
Common Sense on Digital Piracy

Are Your Kids' Downloads on the Up and Up?

Many parents remember exchanging mix tapes or VHS copies of our favorite TV shows with our friends. But today's technology makes it much easier to get and give away copyrighted material illegally. And many kids are taking advantage of the access, downloading and sharing everything from games to movies to music to software. Some kids are downloading innocently — unaware of the ethical, legal, and security consequences of their actions. Other kids find the chance to get stuff for free just too tempting.

Some facts

Under U.S. copyright law, illegal downloading could be punishable by up to five years in prison and \$250,000 in fines.

Internet Service Providers can detect connections to illegal sites and flag large file downloads.

Illegally downloaded material can expose computers to viruses, malware, spyware, or other unwanted software, costing families hefty recovery fees.

What is piracy?

Piracy is the act of illegally downloading copyrighted games, music, movies, TV shows, photographs, and software that you haven't paid for. Downloads are surprisingly easy to find on the Internet, mostly on file-sharing sites that kids hear about from other kids.

Why it matters

Not paying people for their creative work isn't just an ethical issue, it's illegal. Under U.S. copyright law, offenders can be punished by up to five years in prison and \$250,000 in fines. In some cases, modern-day pirates have been turned into the authorities by their Internet Service Providers, which detect connections to illegal sites and flag large file downloads.

Beyond the ethical and legal issues is the hefty price tag that many families pay because of piracy. Illegally downloaded material can expose computers to viruses, malware, spyware, or other unwanted software, all of which can crash your computer and lead to costly computer damage, loss of irreplaceable files, or even identity theft.

Parent tips for all kids

- » **Talk to your children about piracy.** Remind them that just because it's easy to download something, that doesn't make it right. A lot of people work hard to put together a song, a movie, or a software program. All of these people need to get paid for their hard work. Make sure kids understand that downloading is a form of theft. When you download a movie illegally from peer-to-peer sites, load an unauthorized copy of a software program on to your computer, or copy a music file from a friend, it's against the law — even if you give it away for free. You can be fined lots of money or put in jail.
- » **Use authentic software from authorized sources.** Not all file-sharing sites are illegal. Many software tools let people share big files legitimately. Just make sure that your kids are using a legitimate product. Tell them to check for security indicators, such as a padlock icon on the computer browser or an encrypted URL (commonly shown as https in your browser bar). And if a software program is ridiculously cheap — at least 35% lower than normal costs -- then it's most likely not legal.
- » **Lead by example.** Make sure that every program, movie, music track, TV episode, or game that you purchase, download, or stream is authentic and legal. Make sure you abide by the terms that come with the software (called the end-user license agreement, or EULA). It sets a great example for your kids and ensures your protection from the pitfalls of piracy.