

Youth's Digital Safety: What Parents Need to Know

Use this guide to learn the essentials of digital safety for youth. It covers core concepts, how your child interacts online, and how to identify common risks and their warning signs.

DIGITAL SAFETY: THE BASICS

What is digital safety?



As your child grows, their online lives become more **complex** and **independent**.



Digital safety for children involves **practices and tools** that **protect** them from online risks, **empowering** them to navigate the internet responsibly.



Why is it important today?





Digital safety is crucial now due to children's widespread online presence and increased exposure to evolving threats like cyberbullying and online predators.



It's essential to foster their long-term well-being, responsible digital citizenship, and to equip them with vital skills for a safe online experience.³





NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL WORLD

Understand the digital landscape for your child!

Did You Know?

Research shows that parents who have strong digital knowledge and skills tend to be more involved in guiding their children through the online world. 7



Youth's Online Benefits



ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The Internet aids school research, homework, and offers engaging online learning formats like educational games and videos.



PROSOCIAL WELL-BEING

Online interactions foster a sense of belonging and can improve well-being.



COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Computers and online activities improve school readiness and cognitive skills such as problemsolving and digital literacy.



IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The internet lets youth explore who they are, developing a positive self-image.



SAFE SOCIAL SPACE

Internet provides a low-pressure way for youth, especially those with anxious tendencies, to practice social skills, boosting confidence.



EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

The internet offers a means for youth to seek emotional help and important information. ^{1, 4, 6}





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Youth's Online Interactions

How Youth Are Using the Internet:

Youth are more active online than ever, using devices like smartphones and computers for education, entertainment, research, and social networking.

The Tech Behind Their Digital Lives:

It's common for parents to be unaware of certain technologies and platforms their child are using. Here are some examples:

Hidden App Features

Photos, videos, or messages that are designed to **disappear** after a short period (e.g., a few seconds after viewing for Snapchat Snaps).

Bypassing Filters

Tools like VPNs that help youth get around internet blocks at school or home.

Specific Gaming

Platforms like Discord for talking to other players, or apply special game changes called **mods** to **customize their gaming experience**.

Niche Online Groups

There are some **websites or forums** about **very specific hobbies or interests** (e.g., Subreddits on Reddit).





IDENTIFYING ONLINE RISKS

Understand the threats your child might encounter online!



This section breaks down online risks to your child into 5 categories: Content, Contact, Conduct, Contract, and Cross-Cutting Risks. ⁵

CONTENT RISKS

Your child may **accidentally** or **intentionally** encounter or create **problematic online content**, like explicit violence, hate speech, or pornography, with Al deepfakes and Al-assisted image-based abuse posing a serious new risk for teens.

CONTACT RISKS

Your child can encounter or be targeted by **harmful online and offline interactions**, including harassment, grooming, sextortion, child sexual abuse material, predatory behaviors like catfishing, and potential issues with Al companions.

CONDUCT RISKS

Your child may witness, participate in, or become victims of harmful online behavior like cyberbullying, or be exposed to dangerous user communities like those promoting self-harm, or risky online challenges and trends like the choking or Benadryl challenge. (*Click here to learn more about cyberbullying.)

CONTRACT RISKS

Your child can be exploited by **harmful agreements or commercial interests**, including age-inappropriate marketing, online gambling, malware, scams, and insecure digital services leading to identity theft, fraud, and in severe cases, human trafficking.

CROSS-CUTTING RISKS

Your child can be exposed to dangers that **span all four categories**, affecting their privacy and their physical and mental health. This can cause **inequalities or discrimination**, and includes common examples like **addiction and privacy risks from online oversharing**.





RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS



Watch out for these early alerts!

Learning to spot **the following general warning signs early** can make a huge difference in keeping your child safe from online risks.²

Behavioral and Emotional Shifts

- Increased secrecy about online activities.
- Agitation or withdrawal when not online.
- New, secret online "friendships" or defensiveness about internet use.
- Unexplained anxiety, sadness, or loss of interest in usual activities.

3 Academic and Social Impacts

- Sudden drop in school grades or missed assignments.
- Shifts in friend groups or increased arguments with family.
- Unexplained requests for money.
- Using new, out-of-character words or ideas.

Physical Well-being

- Constant tiredness or trouble sleeping.
- Unexplained headaches, stomach aches, or muscle tension.
- Bruises, cuts, or injuries without a clear reason.
- Neglecting personal hygiene or significant shifts in eating habits.

4 Device and Online Activity Clues

- Finding new, hidden apps on their devices.
- Receiving many unknown or suspicious messages/calls.
- Ignoring privacy settings or discovering disturbing content.

