

INTERNET SAFETY FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH & CAREGIVER MONITORING & SUPERVISION

As adults and children increasingly turn to digital tools for school, work, and socialization, online safety matters more than ever. Children and youth are at increased risk of online exploitation as their lives move increasingly online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closing of schools, the use of hybrid models for school reopening, and reliance on online learning environments have led to an unprecedented rise in screen time for young people of all ages. Most families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained, and connected to the outside world – but a baseline level of knowledge, skills, and resources are needed to keep kids safe online.

HOUSEHOLD RULES, NORMS, & EXPECTATIONS

All parents and caregivers should establish house rules and norms around acceptable and unacceptable technology use. These norms may differ from family-to-family. The rules should consider children's age, developmental level, abilities, maturity, and trust.

- Decide when & where you're comfortable having children/youth use devices in your home.
- Consider the difference between using a device for school and using it for entertainment.
- Talk about balancing time spent with technology, media, and other activities.
- Have ongoing conversations about internet safety.
- Learn the age rules for different sites, platforms, and apps. Set your own standards.
- Review and approve apps and games before they are downloaded and used.
- Explain that images posted online may stay on the internet permanently.
- Supervise the use of all internet-enabled devices.
- Regularly check the online communities they use to see what information they are posting.
- Know their online activities & friends.
- Supervise the photos and videos they post and send/receive online.
- Discuss the risks of features like livestreaming and disappearing/time-limited content.
- Discourage the use of webcams and mobile video devices for younger kids – and help teens and tweens figure out how to use video safely.
- Prohibit kids from meeting face-to-face with someone they only know online or through their mobile device.
- Teach children how to respond to cyberbullies. Tell them they can always talk to you.

AGREEMENTS

- Establish an agreement with the children and youth about internet use at home and outside of the home. *Examples:* [Common Sense Media's Family Media Agreements](#), [Rules 'N Tools Youth Pledge](#), [Childnet International Family Agreement](#)

SECURITY/PRIVACY SETTINGS & MONITORING

Remember that even the strictest monitoring programs and content blockers can't ensure children are totally protected online. The best tools for keeping kids safe are time, attention, and active conversation about digital behaviors.

- Clearly explain to children and youth how they will be monitored or limited, including that they will have to show you the apps they are using and how to navigate them.
- Teach children how to protect personal information posted online and to follow the same rules with respect to the personal information of others.
- Be sure children use strict privacy settings on all social media platforms.
- Use parental controls on all internet-enabled devices (e.g., computers, laptops, gaming devices, tablets, phones).
- Get more guidance on parental controls at <https://internetsafety101.org/parentalcontrols>.
- Set age-appropriate filters to block harmful websites, videos, and images.
- Consider using monitoring tools to see what kids are doing and who they are communicating with.
- Periodically check children's online activity by viewing the browser's history.
- Set time limits and consider using time-limiting software.
- Discourage access to chat rooms and only allow live audio chat with extreme caution.
- Limit children's instant messaging (IM) contacts to a parent-approved friend list.

CONVERSATION PROMPTS FOR TALKING TO KIDS

- What do you use your phone for the most?
- What is your favorite website or app? What do you like to do there? Can you show me?
- Would you feel comfortable if I checked your accounts?
- Have you ever seen something online you didn't want to see?
- What would you do if someone sent you a text or picture that was inappropriate?
- Do you ever talk to people you don't know online? What do you talk about?
- Have you ever talked with someone you first met online on your phone?
- What kinds of things do you post?

CONVERSATION PROMPTS FOR TALKING TO KIDS (continued)

- How much personal information do you share online?
- Do you know how to turn GPS off and turn privacy settings on for the apps you use?
- Do you trust your online friends? Are there any people you should unfriend or block?
- How do you decide who to add as a friend?
- Do you know how to report, flag, or block people on the websites and apps you use? Can you show me?
- Has anyone ever tried talking to you online about inappropriate or sexual things? What did you do?
- Who would you talk to if you were upset by a request you received online?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Vermont DCF-FSD Child Protection Hotline: 1-800-649-5285

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Step Up: *Protect Kids from Child Sexual Abuse*: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/prevention/stepup>

References for this Document:

- <https://www.netSMARTkids.org/>
- <https://www.missingkids.org/>
- <https://www.ice.gov/topics/iGuardians>
- <https://www.justice.gov/usao-vt/project-safe-childhood>
- <https://www.justice.gov/usao-vt/page/file/1275316/download>
- <https://love146.org/action/online-safety/>