



BACK TO SCHOOL SECURITY GUIDE



Okay, so the summer holidays are coming to an end and you're well into the hustle and bustle of getting your children ready for the start of the school year. Along with that, comes your purchase of that shiny new laptop or desktop computer for your child. Or if you're not buying one, you may be powering up a computer you already have for the first time in a while.

To quote a line from Uncle Ben in the movie Spiderman, "With great power comes great responsibility". A computer is a powerful tool and someone has to be responsible for that tool. So here are some things that you need to consider as you get your kids ready for school.

Back to School Shopping List

For starters, here are some accessories you may not have considered that might be useful for your kids:

- ✓ A good backpack or rollers for the laptop. Most kids find a backpack is much easier for when they're on the go.
- ✓ Make sure you have purchased and installed an excellent Anti-Virus, Anti-Spyware, Anti-Rootkit, Two-way Firewall and Anti-Spam protection software for all of your computer systems. For example, the **AVG Internet Security 9.0** full suite solution. You cannot exercise that "great responsibility" mentioned above without having comprehensive, real-time protection against online threats.
- ✓ Blank CDs/DVDs are pretty useful for burning a backup copy of a homework assignment or major project that your kids might be working on and can't afford to lose. Even better, you can sign up for an online remote backup solution like **Carbonite Online PC Backup**. Then you'll never have to worry again about important files being lost, or your kids losing all their data if the laptop is stolen.
- ✓ Consider a USB key(s) for easy transfer and transportation of data.
- ✓ An Ethernet network cable, for when you don't have access to a wireless network, but have access to a wired network.
- ✓ A wireless network card, if the laptop doesn't have wireless built-in.
- ✓ A laptop security cable, especially for use in schoolrooms.



Back to School TO DO List

Now that you have that new computer, or your old one for that matter, how do you exercise “great responsibility” over that power? Here are some tips:

- ✓ Ensure your computer system is running an Internet Security program and has up-to-date threat definitions. Most reputable security software vendors release multiple threat definition updates every day. Configured properly, the software will automatically look for new threat definitions and program updates regularly. You should check to ensure your computer’s update settings are correct and that the automatic update process is working properly.
- ✓ Make sure the system software and operating system are up-to-date with all of the latest updates available installed. This is especially true for computers that have been shutdown or offline for the summer. Before doing anything else, update the systems (from a protected network, if at all possible). You can configure most software to automatically check for updates. Don’t just focus on updates for the operating system. Remember all those other programs and pieces of software on the computer that need to be updated as well.
- ✓ If the laptop is running a version of the Microsoft Windows or Vista operating system, ensure the Firewall is turned on for both the wireless and local area network. If the operating system doesn’t have a Firewall built-in, look for a third-party firewall solution that is compatible for your system. **AVG Internet Security includes a two-way Firewall** that not only stops bad stuff from getting onto your computer, but also stops malware already on your computer from sending information to the bad guys.
- ✓ Screen savers, that are password protected, are another good option to turn on, preferably set to timeout in 10 or 15 minutes – anything more defeats the purpose. Even better, teach all of your family members how to lock the computer when walking away from the system.
- ✓ Don’t run your computer with Administrator privileges as a matter of course. Set up an account as a regular user for your kids as it can lessen the impact of malware and remote exploits. In those rare instances when greater privileges are required, you should use the Administrator privileges.

- ✓ If your kids are using wireless networks, remind them to take great care and ensure that they try to connect only via a secure WPA encrypted network. However, there will probably be many times that they will have to attach to an open wireless network. It may be that the school has open wireless network, or that your kids decide to work at the local Internet cafe and use that network. In such cases, they should be very careful about what they do while connected via these open networks. Warn them to avoid doing any sensitive e-mail or Instant Messaging exchanges and private transactions.
- ✓ Educate your children to stay away from peer-to-peer (P2P) networks (tempting though these may be). While growing in popularity, they are also growing in risk. The risks involved range from the software you download to participate in the P2P network (containing spyware or other malware beasts) to the actual files being distributed or obtained. The vast majority of the files being shared are copyrighted songs and movies which are illegal and can land your children and you in a lot of trouble. Many of the infection mechanisms used by malware today target P2P networks.
- ✓ A final set of tips to give your kids for safe computing.
 - Be careful when opening e-mail from unknown individuals.
 - Be very careful what you click on, especially links that come in via e-mail or Instant Messages.
 - The same principle applies for opening e-mail attachments or files shared via Instant Messaging.
 - Make sure you have an effective Anti-Spam solution installed and working properly.



The computer is a powerful tool and school networks are prime targets for the bad guys looking for vulnerable systems. Protect yourself and others by sending your kids off to school with their backpacks completely packed and ready to go.

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