

Subject: Internet Safety and Use

Application: Employees, customers, consultants, contractors, vendors and visitors

Westchester Library System (WLS) and its member public libraries endeavor to develop services that meet the cultural, informational, educational, and recreational needs of Westchester County's diverse, multicultural community by providing access to Internet resources that offer many valuable local, national and international sources of information. Information and resources on the Internet enhance those already held in the library and often go beyond what is locally available. Users are encouraged to take advantage of the Internet, but also to exercise discretion, good judgment and concern for privacy in their use of it.

WLS supports the right to privacy and confidentiality of library users in accordance with the American Library Association's (ALA) Library Bill of Rights; the Freedom to Read Statement; the Freedom to View; Access to Electronic Information Services and Networks; and with the policies, goals and objectives of this public library system. WLS considers any record of Internet use by a patron to be a library record and as such Internet use will be protected as confidential as prescribed by section 4509 of NYS Civil Practice Law & Rules.

WLS cannot warrant the information available through its Internet connection to be accurate, authoritative, factual, timely or useful. In addition, because the content of the Internet is not managed or governed by any entity, users may encounter materials they consider offensive. The board and employees of WLS assume no responsibility for damages of any type arising from the use of Internet workstations.

Adults and minors are prohibited from use of the Internet for any illegal activity including but not limited to fraud, harassment, threats or any form of unauthorized computer access. Such illegal activities may result in loss of system privileges and criminal prosecution. Use of the WLS Internet gateway/connection is subject to capacity limits that may result in reduced or revoked access for any activity deemed to be using excessive amounts of generally available capacity.

As with other library materials, a minor's access to the Internet is the responsibility of the parent/legal guardian.

As required by the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), in order to be eligible for certain federal funding, WLS has implemented and is enforcing, during use by minors, filtering on all Internet-accessible devices connected to its computer network to block or filter Internet access to pictures that are: (a) obscene; (b) child pornography; or (c) harmful to minors.

The term “obscene” means, in this policy, that a court of law has found that—

- a. the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that such project, when taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; and
- b. such project depicts or describes sexual conduct in a patently offensive way; and
- c. such project, when taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

Users should be aware that all filters, including the filter used by WLS, operate with a certain degree of “underblocking” (i.e. permitting access to certain material that is intended to be blocked) and “overblocking” (i.e. denying access to certain constitutionally protected material that is not intended to be blocked). WLS has attempted to implement filtering while providing library patrons with the broadest possible access to constitutionally protected speech and information. WLS cannot and does not guarantee that the filter will block all materials deemed inappropriate. WLS also cannot and does not guarantee that the filter will not restrict access to sites that may have legitimate research or other value.

In order to help address the issue of overblocking and enhance users’ access to constitutionally protected speech and information, WLS requests that all users, both adults and minors, send an email to it+filtering@wlsmail.org to request unblocking of an incorrectly blocked site. In addition, any user who is 17 years of age or older may disable the filter in order to obtain unfiltered Internet access by following the instructions provided on the computer screen or other instructions as WLS may provide from time to time.

To address the issue of safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms, and other forms of direct electronic communications, as well as the unauthorized disclosure use and dissemination of personal identification information regarding minors, WLS will provide training for member library staff. In addition, WLS encourages libraries to provide training to library patrons and urges minors to keep in mind the following safety guidelines:

1. Never give out identifying information such as home address, school name or telephone number.
2. Let parents, guardians and/or caregivers decide whether personal information such as age, marital status or financial information should be revealed.
3. Never arrange an in-person meeting with someone via any form of direct electronic communication without approval of a parent or guardian.

Oversight

Upon request by the WLS Board of Trustees staff will report on the impact of the filter on the patron Internet experience.

Last approved: June 25, 2024