



Child Abuse Prosecutors Guide to Keeping your Kids Safe On-Line

The Internet is an amazing tool for learning, staying in contact with others, especially during the pandemic, and for simply having fun. But like any tool it can cause harm if used incorrectly. As child abuse and exploitation prosecutors, we know first hand that the internet can be a dangerous place for kids. Below are our Prosecutor's top ten tips for staying safe on-line.

- 1) Talk to your children about the dangers of the internet. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at missingkids.org has great resources on how to talk to your children with their *NetSmartz* tab and training videos or video games for children of all ages at *KidSmartz*.
- 2) Watch/Limit access to the internet– For younger children have the computers or tablets set up in the same room as you when your children are on-line, or in the alternative set parental controls on your child's accounts or internet.
- 3) Know the lingo – Make sure you know the acronyms. For us, POS meant Piece of Sh--, for youth today POS – means Parent(s) over shoulder. Why does your child need to let someone know you are watching? Who are they talking to? Urbandictionary.com or webopedia.com are great resources for learning terms and abbreviations.
- 4) Know the apps – What apps are your children using? Have them show you how the apps work. Kids love to teach us about something. This allows them to shine, and for you to make sure you're tracking the accounts they have. Consider family accounts for things like YouTube, TickTock and others. Read the reviews of apps, and the disclaimers for the information the apps sell and share.
- 5) Limit real information – There is absolutely no need for any social media or app to have your child's full name, date of birth or even their hometown. Nicknames are great, generic emails are even better. Email addresses like footballfan12@gmail.com or dncgirl10@gmail.com are bad, this gives an indication of your child's hobbies and their actual age. Stick with something broad, but easy to remember without any reference to gender or age.

- 6) Post smart pictures – Watch what you and your kids post on social media. Don't post pictures that make it readily apparent what your house number is, your street name, the full name of your children's school, sporting team that identifies town/location or their complete name. Make sure your children understand that the internet never forgets, something they post today can impact college or even job applications.
- 7) GPS check – Make sure your or your children's social media isn't tracking everywhere you are with check-ins. Make sure you have turned GPS off in your settings for the camera in your phone, otherwise the location of every picture is embedded in the properties of every picture you or your children take and post. This allows the bad guy to track your exact location.
- 8) Don't overshare in updates– Neither you nor your children should post that you're going on vacation or pictures of your vacation while you're away. Wait until you return. Studies have shown that approximately 78% of burglars use social media posts to target properties. (eyewitness surveillance study)
- 9) "Friends" – Make sure your kids know every friend on their social media, teams, or on-line games. They're "a friend of a friend" doesn't count. They should also understand that friends treat friends with respect. They should never tolerate cyberbullying of themselves or others. Make sure your children are aware that derogatory teasing, posting embarrassing pictures or making threats is never ok and they don't have to put up with it.
- 10) It's ok to make a mistake – make sure your children know that they can tell you when they violate one of the rules, they're contacted by a stranger or they're being 'blackmailed' to send pictures, money or information. It is important that your children feel safe coming to you right away when something bad happens, so that proper reports can be made, as opposed to allowing them to become a victim because they are too worried you will be upset or embarrassed because of something they did.

The internet is an important tool and a great outlet, especially during the pandemic. With these safety tips, you can ensure that your children can safely access the world wide web.