KIDS AND THE INTERNET

THE PROMISE

NCLIS recognizes and encourages the unprecedented benefits of the Internet and the vital role libraries play in providing Internet access.

- Libraries provide equal access to information for all users without discrimination.

- The Internet enlarges the knowledge of the world by use of technology and, through libraries, the benefits of information technology are shared with those previously denied access.

- The Internet provides an electronic gateway to an expansive array of current, timely information and knowledgeable experts around the globe.

- The Internet gives young people an opportunity to learn how to become critical information consumers.

- By providing immediate access to primary resources worldwide, the Internet extends the resources of individual libraries, no matter where they are located or what their size.

- The Internet facilitates communication among people of diverse locations and backgrounds, thus contributing to greater peace and understanding among people.

- Local governing boards of public institutions are best suited to determine policy regarding access to the Internet in their communities.

- The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides a policy framework which encourages access to the widest array of facts and opinions and prohibits most governmental actions that limit such access.

THE PERILS

NCLIS acknowledges that the Internet presents challenging problems to libraries, especially when children are using the Internet at public and school libraries.

- Individual privacy may be eroded when children provide personal information about themselves and their families in order to register for certain web sites.

- False and misleading information may be perceived to be authoritative because it appears on Internet web sites.

- Library users and staff may be offended by the inadvertent or intentional display of objectionable material by other users.

- The anonymity of Internet email and chat rooms can provide cover for pedophiles who prey on unsuspecting and vulnerable young people.

- The Internet can provide access to material, such as pornography, racism, and hate speech, that parents may not want their children to observe.

- The Internet can facilitate illegal activities such as copyright piracy, gambling, stalking, pedophilia, personal threats, extortion, and consumer fraud.

- Libraries may lack sufficient staff appropriately trained to provide individual assistance to children using the Internet.

"Never before have students – of all ages – been able to gain so much access to information in support of their studies. But we also recognize what some have referred to as the 'dark side of the Internet.' … The Commission is especially sensitive to how these issues affect librarians."

Jeanne Hurley Simon, **NCLIS Chair**

POLICY ISSUES

NCLIS believes that it is the responsibility of local library governing boards to develop Internet use policy and it appreciates that each board must answer a number of questions regarding the library's approach to Internet access. While NCLIS cannot presume to suggest individual answers to such questions – that, after all, is the responsibility of the local community – it can provide the following questions for consideration in developing an "acceptable use policy."

- Can children use the Internet independently or do they need parental supervision or permission?

- Will the library adopt a code of conduct that must be signed by a parent and child before the child accesses Internet?

- Will the library provide a gateway to guide its patrons?

- Will the library adopt a clear statement that Internet terminals may not be used for illegal activities?

- How does the library define illegal activities?

- Will users have to sign up to use Internet terminals?

- Will there be time limits on the use of Internet terminals?

- Will the results of users' research be visible to other users or will the library install privacy screens or other means to restrict public viewing?

- What does the library do when a user is discovered using an Internet terminal for illegal or improper use?

- How does the library handle user and staff complaints about others gaining access to illegal or objectionable sites?

- How will the library handle false accusations about illegal or improper use?

- Does the library's insurance coverage address matters arising from providing access to the Internet?

- How will the library handle access to functions such as chat and email?

- How can the library instill practical "street smarts" on the part of librarians and users?

- How does the library train the governing board itself on the promise and perils of the Internet?

- How do the library and its governing board transmit concerns about Internet access to its funding authority?

- Will the library involve the local community through focus groups, public hearings and other means in the development of Internet use policy?

- How will the library seek legal review of its Internet policy, both from its own legal counsel as well as from other legal experts?

NCLIS Resolution, adopted in Seattle, Washington, December 3, 1998

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science feels strongly that the governing body of every school and public library, in order to meet its trustee responsibilities, should establish, formally approve, and periodically review a written acceptable use policy statement on Internet access.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

NCLIS believes that libraries and their governing boards can take effective action at the local level to mitigate the perils facing children using the Internet.

- Libraries can implement procedures for gaining parental permission that describes what sort of access is permissible for their children.

- Separate terminals can be provided for adults and children, or multiple profiles can be installed on terminals, so that children are not allowed the same access as older people.

- Libraries can restrict the use of chat by children to sites that have been specifically approved (e.g., moderated chat groups, designated interactive sites such as homework helpers, museums and zoos).

- Privacy screens or recessed monitors can be installed on public terminals so that only the terminal user can see what is displayed.

- Libraries can require users to sign up for the use of Internet access terminals and acknowledge their understanding of the libraries' Internet use policies.

- Libraries can present their own web sites that point children to sites that are pre-selected and evaluated or link to search engines that offer levels of selectivity.

- Libraries can provide Internet training, education, and other awareness programs to parents, guardians and teachers that alert them to both the promise and the perils of the Internet and describe how children can have a safe and rewarding experience online.

- Internet access terminals can be configured with software – which can be turned on or off – that restricts access to designated web sites or specific Internet functions.

MORE ABOUT
KIDS AND THE INTERNET

The November 1998 NCLIS hearing on *Kids and the Internet* provided much information on both the promise and the perils of this new technological development. In subsequent meetings, members of the Commission discussed potential solutions and policy issues prompted by the hearing.

This brochure provides preliminary summary information regarding public access to the Internet for young people. The Commission will publish a full report on the hearing that will contain the complete transcript, additional testimony and comments submitted by interested parties, and a discussion of the issues. Please contact NCLIS for further information on the hearing.

National, state and local professional library associations also can provide further information and assistance with these issues.

MORE ABOUT NCLIS

NCLIS advises the President and the Congress on the library and information needs of the nation and the policies and plans necessary to meet those needs. NCLIS coordinates library and information science activities with federal, state, and local governments and with other public and private organizations. It conducts studies, surveys and analyses, and it promotes other research and development activities that will extend and improve the nation's library and information handling capability.

NCLIS is a permanent, independent agency of the federal government.

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U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

KIDS AND THE INTERNET: THE PROMISE AND THE PERILS

Practical Guidelines for Librarians and Library Trustees

On November 10, 1998, NCLIS held a hearing on *Kids and The Internet: The Promise and The Perils*. After listening to the testimony and reviewing submitted statements, NCLIS decided to issue these practical guidelines to assist librarians and library trustees (or other governing bodies) in their efforts to evaluate and respond to the promise and the perils of Internet access for children.

NCLIS recognizes that such decisions must be local ones, based on the culture, customs and character of each community. Thus, the Commission recommends strongly that each library have a written "acceptable use policy," approved by its governing structure and reviewed periodically to adjust to the continuous changes in the Internet.