Online Safety Resources

Protect against online threats and risks. Teach children about internet safety and stay involved in their digital world.

Children and adolescents are spending more time online than ever before, and technology is ingrained in almost every facet of their lives. Today's youth strongly depend on digital devices and online forums, like social media and gaming platforms, to seek immediate connections or gratification. The need for connectivity, acceptance, or sense of belonging can drive children's overall needs and online activities and behaviors.

Children's increased online presence, coupled with evolving and emerging digital platforms, can expose them to a range of potential online safety threats and risks. These threats can include online predators and criminals, as well as forms of harassment, enticement, and exploitation such as sextortion. Cyberbullying, which includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else, can also take place over digital devices and in online forums, and targeting youth online has become an increasingly common tactic among traffickers and criminals, who can gain access to children and adolescents because they are not always aware of how dangerous online environments can be.

Online safety threats can jeopardize children's digital experiences and devices and put their sensitive and personal information at risk. These threats can also have profound and lasting impacts on youth mental health and physical and emotional well-being, and for certain individuals, can present or accelerate a pathway to destructive behaviors.

Parents and Guardians

Teaching children about digital risks and how to avoid them can be one of the most effective ways to help young people make smart and safe choices in their online interactions. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to have conversations with their children early on regarding their online activity, and to keep the lines of communication open so that children feel safe and supported in coming forward with potential concerns. Parents and guardians should also know the apps their children use, tell children to avoid sharing personal information, photos, and videos, enact parental controls where possible, and be aware of potential signs of abuse and/or exploitation.

School Communities

Schools and school districts can also play a role in preventing and protecting against online safety threats. School communities can empower students to make smarter online choices by creating a dynamic and engaging internet safety

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curriculum and by educating youth on digital literacy skills as part of a broader strategy of promoting a positive school climate. A digital citizenship curriculum can help students learn how to better navigate the potential risks and threats they may encounter online, and can include topics such as privacy and security, relationships and communication, cyberbullying, digital footprints and reputation, and self-image and identity. Teachers and school staff are also encouraged to learn the potential signs and indicators of cyberbullying and child exploitation, so they can properly identify and address these issues and support victimized students.

Youth

Young people can take a variety of simple, everyday actions to be cyber safe and better protect against online threats. This includes talking with parents, caregivers, and educators so they understand online risks, only chatting with people they know in real-life, ensuring their online accounts are private, blocking people they don't know or trust, and trusting their instinct if something or someone makes them feel uncomfortable. In addition to online safety actions, students can also practice good cyber hygiene to keep their devices and personal information secure in the digital world. As part of this, they can opt-in to multi-factor authentication (which requires a combination of two or more steps to verify a user's identity) when logging into online accounts and services. Students are also encouraged to create strong passwords, think before they click on unfamiliar inks that show up in emails or messages, and update their software and device applications when updates are available.

Resources

SchoolSafety.gov features a variety of resources schools and families can use to help prevent and protect against online threats. Resources include:

- 4 Things You Can Do To Keep Yourself Cyber Safe: This resource outlines the basics of cyber hygiene and provides information on four easy and common-sense ways to protect yourself online.

- Cyberbullying Information and Prevention Tips: This webpage provides information on what cyberbullying is, where it occurs, and how to prevent it. It also includes digital awareness information for parents and outlines what to do to report cyberbullying if it occurs.

- Cybersecurity Awareness Program: Parent and Educator Resources: This webpage offers a variety of resources and materials to help educators and parents start discussions about online safety with children and students. It includes general education resources, programs for schools, and information on safeguarding devices and reporting threats.

- CyberTipline: This tip line is the nation's centralized reporting system for the potential or suspected online exploitation of children. Members of the public and electronic service providers can make reports of child sexual exploitation by submitting an online form or by calling 1-800-THE-LOST.

- Cyber Safety Considerations for K-12 Schools and School Districts: This fact sheet includes information on the most common online threats students face and describes how school and school district administrators can prepare for and respond to these risks.

- **Cyber Safety Video Series**: This series of videos and accompanying fact sheets highlight common potential threats students and K-12 schools are likely to face online, as well as proactive steps individuals and institutions can take to stay safe.

- **Helping Youth Navigate Dangers in the Digital Age**: This webinar provides information on how to help youth mitigate what they see on the internet and build resiliency against extremist hate groups, as well as various tools and resources to help youth identify misinformation. It also covers how to empower caregivers to identify and report potential hate groups and hate crimes.

- **Information on Child Sex Trafficking**: This webpage provides an overview of child sex trafficking, its risk factors, recent data and trends, and resources and training available to prevent and identify exploitation and support victims.

- **Keeping Children Safe Online**: This webpage offers tips, videos, and resources to help parents, guardians, caregivers, and teachers protect children from becoming victims of online child predators.

- **NetSmartz**: This online safety education program provides age-appropriate videos and activities to help teach children to be safer online with the goal of helping children to become more aware of potential online risks and empowering them to help prevent victimization by making safer choices on- and offline.

- **Project iGuardian**: This program is focused on keeping children and teens safe from online predators through education and awareness. It includes outreach efforts to share information about the dangers of online environments, how to stay safe online, and how to report abuse and suspicious activity.

- **Resilience Series: Bug Bytes**: This graphic novel communicates the dangers and risks associated with threat actors using social media and other communication platforms to spread mis-, dis-, and malinformation for the sole purpose of planting doubt in the minds of targeted audiences to steer their opinion.

- **Tips for Teachers on Cyberbullying**: This webpage provides information for teachers, school personnel, and staff to identify warning signs a child is being cyberbullied or is cyberbullying, as well as strategies to prevent and address it.

Visit SchoolSafety.gov and follow @SchoolSafetyGov on Twitter for additional online safety resources for the K–12 community.

Sources: justice.gov/coronavirus/keeping-children-safe-online | missingkids.org/netsmartz/resources - overview | cyber.org/cybersafety | stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it | dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/blue_campaign_youth_guide | cisa.gov/sites/default/ParentsandEducatorsTipCard | info.publicintelligence.net/FBI-PreventingExtremismSchools.pdf | go.missingkids.org/internet-safety-presentation-for-parents | ice.gov/features/sextortion | rems.ed.gov/docs/Cyber_Safety_K-12_Fact_Sheet_508C.PDF | cisa.gov/news-events/news/4-things-you-can-do-keep-yourself-cyber-safe

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