Parent Resource Guide

Protecting Kids
When They Go Online

Bad-intentioned strangers can reach out to your child via social media, video games and other online platforms. Learn how to arm yourself and your kids.

DAVE YOST
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

Protecting our kids

Kids today can face online risks and dangers that many of us never had to consider when we were young. The rise of the internet and ubiquity of personal devices make it possible for strangers to gain access to your child's inner thoughts and concerns — without needing to be upfront about who they really are. A young person who would never talk to a shady-looking stranger on the street might be hoodwinked into sharing personal details about themselves, providing compromising photos or building relationships with people who only want to take advantage of them.

The best ways to protect your children, be they elementary-school age, tweens or teens, are to:

》 Arm them with the knowledge of how to make good decisions in their online life, which might include social media, video games and apps.

》 Monitor their online activity.

》 Build the kind of relationship where they feel comfortable coming to you with concerns, even if those concerns result from mistakes they made.

Parenting can be more complicated now than it ever was before, but you can protect your kids, even if your knowledge doesn't go far beyond blocking Twitter trolls or playing games on an old Nintendo system. The Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Initiative offers the following resources and tips to help.

Starting the conversation

When discussing online safety with your kids, it's important to project calm and make them feel comfortable and respected. Put aside any feelings you might have about invading their private space and recast the issue as partnering in their well-being. Being honest and prioritizing open communication will make it easier for your child to open up to you.

KEEP IN MIND

- Avoid beginning the conversation with harsh statements such as, "you did this." Instead, start with, "I am worried because…"
- Be nonjudgmental when listening to your kids and keep an open mind – they may just want to be heard.
- Always remember that tone and language matter. Kids may shut down if they are overwhelmed.
- Engage with your kid so that you understand what could make them vulnerable. Address those vulnerabilities.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

If your child spends time on social media

- What are your favorite social media apps? What do you like about them?

- Do you have Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok or Facebook?

- What's the best thing you saw lately? What was the worst?

- What are your top five favorite accounts to follow?

- How do likes and comments affect what you post?

- Do you know your followers?

- Is your account public or private? (If it's private, ask how they decide who follows them.)

- When you sign up for a social media site or app, did you give them your cellphone number, home address or email address?

- What happens to what you say or post online?

- What can you post online that could allow someone to find you on social media?

- Did you know that everything stays on the internet even when you delete it?

- Does what you post represent how you want others to see you? Did you know teachers or future employers can still see your comments when you get older?

- Do you use chat features on any of your apps?

- How do you know that the person you are DM'ing is who they say they are?

- Have you ever felt uncomfortable with something you saw or an interaction you've had online?
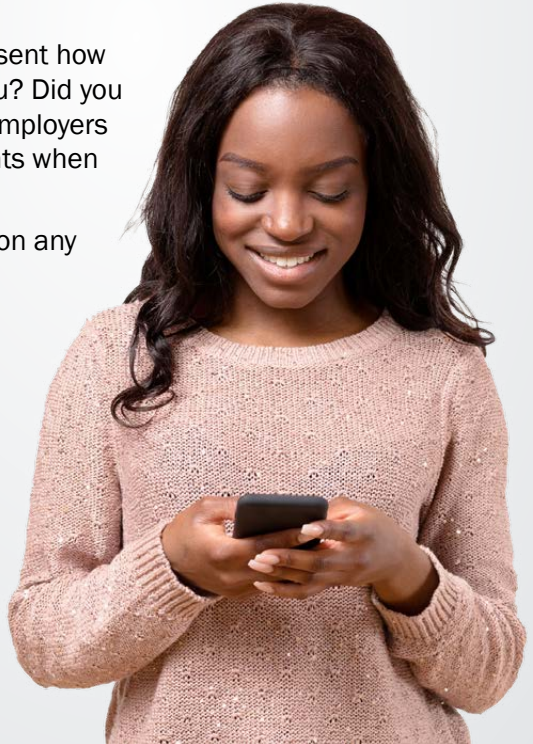
If your child spends time playing video games

- What are the best online games you've played? What do you like about them?

- Do you play against real-life people?

- Do players talk to each other, like in a text, video or VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) chat?

- Do people you don't know try to initiate conversation with you?

- Have you seen anyone get censored or kicked out for saying something offensive?

- Is there a way to report offensive behavior? Have you ever wanted to report anyone?

- Has another player ever given you the creeps?

- Are you part of a group, like a team, guild or family? If so, do you know the people in your group in real life?

- Has anyone asked/offered to play your character when you can't?

- Have you ever shared real-life details about yourself, like your real name or where you live, with anyone you know only through the game?

- Did you get to design your character? How did you decide what to look like?
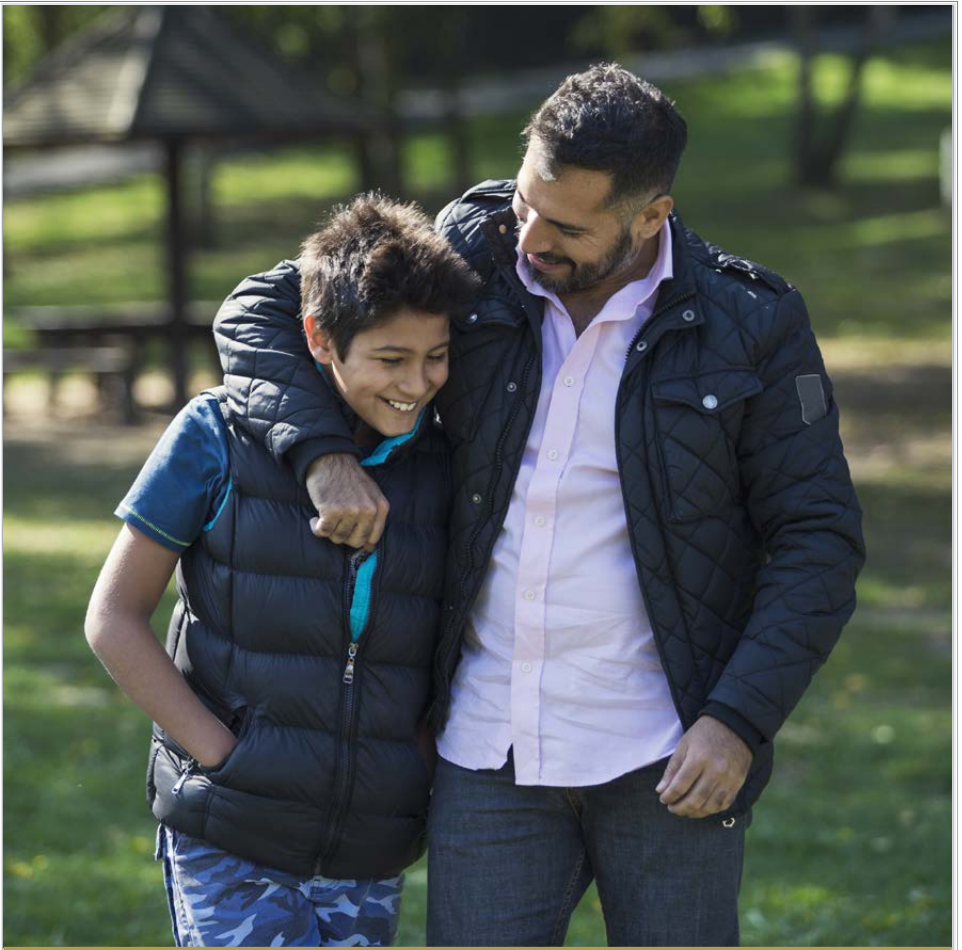
Five safety goals

1. **Keep** an open dialogue with your kids, no matter their age.

2. **Check** on your teen's or tween's social media use regularly.

3. **Manage** their privacy settings on social media and teach them how to protect their personal information.

4. **Teach** your kids how to block unwanted interactions on social media.

5. **Ensure** they don't meet someone face-to-face if they have only interacted with them online.

Helpful websites

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

These organizations offer more specific information on how you can talk to your kids about all kinds of online issues and help them create a healthy awareness of potential dangers.

Family Online Safety Institute

» https://www.fosi.org/
» The website includes a series of videos in which families talk about how they've worked together to build healthy and safe use of technology, and articles offer tips, tools and potential rules so that you can teach your kids to confidently navigate the internet.

Shared Hope International

» https://sharedhope.org/what-we-do/prevent/awareness/internetsafety/
» One of the largest anti-trafficking organizations in the United States, Shared Hope has produced a full internet safety toolkit for parents to download. The content addresses sexting, video games, popular apps and online predatory grooming, including warning signs and practical tips.

a21 Parent Guide

» https://www.a21.org/content/parent-guides/gq3xc0?permcode=gq3xc0&site=true

» These downloadable parent guides (one aimed at kids and one at teens) focus on preventing human trafficking, including recommending topics to talk to your children about, including (for kids) safe and unsafe spaces, secrets and touching and (for teens) healthy relationships, personal boundaries and smart use of social media. Parents have to fill out some information to receive the guides via email.

ICAC Parent Resources

» https://www.icactaskforce.org/Pages/InternetSafety.aspx

» The Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, a national network of 61 coordinated task forces representing over 4,500 federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies, put together an extensive list of resources (organized by organization name and topic) for parents and youth to access on internet safety. The website also contains useful PSA videos to inform on the dangers of the internet.

NetSmartz

» https://www.missingkids.org/NetSmartz

» The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children partners with Net Smartz to provide an online safety education program for children, tweens and teens. The program helps youth become aware of potential digital risks, including cyberbullying and online exploitation, and encourages them to make safe choices. Tools include cartoon videos, games and a blog for parents.

Common Sense Media

- » https://www.commonsensemedia.org/
- » This research-informed nonprofit reviews movies, books, and games and apps for their age-appropriateness and offers parents topic-specific guides, such as for TikTok and Fortnite. Research papers share digital-themed findings, such as a survey of teens on their social media use and an examination of teens' digital privacy. There is a membership option, but many parts of the site can be accessed without paying.

CyberWise

- » https://www.cyberwise.org/
- » CyberWise produces content for parents to learn how to teach kids to use technology safely and wisely. From articles on recognizing digital dating abuse to understanding underlying meanings of emojis that teens use, CyberWise offers a wealth of information.

TOOLS WITH PARENTAL CONTROLS

Family Link

- » https://families.google.com/familylink/
- » This app helps you monitor which apps your kid uses most often and pre-approve new apps, and it lists apps recommended by teachers. The app also lets parents lock the device during certain hours — such as when your kid should be sleeping — among other useful tools.

Facebook's parent portal

- » https://www.facebook.com/safety/parents
- » Facebook's page for parents has some explanation about how the social media site works and offers tips about how to talk to your child about online safety. The same page helps you access privacy and security information, as well other tools.

Cybersecurity quick guide

- » https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/pta-connected/connect-safely/cybersecurity_final.pdf
- » The national PTA offers some useful quickguides, including this one on helping your child stay secure online. It includes information on scams that even kids should be aware of and tips for how to protect your devices.

GOOD SITES FOR YOUR KIDS

Love 146

- » https://love146.org/action/online-safety/
- » This international human rights organization offers kids good advice (such as red flag phrases and rules of thumb) for how to make good choices in their own language – fun gifs.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

- » https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/staying_safe_while_staying_connected_teens.pdf
- » This guide takes a look at how online interactions can go wrong. It offers kids straightforward advice without talking down to them.

A Thin Line

- » http://www.athinline.org/
- » This MTV campaign offers teens extensive information on "boundary-defying" online activity and what they can do to stop it when it happens to them or their friends.

Ohio Attorney General's

Human Trafficking Initiative

30 E. Broad St., 23rd Floor
Columbus, OH 43215
800-282-0515

www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/HumanTrafficking

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