

Internet Safety



There is so much to consider when we are thinking about keeping our children safe.

Newborn sleep safety, car seats, water safety, choking hazards, electric sockets, bike helmets, and the list goes on.

*One major area of safety that is often overlooked until problems come up is **internet and media safety.***

Additional resources:

- [The 5 Cs of Media Use](#)
- [The 5 Cs of Media Use- School Age Children](#)
- [The 5 Cs of Media Use- Young Teens](#)
- [The 5 Cs of Media Use- Older Teens](#)
- [TV Ratings- A guide for Parents](#)
- [Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)

For young children (infants and toddlers)

Our focus is on limited screen time and appropriate media types for healthy development of social & emotional skills.

- [Kids & Screen Time: The 5 C's Questions to Ask for Infants - HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [Kids & Screen Time: 5 C's Questions for Toddlers & Preschoolers - HealthyChildren.org](#)

Media can influence how children and teens feel, learn, think and behave. This is why it's important to understand the risks and benefits of digital media use and how to keep them in balance for your family.

- [Constantly Connected: How Media Use Can Affect Your Child - HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [Kids & Screen Time: How to Use the 5 C's of Media Guidance - HealthyChildren.org](#)



As children get older and more adept at using digital media in all its many forms, we need to think about safety as well.

School age (5-10 years)

Make a Family Media Use Plan

Age-Appropriate Media: Can You Trust Parental Guidance Ratings? - HealthyChildren.org

- Parental controls: when children are young, parental controls can help prevent access to age-inappropriate content (violent, sexual, rudeness). They can also prevent in game chats with strangers.
- Communication is key. Talk to your child about:
 - Why they should only play online games with people they know and avoid strangers.
 - Why it's important not to share personal information online with anyone.
 - To let you know if a stranger contacts them or they feel bullied online.
 - Let them know that they can talk to you about anything negative or creepy they see online.
- Keep the device or computer in a room with plenty of people, such as a living room or kitchen, this lets you see what they are doing, without hovering over them.
- The 5 Cs of Media Use- School Age Children
- Multiplayer Games Online: How to Help Keep Kids Safe - HealthyChildren.org



Teens

During the teen years kids will start to have more independence about what media they are using and become more tech savvy. Current research emphasizes that family communication is essential in reducing teen's online risky behaviors. Teen involvement and teen-parent communication around online safety measures allows teens to have an active role in maintaining online safety and teaches them how to make responsible decisions on their own. From the teen's perspective, restrictive rules around access to the internet diminished family communication overall.

- Parental controls are still important for younger teens. As they age, they may find ways around them. Make sure teens keep their social media and other accounts set to private, so that they can't be contacted by marketers or adults they don't know.
- Keep the conversation going. Teens may be afraid that if they share challenging situations involving media with their caregivers, their device will be taken away. Listen and provide support. Ask questions. Here are some conversation starters from the American Academy of Pediatrics: Conversation Starters for Families About Media
- Internet dangers in the teen years increase
 - Online predators, identity theft, hacking/malware, scams, and "sextortion". Online predators can have devastating effects on young people.
 - Sextortion is when someone is coerced into sending explicit images online and extorted for additional images or money.
 - For teens targeted by these scams, it can lead to feeling depressed and hopeless. There are over a dozen reported cases of teens who have died by suicide after being sextorted. What do teens need to know about "sextortion" & online predators? - HealthyChildren.org



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- Talk with your kids about dangers of meeting an online friend in real life. If they do make plans to meet a friend, make sure a trusted adult is present and it's in a public place. For older teens who may insist on meeting up with online friends without you there, convince them to take a real life friend along and meet in a public place.
- Social Media use can be very tricky to navigate for teens.
 - In 2023, the U.S. surgeon general issued an advisory about the negative impacts on children's mental health from social media.
 - Extreme, inappropriate and harmful content is easily accessible and can be spread by algorithms.
 - There are dangerous social media challenges that can result in life threatening injuries and poisonings (the tide pod challenge, the choking game etc.).
 - Studies show that young teens who spend more than 3 hours per day on social media faced double the risk of poor mental health, such as anxiety and depression.
 - [How Social Media Can Affect Your Child's Mental Health - HealthyChildren.org](#)
 - Cyberbullying includes a range of harmful words and actions that take place in the digital space. Check in early and often with your kids about what kind of messages they are seeing and sending online.
 - Cyberbullying can include: Sending mean messages to someone, sharing embarrassing pictures of them, making up and spreading untrue stories about them, telling others to ignore them or leave them out.
 - It can take place through messaging, on social media, apps, email or multi-player online games.
 - The difference between regular bullying and cyber bullying is that cyberbullying can take place at anytime, anywhere, not just in the physical presence of the bully, it is more easily done anonymously, it can spread more quickly via social media.
 - Bullying increases a child's risk for depression, anxiety, sleep problems and substance abuse.
 - [Cyberbullying: How to Help Prevent It - HealthyChildren.org](#)
- Body image: Media has long presented unrealistically thin or muscular type body images that have been altered from reality. This has only increased with the rise of digital platforms and influencer culture.
 - Viewing these images can lead to lower self-esteem, and teens' unrealistic expectations for themselves.
 - Social media platforms' algorithms send digital ads and content that can be harmful and promote dangerous behaviors and can lead to eating disorders.
- Sexting: Teens need to know about sexting, what it is, and why it's dangerous. Keep the conversation going, even if it's not easy.
 - [Sexting: How to Talk With Kids About the Risks - HealthyChildren.org](#)
 - Sexting is the sending or receiving of sexually explicit images, videos or text.
 - It's very common and has become more normalized, but there are many risks:
 - Increased anxiety and depression.
 - Risk for sextortion (blackmail).
 - Legal risks: in some states minors can get a felony charge for sexting (sending or receiving), leading to a long prison sentence and a place on a sex offender registry. This can prevent them from getting into college or getting a job.
 - There is no control over a video or photo once it's been sent, it can be forwarded or posted anywhere.
 - Images and messages on the internet remain there forever, even if they were posted on apps that delete them.

