

## *What is IM and Chat?*

IM stands for “instant messaging.” This is a form of “real-time” communication with others online through written text (typed messages appear on your screen and the screens of others you are talking to as you type them—this is “real time”). To use IM, you first create an IM “screen name” (a nickname). Other people you know give you their screen name and you can add them to your list of friends; these are people you want to be able to send messages to and receive messages from. You can then open a private, typed conversation with this person and send messages back and forth.

“Chat rooms” are similar to IM in some ways. Like IM, it is a form of real-time, text-based conversation online. A chat room is actually a large online community where there are many different text-based conversations going on. Unlike IM, these are not private conversations. Anyone can join them. In order to talk to someone via IM, you need to know their screen name first. In chat rooms this is not the case. Much of the point of a chat room is to meet people one does not already know. Many times chat rooms are interest-specific: people can find chat rooms with people who share similar interests and ideas. Many chat rooms allow you to open private text conversations with others you meet.

**Is IM safe?** – Generally, yes. But it is important for teens to not distribute their IM screen name to just anyone. If a stranger finds someone’s screen name, they can contact them through IM. It is wise to reject any conversations from unknown and uninvited people on IM. If an unknown person continually tries to make contact, most IM programs will allow you to “block” that screen name from contacting you again. Parents who are concerned about who their teen is talking to through IM should gently ask questions about the people in their teen’s friend or buddy list.

**Are chat rooms safe?** – It depends on the chat room. Some chat rooms are designed for teens and pre-teens to interact with people they already know from school or other social circles. Teens should use utmost caution about who they interact with in a chat room. Never give out private information such as address, full name, name of parents, name of school, etc. Many experts say that teens should avoid chat rooms in general.

**What should parents be aware of?** – It is wise for parents to have a handle on who their children are talking to through IM and Chat. It is a good idea to learn some of the “shorthand” terms that are typed on IM as well. Some shorthand terms may be indicators that teens are having inappropriate conversations online. “P911” for example, means “my parents are coming.” Others like “PAL” (parents are listening), “PAW” (parents are watching), “PIR” (parent in room), and “POS” (parent over shoulder) are good examples.

143: I love you

AISI: as I see it

ASL: age/sex/location

BF: boyfriend

BRB: be right back

BTW: by the way

F2f: face to face

GF: girlfriend

IDK: I don’t know

IMO: in my opinion

INDB: it's no big deal

IRL: in real life

ISS: I said so

JK: just kidding

K: okay

KIT: keep in touch

LDR: long distance relationship

LMIRL: let’s meet in real life

LOL: laughing out loud

M/F: male or female?

N/P: no problem

NTK: nice to know

OMG: oh my god

OTP: on the phone

P911: my parents are coming

PAL: parents are listening

PAW: parents are watching

PDA: public display of affection

PIR: parent in room

POS: parent over shoulder

PPL: people

S2R: send to receive

ROFL: rolling on floor laughing

THX: thanks

TTYL: talk to you later

TY: thank you

WT? what the

WTG: way to go

WTGP: want to go private?