

# TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DIGITAL SAFETY

The internet provides an opportunity for children to learn, explore their world, and socialize with friends. By understanding the potential dangers your children face, you can educate them and help them have safer digital experiences.

## APPLYING THE 5 STEPS

Darkness to Light's 5 Steps to Protecting Children™ is the foundation to everything we teach about prevention. You can also apply these steps to internet and device use to keep your children safe:

### STEP 1: LEARN THE FACTS

Learn the access, privacy, and messaging policies of all digital games, social networks, and video games used by your children.

### STEP 2: MINIMIZE OPPORTUNITY

Parental controls can help restrict accesses and monitor messaging. Privacy and language filters can also reduce kids' risk of receiving solicitation.

### STEP 3: TALK ABOUT IT

Spend time with children online and talk to them about potential dangers and what appropriate online conduct looks like.

### STEP 4: RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

Stay tuned to change in behavior - secrecy about computer use, sites visited, or online "friends" should raise warning flags.

### STEP 5: REACT RESPONSIBLY

Understand how, when, and where to report suspicion behavior online.

## GENERAL TIPS AND GUIDANCE

- Make sure your youth serving organizations have and enforce communications policies that protect children. Teachers, instructors, and other youth workers should not be communicating privately with children. Instead, they should use group texts, messages, or other communications, and include parents.
- Do not underestimate the level of sophistication that an abuser will use to approach your child. Pay attention to all downloaded apps and their capabilities - even ones that do not seem to be chat-related.
- Smartphones and tablets have a "location services" feature which allows devices to broadcast their location to the users' apps and contacts. Ensure this feature is turned off to ensure your child's whereabouts remain private.
- If you discover questionable communications from your child to an adult or other youth, remain calm. Talk to your child without accusation and with the goal of resolving the situation.
- Report sexual solicitation, bullying, or child pornography immediately to your local law enforcement.

## FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Children under eight should have direct supervision while using computers, smartphones, and devices. Know which games, apps, and learning tools have communication and chat capabilities.
- Keep children's personal information off online profiles and talk to them about what information is private and shouldn't be shared.
- Parents, use your name and email for when signing up for games or services. This ensures you are the primary contact rather than your child.
- Talk frankly with children about inappropriate questions and language. Use age-appropriate examples and tell them to come to you if anything uncomfortable or questionable is said.

# TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DIGITAL SAFETY (CONT.)

## FOR PRE-TEENS:

- Set reasonable time limits on computer, smartphone, and device use, and when possible, limit use to common areas of the house where parents or caregivers are present. To protect children, set privacy settings to the highest levels.
- Talk to children about the apps and services they use, and how they use them to communicate. Pay attention to games and gaming systems, which often have online communication capabilities. Chatting can be an enjoyable activity that accompanies digital fun and learning, but it requires oversight and parental involvement.
- Monitor texts, messages, and other digital communication, and explain why this is necessary as one step to protection. Abusers use sophisticated grooming tactics that may be above children's level of understanding. By monitoring communication, you are in a better position to identify a situation if it does occur.
- Talk to your children about topics like sexting and cyberbullying. Explain the potential long-term consequences of sending sexual messages and pictures. Tell children if they hear of this happening or if anyone sends them an inappropriate communication - no matter who - to tell you immediately.

## FOR TEENS:

- Talk to your teens about the dangers and permanence of communication sent digitally, including on social media and blogs. Explain that applications like Snapchat that claim to delete images and messages still retain them, and that private messages and comments are actually public, and can easily be shared.
- Periodically monitor device use, including emails, photos, messaging, and app use. Make sure teens understand this is not to punish, but to protect.
- Let your teens know they can come to you if they ever have questions about a communication, or if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable.

## FOR ALL AGES:

*Adapted from the FBI Publication "A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety."*

Make sure children know:

- Never to chat with someone they do not know, or arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone who contacts them through an app or online service, even if they claim to be another youth or friend of a friend.
- Never to give out identifying information such as name, home address, neighborhood, phone number, school information, or extracurricular organizations and activities.
- Never to post public photos of themselves, send photos to someone they do not know, or send explicit/inappropriate photos to a friend or significant other.
- Never to download pictures from someone they do not know, as there is a good chance they could be sexually explicit.
- Never to respond to messages or posts that are suggestive, obscene, bullying, or harassing media and blogs.

Be prepared in case your child discloses knowledge of abuse. If this does happen, remain calm and report immediately. Visit [www.D2L.org/reporting](http://www.D2L.org/reporting) for information and resources.