

# Teaching your kids online safety

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(HealthDay)—Limiting online access used to be the main parenting strategy to protect kids from internet hazards like cyberbullying and sexual predators. But research suggests that teaching them how to avoid

these risks in the first place is a smarter and safer approach.

Thanks to photo- and video-sharing apps, much of a teen's and even a preteen's social life is lived through their smartphones. Social media is both a way to express one's self and a way to fit in.

But children need to know to follow the same family rules they do in other circumstances and how to exercise good judgment.

For starters, teach your kids "best practices," such as never posting risky photos of themselves, and saying no when others request unsafe behavior, like in-person meetings with chat room acquaintances. This guidance prepares them to handle tricky situations later on, when you might not be there to guide them.

Make sure your kids know that:

- Not everything they see on the internet and not everyone they "meet" is who they claim to be.
- The people they do know have real feelings, so they shouldn't post pictures, videos or comments that could damage a reputation or be hurtful.
- It's important to be careful about sending group messages to more people than is truly necessary.

Another reason to take a pro-active approach is to improve the way kids manage, or more accurately, fail to manage, privacy risks. Unlike adults who think before they act, teens often take risks and then are forced to deal with any consequences.

Online Safety 101:

- Offer guidance on the type of personal and family information to

keep private, like Social Security numbers, home address, phone and cell numbers, and financial information, and why this is a must to avoid identify theft.

- Stress blocking anyone questionable and not talking with strangers about sex.
- Explain about over-sharing and how to use privacy settings to restrict who has access to their profiles.
- Let your kids know who you think is appropriate to view their [social media](#) accounts.
- Discuss when they should ask for your help to manage privacy concerns.

**More information:** Netsmartz.org, a service of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, has a wealth of [tips for parents and kids](#) on internet safety.

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