Kids' Safety Online

Online dangers and how to keep kids safe online

The Internet is a great social networking tool for young people, but abusers know it and use its anonymity to access kids. Predators can adopt a false identity, initiate trusting friendships with children or youth and attempt to meet them in person.

Online child sexual exploitation is a serious problem. Approximately one in five children is sexually solicited online.[1]

"Luring" is a term describing a number of dangerous activities an adult may engage in with a child online. It can include convincing a child or youth to reveal personal details about themselves and family members, sending photos, or meeting in person. Sending photos to even a relative over the Internet can be risky because an exploiter can intercept the photos and cut and paste the child's image into a pornographic photo and then distribute it.

Warning signs your child may be unsafe online[2]

- Your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night, and doesn't want to tell you who s/he is talking to or what s/he is doing.
- You find pornography on your child's computer.
- Your child receives phone calls from adults you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize.
- Your child asks for a web camera or moves the web camera to a more private location.
- Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know.
- Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen when you come into the room.
- Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.
- Your child is using an online account belonging to someone else.

How parents can keep kids safe online

The most important thing you can do to keep kids safe online is talk with your kids—before someone else does.

By setting guidelines, explaining the dangers and supervising younger children online, caregivers can dramatically reduce the chances their child will meet an online acquaintance in real life.

10 cyber-safety tips for parents and caregivers

Here are 10 cyber-safety tips you can use to prepare your kids for the online world:

1. Talk to your kids about online safety issues.
2. Build guidelines and a family agreement around Internet use just as you would for other activities.
3. Be proactive in finding out who your kids are talking to online by spending time with them on the Internet.
4. Keep your computer in a public area of your house.
5. Never disclose personal details online.
6. They should never post pictures of themselves online to people they do not know. Webcams and camera phones make it easy to take and transmit images—and too often, young people are lured into sending explicit pictures that are then used to manipulate them. Explain to your child that everything sent out over the Internet could last there **forever.**
7. Reinforce that people online may not be who they say they are.
8. Consider using parental controls like Internet filters or blocking software.
9. Encourage open dialogue with your kids and offer a "No-Questions-Asked Bailout" as a safety net if they feel they could be in danger.
10. Be constructive about good places for them to visit on the Internet.

Safety tips for social networking sites

Social networking sites are very popular with young people. Most have privacy controls that limit access. Ensure that your child or youth's site has the privacy controls set so that only those known to them can access their information. Explain that they should never accept an invitation from someone they don't know—even if that person claims to be a friend of a friend.

What to do if you suspect sexual exploitation online

1. Any instance of suspected child exploitation on the Internet, including pornography or sexually explicit communication with a child or youth, should be reported to www.cybertip.ca. Cybertip.ca analysts are available 24 hours a day, seven days per week to accept calls from those who require direct assistance. If you are worried about any

child being hurt, report what you do know and let the experts handle the rest. You might save a child or youth from unimaginable hurt.
2. Talk immediately, calmly and frankly to your child in a supportive, calming way
3. Contact your local police
4. Report these incidents to your Internet Service Provider (ISP).

Remember, Internet controls—though good—cannot take the place of honest, open dialogue. Young people may access the Internet from a friend's house, school, library or on mobile devices.

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[1] David Finkelhor, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Janis Wolak, 2000, *Online victimization: A report on the nation's youth,* Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, page ix.

[2] U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, *A parent's guide to Internet safety.*