You can childproof your computer

February 27 2009, By Anne Krishnan

Every few months, I receive a question from a reader whose computer was never the same after a grandchild came to visit.

One computer's default language switched from English to German. Another could no longer launch Firefox. A third mysteriously lost its sound.

While it's difficult to figure out what buttons a child might have pressed or clicked to cause these problems, there are a number of ways that you can protect your computer while still allowing the kids to play on it.

Many computer problems can be attributed to kids' indiscriminate Web surfing. Adults (hopefully) know to be careful in cyberspace, but children are more likely to invite any old malware home for dinner.

KidZui is a Web interface that limits children's surfing to a pre-approved set of Web sites, pictures, games and videos. It even has a social networking component.

The interface comes as a standalone browser for Windows or a Firefox extension. Both allow the parents/grandparents to lock the browser so that it's the only application available for the child to use on the computer. Learn more at www.kidzui.com.

Crazy Little Fingers is a free program that lets toddlers pound on the keyboard without the risk of accidental damage to your settings or files. What's more, this application assigns customizable images to the keys,

making the pounding interactive but safe. Download it at www.kwacky.dcmembers.com.

Windows also provides free software to help protect the family computer. Windows Steady State, available as a download for Vista or XP, allows you to return your computer and hard disk to its exact condition before the child touched it, simply by rebooting. The program also gives parents or grandparents the ability to head off problems by restricting certain user accounts' access to the control panel and designating safe Web sites for surfing.

Finally, the beauty of separate user accounts in Windows is that you can limit one or more people's access to the system resources, with no additional software required. For instance, by creating a user account for the kids, you can prevent your grandchildren from being able to download software to the system and protect your personal files so the kids can't destroy them.

To open a new account in Windows XP, first log in as "Administrator." Open the "Start" menu, click on "Control Panel" and double-click on "User Accounts." Click on "Create New Account" and enter a name for the account.

Now select the "Limited" radio button (the little circle) at the top of the screen. This is the key step for preventing your children from installing software or changing your settings.

Click "Create Account," which will take you back to the "User Accounts" screen. Click on the account you just made, then click "Create a Password." Having control over the password will allow you to block the child's computer use if necessary.

If your child knows your password, be sure to create a new one for your

account. You'll need to make sure your documents aren't in shared directories, as well.

For a step-by-step guide to setting up a new account, changing the password or changing the log in picture, visit www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/us … /winxp/accounts.mspx .

___

(Think you can stump the geeks? Send your high-tech question to stumpthegeeks(at)newsobserver.com. Please include your name, address and daytime phone number. Individual replies are not given.)

___

© 2009, The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.).
Visit The News & Observer online at www.newsobserver.com/
Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

Citation: You can childproof your computer (2009, February 27) retrieved 16 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2009-02-childproof.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.