TEENAGERS ONLINE

Teenagers use digital technologies for everyday activities like keeping in touch with friends on social media, relaxing and doing schoolwork. They also go online to look for support for physical or mental health problems, and sometimes to experiment with different ways of expressing themselves.

Because they're online so much without your supervision, teenagers need to be able to identify acceptable and unacceptable online content independently. They also need to know how to behave respectfully online and avoid online risks.

Internet safety risks for teenagers
There are three main kinds of internet risks for teenagers.

Content risks
For teenagers, these risks include coming across material that they might find upsetting, disgusting or otherwise uncomfortable, especially if they encounter it accidentally. This material might include:

- real or simulated violence
- pornography
- hate sites
- terrorist sites
- harmful user-generated content like sites about drug use, self-harm, suicide or negative body image.

Contact risks
These risks include coming into contact with adults posing as children online or with strangers who persuade teenagers to meet them in real life, or becoming the victim of online scammers.

Conduct risks
Conduct risks include behaving in inappropriate or hurtful ways, or being the victim of this kind of behaviour. Examples include:

- misusing people's passwords and impersonating people online
- cyberbullying
- sexting
- making unauthorised purchases using other people's financial details
- creating content that reveals information about other people
- having trouble regulating online time, which can develop into problem internet use.

Protecting your child from internet safety risks

Your child is probably an independent internet user now, but you can help her keep building the skills and knowledge she needs to identify and manage internet safety risks.

Here are some basic things you can do to protect your child from internet safety risks:
- Create a family media plan. It's best to negotiate your plan with your child. Your plan could cover things like screen-free areas in your house and what online behaviour is OK.
- Talk with your child about upsetting and inappropriate content. If you can talk with him in an open and non-judgmental way, he's more likely to talk with you if he comes across something disturbing online or has a bad online experience.
- Stay in touch with what your child is doing online and how much time she's spending online. This will help you to spot when your child might be having problems.
- Ask your child to 'friend' you on social media. Younger teenagers might be OK with this, but older teenagers might prefer not to friend you.
- Encourage and remind your child to explore and use the internet safely – for example, it's OK to remind him to check his privacy settings.

Technical internet safety tools like **internet filters can actually increase risk** for children over 14 years. If children are using filters at this age, they might not be developing the skills they need to avoid disturbing content. They might take risks either accidentally or on purpose when they use the internet in unfiltered environments.
Helping your child to identify and manage internet safety risks

It's important to **help your teenage child manage internet safety risks for herself**. This lets your child build digital resilience which is the ability to respond positively and deal with risks they come across online.

You can do this by:

- being a role model for healthy internet use
- talking with your child about online content and behaviour
- reminding your child about privacy and personal information
- teaching your child about online purchases.

It's all about trusting your child to become a responsible digital citizen.

Being a role model for internet use

All children – including teenagers – do as you do, so being a role model for your child is a powerful and positive way to guide your child's behaviour when it comes to internet use.

You can be a role model for safe and healthy screen use by using digital media and the internet in the way you want your child to use it. For example, you might keep internet-connected devices out of bedrooms, or avoid using your phone during mealtimes.

It's also good to model positive technology use like sending supportive messages to friends.

Talking about online content

Talking openly about your own digital media and internet use and encouraging your child to do the same will help your child feel able to talk to you if he has a bad experience online.

You can get your child talking by asking her to explain the apps, games and content she's interested in, so that you understand why she uses them. You might say, 'Snapchat posts disappear quickly, but a screenshot can capture what's been said. Is that right?'

It's good to encourage your child to develop a sense of what he likes and doesn't like online and to defend his choices with friends. For example, you could say, 'It's great that you chose to block that content and didn't get involved in that online argument'.

Talking about online hoaxes and fake news with your child will help her develop the ability to tell whether a website has good-quality information. Hoax-Slayer is a site that can help you and your child uncover online scams and hoaxes.

This is all part of digital and media literacy.

Taking care with privacy, personal information and personal safety

You can help your child look at and choose appropriate privacy, location and safety settings on any devices, programs or social media that he uses, and explain why this is important. For example, you might say, 'Employers often do online searches to find out about job applicants. Make sure that anything you make public online is OK for future employers to see'.

It's also important for your child to be careful about sharing personal information. Remind your child not to give out her name, address, date of birth or other identifying information to people she doesn't know in person.

And it's a good idea to update 'stranger danger' advice with your child as he moves towards adulthood and comes into contact with online dating. For example, you might say, 'There's always a risk if you go to meet someone you only know online. It can lead to dangerous situations. For example, the person might want to hurt you'.