

SEWICKLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY
Internet Access, Safety and Use Policy

Internet Access

The Internet is a worldwide network that interconnects computers ranging from desktop personal computers to the largest supercomputers. At present, the Internet is a public, cooperative and self-sustaining facility accessible to hundreds of millions of people worldwide. No one is in charge of the Internet. The most widely used part of the Internet is the World Wide Web, which constitutes the universe of network-accessible information, including web pages. The Internet is also used for more direct forms of communication, such as e-mails and chat rooms.

Libraries are a major information source in our society for access to the larger world of human expression. For some, they are the only available access point. Libraries connect individuals with the ideas, information and images they seek. By providing information across the spectrum of human interests and making it accessible to anyone who wants it, libraries allow individuals to exercise their First Amendment right to seek and receive all types of expression, from all points of view.

In keeping with the Sewickley Public Library's mission to provide free access to a wide range of information to all library users through various media, the Internet is available to all Library patrons. The Internet enables the Library to provide resources beyond the Library's own collection from around the globe. It offers a wealth of materials and information that is personally, professionally and culturally enriching to individuals of all ages.

Internet Safety

Like other materials in public libraries, the Internet includes information that some people may consider offensive, false or even dangerous. The Library staff can and will identify specific starting points for searches that are appropriate to the Library's mission and service roles. However, the Library cannot technologically or legally control or monitor all material that may be accessible from Internet sources.

Technologically, the Internet is a vast and unregulated medium with access points that can and do change often, rapidly and unpredictably. Filtering software has been installed on the majority of the Library's computers in an attempt to block access to web sites with adult or sexually explicit content and web sites that promote violence, hacking, drugs, alcohol, criminal skills or hate speech. But filters are not perfect. Filters sometimes allow access to objectionable material. Likewise, they can sometimes prevent access to educationally relevant material.

Legally, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution greatly limits the Library's ability to discriminate with respect to the content of communication. Because

filters block educationally relevant material and a wide range of other material protected under the Constitution, the Library does provide access to a minority of unfiltered computers and unfiltered wireless connections for laptops.

Recognizing these technological and legal limitations, the Library offers the following guidelines intended to promote the safety of its patrons who choose to use the Internet, particularly parents seeking to protect their children from inappropriate materials.

Reliability of Information

The Internet is an unregulated medium. The accuracy, completeness and timeliness of information found on the Internet vary widely. Moreover, people or websites on the Internet may not be who they seem. Users should evaluate information found on the Internet, as they do other media, by questioning the source and validity of the information provided. Provision of access to the Internet does not mean or imply that the Library endorses or sanctions the content or point of view of any of the information or commentary found on the Internet.

Dissemination of Personal Information

The Internet is not a secure medium. Third parties may be able to obtain information regarding a user's activity on the Internet. Users should think carefully before giving out any personal information, including their name, address, password, telephone number or credit card number.

Illegal Activities

Internet workstations cannot be used for any fraudulent or unlawful purposes, including activities prohibited under applicable federal, state or local laws.

Obscenity and child pornography are illegal. The display of material harmful to minors, as defined in 18 Pa. C.S. 5903, on a viewing screen is also illegal. Internet users must be sensitive to the fact that workstations are in public areas and, therefore, images displayed on a screen or printed on paper may be seen by a wide audience.

Materials obtained or copies made from the Internet may be subject to laws that govern making reproductions of copyrighted works. Users are responsible for compliance with all international, national and state laws governing copyrighted materials.

Any illegal activity involving the Library's Internet resources or equipment may be subject to prosecution by appropriate authorities.

Use of the Internet by Minors

As with other Library materials, the parent or guardian should set family standards and values with respect to the Internet. The Library cannot usurp this right nor assume this responsibility. The Library strongly encourages parents and guardians to supervise their children's Internet use and to provide Internet guidelines.

Suggested Internet guidelines available online include those provided by the American Library Association on the website, "700+ Great Sites" (www.ala.org) and "Child Safety on the Information Highway" and "Teen Safety on the Information Highway" (www.safekids.com). Hard copies of this information are available from the reference librarians. The Library has also created web pages for children that provide content and links to other web sites that, in the professional opinion of the Library staff, parents or guardians will find appropriate for their children. Librarians are also available to provide assistance, identify appropriate sites and to discuss questions or concerns.

Filtering software is functional on the majority of Library workstations, including all workstations in the Children's Department. These filters are intended to block access to web sites with adult or sexually explicit content and web sites that promote violence, hacking, drugs, alcohol, criminal skills or hate speech. But filters sometimes allow access to objectionable material. Parents should encourage their children to report such lapses in filters to their parents and the librarians.

The Library does provide a minority of unfiltered computers and unfiltered wireless connections for laptops. These connections permit access to educationally relevant material that would be inadvertently blocked by filters. The Library also believes that this unfiltered access is necessary to comply with numerous Supreme Court decisions that have held that adults should not be limited to seeing only what is appropriate for children if there are less restrictive alternatives. Parents who do not wish their children to have access to these unfiltered connections should instruct their children not to use them.

Parents must also realize that these unfiltered workstations and wireless connections are in public areas. Parents should strongly urge their children to refrain from attempting to view or read material being used by others.

Parents or guardians should also supervise and provide guidelines for their children when they are using direct forms of electronic communications, such as e-mail or chat rooms. All users, including minors, can access existing accounts or establish new accounts that allow them to directly communicate with third parties through the Library's computers. Parents should warn their children that people online may not be who they seem: someone claiming that "she" is a "12-year-old girl" may in reality be a 40-year-old man. Children should never give out identifying information (name, address, school, telephone number, password) in a public message center, such as a chat room or bulletin board, and should give such information out via e-mail only to someone that both the parent and child know and trust. Children should never respond, and should tell their

parents about, messages that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening or make them feel uncomfortable. And with respect to e-commerce, parents should advise their children that offers that seem “too good to be true” probably are.

The Internet is not a secure medium. Parents should warn their children that third parties may be able to obtain information regarding a user’s activity on the Internet.

Finally, parents should prohibit their children from engaging in unlawful activities online, including unauthorized access, such as “hacking,” or the unauthorized use of credit card numbers. Parents should also prohibit their children from accessing material that advocates illegal or dangerous behavior.

Terms of Use

Given the limited number of, and great demand for, the Library’s computers, the Library reserves the right to establish procedures that allocate the Internet stations on a first-come, first-served basis. The Library also reserves the right to limit a patron’s time on the Internet.

Internet workstations must be used in a responsible manner. Users should not attempt to damage computer hardware, peripherals or software. Computer and Internet settings may not be changed. Personal software cannot be used on Internet workstations.

Library patrons must respect directions provided by the Library staff. Violation of the policies and regulations that govern the use of the Library’s Internet resources may result in suspension or loss of privilege to use these resources. Any illegal activity involving the Library’s Internet resources or equipment may be subject to prosecution by the appropriate authorities.

The Library reserves the right to take appropriate action to ensure compliance with this policy. This policy is reviewed annually.

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