

7 Ways to Help Keep Your Child Safe Online

During the age of online learning, kids are constantly on laptops, tablets, and smart devices. But even without the pandemic-induced virtual classrooms, it is well documented that kids are spending more and more time online. But being online and using apps does not come without potential risks. Many predators lurk on the internet and in game chat rooms, aiming to pose as friends to a child to ultimately sexually exploit them.

This is a form of child sex trafficking. It can look like the predator obtaining child sexual abuse material (legally known as child pornography, which includes sexual images and video), or the predator tricking the child into agreeing to meet up to perform sexual acts. Regardless of the specific scenario, it is important that you help your child understand the potential dangers that exist online. Equally important is taking steps to eliminate or lessen the chance of being in such a position. We have made a list of suggested actions to take to help keep your child safe online.

Have conversations about grooming and sextortion

Make sure your child is informed about the “unsafe people” that can sometimes be on the internet, in social media direct messages, or video game and app chat rooms. Any person who asks to meet up, where they live, or mentions anything about "private parts" is not a safe person to be talking to. Explain to them what grooming and sextortion are. *Grooming* is when a person acts like a friend and gets to know a child, with the intention of asking for a meeting of sexual materials, which can be anything from sexting to sexual images to sexual videos.



Sextortion is when a person obtains sexual material from a child and uses it as blackmail to get them to stay quiet or keep sending more. Stress to your child the importance of being careful who they talk

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to online, and encourage them to ask you any questions they might have about the topic.

Discuss what can and shouldn't be shared

If your child has games with chat rooms or social media, be sure to discuss the responsibilities of having access to those platforms. Make sure to explain the importance of keeping things private -- personal information such as full name, birthdate, address, school name, phone number, etc. Require social media apps to be on the private setting, which restricts who has access to what your child is posting. Also, discuss the dangers of Snapchat -- a popular app that allows senders to send images or messages that "disappear" after a certain amount of time. Show them how quick and easy it is to make a screenshot of the pictures and messages they send even though the picture or message is no longer there.

Use privacy setting and parental controls

Today most devices come with parental controls that allow parents and caregivers to require a password in order to perform certain tasks or download and use certain apps. This allows you to block inappropriate and explicit web content and overall, gives you control over what your child has access to and help keep them safe.

For added protection, there are several devices or content monitoring software you can subscribe to and/or purchase to keep your family safe. The top 5 are: Aura, Qustodio, Bark, Net Nanny, and Family Time. Most come with a free trial period and allow you to not only monitor app use, but texts and calls to your child's phone.

Review apps before downloading

You have the ultimate say on whether your child can download apps. Use this oversight to review apps before you download them for your child. Opt for apps made specifically for children, such as YouTube Kids versus regular YouTube. Be particularly careful of apps that include features such as direct messaging, video chats, and the ability to send pictures. These options open many doors for predators to groom and eventually exploit your child.

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Keep devices outside their room

With online learning and kids spending so much time on tablets and laptops, it is impossible to monitor their device usage all the time. However, when your child is using their device for fun or games, have them sit in the family room or at the kitchen counter. This will help you keep an eye on them and make it easier to ask them conversational questions about their games and what they're up to. At the end of the day, have your kids leave their devices outside of their room in a designated spot so they aren't tempted to go online when they should be sleeping.

Discuss online friends

Much like you would ask about your child's school friends, ask about anyone they are talking to online. Since many predators pose as friends to children before exploiting them, keeping up-to-date on anyone your child may be chatting with online will keep you in the loop and on the lookout for any signs of your child beginning to feel uncomfortable talking about a certain "friend".

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Be a safe space for your kids

Despite all the measures and precautions you may take, your kids may still find themselves in an uncomfortable position. If they are in a situation, knowing that they can turn to you and confide in you without fear of punishment is so important. You want to be their safe space -- a person they can go to without being scared that you will be angry at them for being in that position.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 1.13.21 The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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