

Internet Safety Tips for Parents

The internet is great for socializing and communicating but it also comes with certain risks. The online world can feel anonymous and kids sometimes forget that they are still accountable for their actions. Unfortunately, there are people online who are not well intentioned, including bullies, predators, hackers, and scammers. There is also the risk that your kids could find pornography, violence, or hate speech online. You can reduce these risks by talking to your kids about how they communicate—online and off—and encouraging them to behave in ways they can be proud of.

The best way to protect your kids online? Talk to them and let them know that you will listen and support them. Don't wait for them to start the conversation- use everyday opportunities to talk to your kids about being online. For example, news stories about Internet scams or cyberbullying, can help start a conversation with kids about their experiences and your expectations. If your child confides in you about something disturbing or inappropriate they saw online, try to work together to prevent it from happening again. He/she needs to learn how to behave and how to exercise judgment about using the Internet safely, securely, and in accordance with your family ethic.

*It's important to emphasize the concept of **credibility** to teens. Even the most tech-savvy kids need to understand that not everything they see on the Internet is true, that people on the Internet may not be who they appear to be, that information or images they share can be seen far and wide, and once you write or post something online it is there **forever** . Even when you think you have deleted it, you have not, because the internet provider (Gmail, Facebook, Snapchat, etc), stores every post. Others can also take screen shots of it and repost it to hundreds of people in seconds. Years from now, something you posted could be seen by others, including colleges and future employers.

*Use **privacy settings** to restrict who can access and post on your child's profile. Some social networking sites, chat rooms, and blogs have strong privacy settings. Talk to your kids about these settings and your expectations for who should be allowed to view their profile.

*Review your child's **friends list**. Encourage them not to "friend" anyone who they don't know or who claims to be the friend of someone they know. If they do not have a friendship with the person offline, they should not friend them online.

*Talk to your teens about **avoiding sex talk online**. Research shows that teens who don't talk about sex with strangers online are less likely to come in contact with predators. In fact, researchers have found that predators usually don't pose as children or teens, and most teens who are contacted by adults they don't know find it creepy. Teens should not hesitate to ignore or block them.

***Know what your kids are doing**. Get to know the social networking sites your kids use so you know how best to understand their activities. If you're concerned that your child is engaging in risky online behavior, you may want to search the social networking sites they use to see what information they're posting. Are they pretending to be someone else? Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, grade, or community.

*Encourage your kids to **trust their gut** if they have suspicions. Encourage them to tell you if they feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online. You can then help them report concerns to the police and to the social networking site. Most of these sites have links for users to report abusive, suspicious, or inappropriate behavior.

*Tell your kids **not to impersonate someone else**. Let your kids know that it's wrong to create sites, pages, or posts that seem to come from someone else, like a teacher, a classmate, or a made up person.

* Help them to create **safe screen names and email addresses**. Encourage your kids to think about the impression that screen names and email addresses can make. A good screen name or email address won't reveal much about how old they are, where they live, or their gender. For privacy purposes, your kids' IM names should not be the same as their email addresses.

*Talk to your kids about using **strong email passwords** and protecting them. The longer the password, the harder it is to crack. Personal information, your login name, common words, or adjacent keys on the keyboard are not safe passwords. Kids can protect their passwords by not sharing them with anyone, including their friends.

*Help your kids understand **what information should stay private**. Tell them why it's important to keep some things— about themselves, family members, and friends— to themselves. Information like their Social Security number, street address, phone number, and family financial information—say, bank account or credit card numbers—is private and should stay that way.

*Talk to your kids about **cyberbullying**. Tell your kids that they can't hide behind the words they type and the images they post. Hurtful messages not only make the target feel bad, but they also make the sender look bad—and sometimes can bring scorn from peers and punishment from authorities.

Ask your kids to let you know if an online message or image makes them feel threatened or hurt. If you fear for your child's safety, contact the police.

Adapted from STOP.THINK.CONNECT, at
http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Chatting%20with%20Kids%20Booklet_1.pdf

Luckily, there are many great resources to help parents. We encourage you to visit the sites listed below for more information.

Online resources:

http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Chatting%20with%20Kids%20Booklet_1.pdf

<http://www.stcguide.com>

<http://www.thinkbeforeyoulinkinschool.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/STOPTHINKCONNECT>

<http://www.dhs.gov/stopthinkconnect>

www.centerforparentingeducation.org

www.common sense media.org/educators/educate-families

www.dhs.gov/stopthinkconnect

FBI – Violent Crimes Against Children

http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc_majorthefts/cac

Other Information of Interest:

"The Data Brokers: Selling your personal information"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAT_ina93NY

"The Innovation of Loneliness"

<https://vimeo.com/70534716>

To schedule a lecture please contact me at:

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Use subject title: "Social Media and Emerging Technology Safety"

(703) 957-9293

<https://www.facebook.com/StayCyberSecure/>