Safety On The Internet

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My big brother can be a little paranoid, the first time I created an email account I remember him constantly nagging me to "always sign out because you never know what creep could log into your account." Of course I listened, but often with a pinch of salt as I'd tell him to "chill." I guess I didn't take internet security as seriously as I should have, until it nearly cost me quite a number of good friendships. About two years ago, my yahoo account was hacked into and all my contacts were receiving links to porn sites and penis enlargement ads. Hardly one ever to check my e-mails at the time, I was oblivious to what was going on, unfortunately giving my brother the joy of bringing my attention to it with a side of "what have I been telling you?"

In the following couple of days as I sent lots of apologies, got a new email address and made sure my password was "very strong", my lesson was learnt.

Another issue my brother was always badgering me about was how much personal information I had on my facebook profile, again, I thought he was being unnecessarily paranoid until I started hearing stories of people being impersonated on facebook and of late I've been getting "Hi I saw your profile picture on facebook and think you are cute, I'd like to get to know you. Please add me for a chat" messages on my yahoo messenger, which is scary because I don't even have my yahoo address on my profile, but apparently it can be accessed because it's my login account.
The internet has undeniably made life easier for us in a lot of ways…

Communication, retail access, information, education and employment access are all just the click of a button away. What this means however, is that more and more of our information is accessible to people we've never even met, from our bank details to what we like to have for breakfast and we have no control over what people can do with that information. As entertaining and informative as the internet can be, it can also be quite dangerous. People have been kidnapped and killed by people they'd "befriended" on the internet. Here are a few tips on how to be safe on the internet:

- Secure your computers with anti-virus, anti-spyware, and tools.

Keep them current and use them unfailingly-as automatically as locking your door when you leave the house. A computer that does not have security software installed and up-to-date will become infected with malicious software in an average of four minutes. That malicious software will steal your information and put you at risk for crimes.
Choose a safe online name.

- Use e-mail addresses, IM names, chat nicknames, and other such names that don't give away too much personal information. Pick a name that doesn't help identify you (your age, for example) or locate you. Avoid flirtatious or provocative names that may cause unwanted attention.

- Use strong, unique passwords for every site to reduce the risk of someone breaking into your account.

- Secure passwords do not have to be hard to remember, just hard to guess. The key aspects of a strong password are length (the longer the better); a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols; and no tie to your personal information.

- Use unique passwords for each site or service. This way, if your password is discovered on one site, the rest of your services aren't at risk.

- Discuss online safety with your family and friends.

Decide together how you will help protect each other's privacy online and set rules that reflect your personal values. Decide what information about yourself you are willing to have shared online, and with whom you are willing to share it. This includes asking friends to put your email address on the Bcc: line if they are including you on an email to people that you don't know.

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