

# Tips for Monitoring Kids Online

***If your children are always on their phones or on the Internet, what can you do to keep them safe?***

- **GET INTERNET SAFETY TIPS FROM PROFESSIONALS SUCH AS BARK.**<sup>1</sup> Start early, when they first begin using devices, and be sure they understand you are only protecting them, not robbing them of their fun.
- **IF THEY'RE ONLINE** make sure the computer they are using is in a shared space in your home where you can see what they're viewing/doing. Stay involved. Check their browsing history regularly.
- **TALK WITH YOUR KIDS!** Discuss with them safe social media practices, the dangers of starting a conversation with someone they don't know (or only *think* they know), and why sharing too much personal information can be dangerous. (They should be warned about sharing locations, daily schedules and routines, addresses, names of school/church/clubs, bus routes.)
- **CHECK THEIR MOBILE DEVICES AND LAPTOPS REGULARLY.** Establish guidelines about checking with you before loading new apps. Interact with them to get an explanation of any new apps they want to load and discuss how to use them safely.
- **BE AWARE OF PRIVACY SETTINGS AND CHECK THE SETTINGS ON THEIR DEVICES REGULARLY.** New apps are prolific so set regular calendar reminders for yourself to look at any electronic device your child uses that connects to the Internet. (Pay special attention to online or video games, social media, and apps for music, pictures, connecting, or sharing.)
- **DISCUSS BEDROOM ETIQUETTE IN YOUR HOME.** If visitors of the opposite sex aren't allowed into their room, then live chat with an online visitor should be treated in the same manner. Remind them that showing something to someone online is the same as inviting that stranger into their bedroom. *Would you go to the door and greet a guest in your underwear?* No, of course not. So don't FaceTime or send photos while wearing only underwear, or even pajamas.
- **DO NOT ALLOW YOUR CHILDREN TO HAVE DEVICES AT NIGHT,** which is essentially "leaving a front door open" while you're sleeping.

- **DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD THE TACTICS USED BY PREDATORS** and explain to them why it's safer if you collect electronic devices at bedtime and put them all on chargers in another room.

***If you hear about kids sending inappropriate pictures to one another, recognize that this is not just a normal part of growing up. Teach your children that:***

- **SEXTING IS VERY DANGEROUS,** because on the Internet those photos *never* go away.
- **YOU CAN NEVER KNOW WHO WILL SEE THAT PHOTO** so don't send something you don't want everyone to see.
- **YOU MAY LIKE THE BOY/GIRLFRIEND TODAY** but not like them next week. You don't want someone to have a photo of you that's very private.
- **UNDERAGE SEXTING IS ILLEGAL** and if you are caught, even though you are underage yourself, you could be charged with possession and distribution of child pornography.
- **IT'S NEVER APPROPRIATE** to send a photo of yourself unclothed, to anyone. *Ever.*



## HELP THEM UNDERSTAND:

- That cute 15-year-old guy who reached out on Instagram may actually be a 37-year-old man wanting to meet you.
  - The person who offers to help you win a game, and offers to share tips and give you free upgrades, etc., may not really be a nice person.
  - If you don't know them in person – where they live/go to school – don't let them be your online “friend” because they could be anyone.
  - A person may say they live in Panama and just want to get acquainted with an American teen, but you don't know who they really are.
  - Ask your safe adult if you want to friend someone, and ask for the adult's oversight to be sure you stay safe.
- If anything makes you uncomfortable online:
    - immediately stop the conversation
    - exit the app but don't delete anything
    - tell your safe adult about the incident
    - the adult will investigate and alert the proper authorities if someone appears to be an online predator. (Clues that the person you're interacting with could be an online predator include asking for nude/compromising photos, requesting personal information, asking to meet with you, wanting to share a secret with you, asking you to keep a secret). Approaching a minor sexually is illegal, so the police will investigate.

## As your children get older, they may resent your interference in their lives. How can you make them feel good about talking to you?

- **TALK OPENLY WITH YOUR KIDS**, in a non-judgmental way, especially about relationships and healthy boundaries.
  - **TEACH THEM HOW TO RESPOND** to various threatening situations, including online threats.
  - **TEACH THEM THAT YOU WILL ALWAYS LISTEN**. Put away your phone or set aside other distractions, make eye contact, and be present no matter what they want to talk about.
  - **TEACH THEM NOT TO KEEP SECRETS** and to tell you immediately if someone tells them *not* to tell.
  - **SHOW** them Shared Hope's *Chosen* documentary. Sometimes they will listen to someone else.
- **CREATE A “SAFE WORD”** that they can use on the phone with you if they're ever feeling unsafe (for instance: “I'm hungry for pepperoni pizza”). Let them know you'll immediately come pick them up without repercussions if they aren't where they were supposed to be. Always give them an out, and the confidence that you will be their ally. When you pick them up, don't be angry, but instead ask:
    - How can we make sure you're safe next time?
    - Tell me why you think this could have been dangerous (drugs or alcohol offered, no adults present, no one knew where I was).





## INTERNET PROVIDER PARENTAL CONTROLS

**You may make sure your kid's phone has privacy settings on. Is that enough?**

- There are ways to hack into information that can easily bypass standard privacy settings.
- Research online sources like [netsmartz.org](https://www.netsmartz.org) for easy access to parental controls.
- Listen to the Shared Hope Internet Safety Video Series ([sharedhope.org/internetsafety](https://www.sharedhope.org/internetsafety)).
- Establish as a general rule for your child/teen that they never post anything they don't want everyone to see/know. Encourage them to think about who will know private information about you, like where you go and what you do, if you post this information.

## MONITORING DEVICES

Monitoring your kids' online devices is a challenge. We understand how difficult it can be to keep up with today's ever-changing technology, along with doing just the requirements of everyday parenting and managing all of life's other responsibilities. But we know your child's safety is your first concern, so this resource is intended to give you easily understood tools and information to support your efforts.

**To help you get started, here are some tips:**

- Guard your kids at the location level. Keep internet devices out of the bedroom as much as possible. Have a bedtime "turn in" time when you have the devices lined up on a power strip charging in a different room.
- Talk to parents of friends where your kids spend time (it's worth the awkward conversation). Ask at school

## SET UP A SAFE PASSWORD WITH YOUR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES<sup>2</sup>

If anyone ever tells them they're supposed to come with them ("Your mom has been hit by a car and she sent me to bring you to the hospital"), your child is to ask, "What is the password?" If that person doesn't provide it correctly, the child knows to run and yell for help and not to go with them, no matter who it is.

- Keep passwords very simple (for instance, the color blue), but change it periodically.
- Make it a special occasion when you create the password so they remember it, such as on Mom's birthday.
- Tell them this password is not to be shared with anyone but the immediate family. Assure them that you (the parent) will give it to anyone they send to pick them up.

and church about wireless access points, and be sure you're satisfied with their answers about monitoring web activity, etc.

- Guard your router/network signal. Is it filtered? Do you worry about kids or babysitters surfing your WiFi for inappropriate content? [Check out these easy instructions how to filter your signal.](#)
- Guard the device. Predators can communicate with your children through iPhones, Chromebooks, MacBooks, iPads, and laptops. [Here is a simple go-to guide to monitor and filter all of these devices.](#) Although many parents don't realize it, predators can also communicate with children via Xbox/Playstation consoles. [Here is a simple guide to filter Xbox/Playstation consoles.](#)

## MONITORING DEVICES (CONTINUED)

- Understand and monitor social media. Social media is an integral part of our children and teenagers' world. It's important for parents to understand the various platforms, how they work, and how to talk to your children about being smart when using social media. [Here is a handy overview document of various social media platforms.](#) You'll also find [this guide](#) helpful: Parenting the Internet Generation: A Blueprint for Teaching Digital Discernment. Instagram and Snapchat in particular are some of the most popular social media platforms.

Check out [Instagram's Tips for Parents](#)

and [ConnectSafely's Parent's Guide to Instagram.](#)

For Snapchat, check out their Safety Center and [ConnectSafely's Parent's Guide to Snapchat.](#)

- At present, chat and web play features on gaming consoles can be turned on or off, but there is no parental control platform that will prevent a child from re-enabling these features once they've become reasonably savvy about navigating the software.
- The chat logs on games can be monitored, but the means by which they are recovered is far too complicated for the average parent.
- Still, you can take a number of measures<sup>3</sup> to protect your kids, including online protection tools and good old-fashioned monitoring. Parental control options vary by console.

**We recommend [internetmatters.org](http://internetmatters.org) as a resource to access step-by-step instructions on how to set-up parental controls.**

In short, devices need parental controls — period. Compare it to driving a car. You would prepare a child to get their driver's license before you handed over the keys to the car. You control access to the vehicle, practice with them, quiz them, and remain in control until you're ready to let them drive independently. But even then, you want to know where they are going, with whom, and when they will be back. Internet access is no different and can be just as dangerous as an unmonitored teen behind the wheel.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.bark.us>

<sup>2</sup>Shared Hope International. "Women's Discussion Guide — Faith in Action Kit." *Shared Hope International*, 2016, [sharedhope.org/product/faith-action-kit/](http://sharedhope.org/product/faith-action-kit/)

<sup>3</sup><https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/net-safety.html>

<sup>4</sup>"Change Your Child's Xbox Privacy and Online Safety Settings." Support.microsoft.com, Microsoft, 14 Feb. 2019, [support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/4026796/microsoft-account-change-childs-xbox-privacy-online-safety-settings](http://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/4026796/microsoft-account-change-childs-xbox-privacy-online-safety-settings)