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HEALTHY HABITS

The Internet makes our lives easier in so many ways, but it's true what they say about too much of a good thing. An unhealthy amount of screen time can affect your children's health and development.

SET TIME LIMITS ON SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have your children "unplug" and go play outside for some exercise and fresh air. Use built-in parental controls on devices or apps to enforce time limits.

INITIATE A DIGITAL CURFEW

Using a digital device before bed can interfere with sleep. Put away electronics at least 30 minutes before bedtime to promote a good night's rest.

ENCOURAGE REAL INTERACTION

Too much time spent online can lead to poor communication and social skills. Nothing can replace meaningful face-to-face interaction. Make sure your children understand that making friends and having in-person conversations can be just as rewarding, if not more so.

MODEL HEALTHY HABITS

Lead by example: Limit your own screen use and engage in offline activities too. Go for family walks after dinner or have a game night. Avoid using devices during family meals or conversations.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Keep an eye on your children's online activities. Insist that they:

- Talk to you about what they do online and who they chat with.
- Use privacy settings to limit what people can see and who can interact with them.
- Avoid posting something that they wouldn't want everyone to see.

Agree on some ground rules.

- Always be courteous and use netiquette.
- Keep personal information private (e.g., phone number, address, school they attend).
- Use strong passwords and don't share them with anyone.
- Stop and think before sending, retweeting, or sharing anything offensive or harmful to others.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

Social media websites and apps give registered users the option to report offensive posts and abusive users. Familiarize yourself with these policies and take action when needed.

For more information on safe social media practices for children, visit:

ConnectSafely
www.connectsafely.org/safety-tips-advice

Federal Trade Commission
www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/protecting-kids-online

KidsHealth
https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/social-media-smarts.html

StopBullying.gov
www.stopbullying.gov

U.S. Department of Justice
www.justice.gov/criminal-ceos/children-internet-safety

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QUICK SERIES

Social Media Safety Tips for Parents

Prepare your children with the right tools to become savvy social media users.



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IS YOUR CHILD PREPARED?

The Internet is a playground for today's youth, seemingly without boundaries. Exploring the digital world can be educational and entertaining, but it's vital to teach children the "rules of the road" to ensure a safe journey on the information superhighway.

As a parent, it's your responsibility to educate your children about the technology surrounding them, including safe social media use.

You've heard of Facebook and Twitter/X, but new social media platforms are created all the time. These include forums, apps, and websites for instant messaging, live streaming and media sharing, and gaming and virtual reality (VR) environments.

POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES & APPS

Instagram | Messenger | TikTok | Reddit

Twitch | Snapchat | Roblox | Be Real

Threads | WhatsApp | YouTube

TACKLE TOUGH TOPICS

Chatting with friends, tweeting, and sharing photos are fun online pastimes, but there are hazards to watch out for:

SEXUAL PREDATORS

A sexual predator may approach a child online pretending to be the same age. Encourage your children to delete any "friend" request that comes from someone they don't know and to never agree to meet someone in person who they don't know.

CYBERBULLYING

A cyberbully is like a regular bully whose aim is to harass, intimidate, and threaten, but their actions are carried out using technology.

Cyberbullying comes in many forms:

- Sending harassing/threatening messages.
- Posting insults or malicious remarks on someone's public profile.
- Sharing private or embarrassing information or photos of someone without their consent.
- Creating a fake (and nasty) profile or account in someone else's name.
- Creating private groups to talk negatively about someone without their knowledge.
- Threatening to share someone's private or sensitive photos if they don't comply with demands (known as sextortion).

If your child is being targeted by a cyberbully, take action.

- **Ask the cyberbully to stop** and delete/block them. Don't respond to any messages; it will only add fuel to the fire.
- **Save all evidence** (public posts, direct messages, emails).
- **Contact the website for removal** if your child's profile has been created or altered by a cyberbully.
- **Report abuse** to the website or app. If the abuse involves dangerous criminal acts (stalking, invasion of privacy, child pornography, etc.), contact your local police.



KEEP YOUR CHILD CYBERSAFE

While parents want to make sure their children are making smart decisions, hovering over them or snooping can damage trust. Use the tips below to provide guidance:

1 TELL SOMEONE

Encourage your children to tell you if they see something on social media that makes them uncomfortable or if they receive unwanted or harassing messages.

2 UNDERSTAND THE RISKS

Help children understand that some people they meet online may not be who they say they are and could be tricking them (known as catfishing).

Clicking on suspicious "free stuff" links in posts, tweets, or direct messages is never a good idea. These could be from cybercriminals trying to steal your personal information. When in doubt, throw it out!

3 PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION

Explain that reckless online behavior could have serious offline consequences. Inappropriate posts or interactions could come back to haunt them. Periodically review their profile, posts, and friend list to see if they are behaving appropriately.

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