," "Designed-for-children Search Engines," "Additional ALA Web Sites for Parents, Children, and Librarians," "Other Educational Sites," and "Privacy Issues."

Are libraries without Internet filters safe for children?

Filters do not protect children, education does. As the National Research Council pointed out in its 2002 report, *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet*, "Swimming pools can be dangerous for children. To protect them, one can install locks, put up fences, and deploy pool alarms. All these measures are helpful, but by far the most important thing that one can do for one's children is to teach them to swim." Similarly, the more children and parents know about the Internet and Internet safety, the better equipped they will be to protect themselves and enjoy their time online. Libraries have a long tradition of providing quality service to children and adults in a safe place, and they continue to do so. Parents and children should still exercise common sense in the library, like any public place.

Valuable Links

ALA Privacy Policies and Statements

<http://www.ala.org/oif/ifissues/privacypolicies>

Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Q & A

<http://www.ala.org/oif/basics/censorshipqanda>

Libraries: An American Value

<http://www.ala.org/oif/policies/librariesvalue>

Statement of Commitment to Excellence in Library Service to Children in a Technological Age

<http://www.ala.org/alsc/techstatement>

Key Contacts

ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom

50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611
Telephone: 800-545-2433, ext. 4223
Fax: 312-280-4227
E-mail: oif@ala.org
<http://www.ala.org/oif>

ALA Public Information Office

50 East Huron Street
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Fax: 312-944-8520
E-mail: pio@ala.org
<http://www.ala.org/pio>

ALA Washington Office

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Suite 403
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Telephone: 800-941-8478
Fax: 202-628-8419
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