

Tips for Monitoring Kids Online

We understand how difficult it can be to keep up with today's ever-changing technology — along with everyday parenting, work, and all the other responsibilities on your plate! We also know that the safety of the children in your life is your first and highest priority. To get started, here are some tips we have compiled to help you keep your kids safe on the internet:

- **Don't be afraid to start early.** Ideally, conversations about internet safety would begin when your child is first starting to use internet-connected devices, like smartphones, tablets, laptops, or gaming consoles. In addition to keeping them safe, these conversations will also give you the opportunity to instill in them that any rules you put into place are to protect them from danger, not to rob them of their fun.
- Whenever possible, **make sure your child is using their devices in a shared space** in your home where you can monitor what they're viewing or doing online. Stay involved. Check their browsing history regularly.
- **Have ongoing conversations with your kids about internet safety.** Discuss safe social media practices, the dangers of starting an online conversation with someone they don't know (or only *think* they know), and why sharing too much personal information can be dangerous. They should be warned about posting locations, daily schedules, bus routes, addresses, or even names of their school, church, or where they hang out. Explain to them that this information is available to everyone on the internet — both people they love and people they don't even know. If they aren't okay with *everyone* seeing it, they shouldn't be posting it online.
- When your children are young, **establish guidelines about checking with you before downloading new apps.** Interact with them to get an explanation of any new apps or games they want and have a discussion about how to safely use them.
- **Be aware of app privacy settings and check their devices regularly.** App updates are prolific, so set regular calendar reminders for yourself to look at any electronic device your child uses that connects to the internet. Pay special attention to video games, social media, and apps for music, pictures, connecting, or sharing.

TIP FROM A TEEN:

Make this as open a conversation as possible. Snooping behind your child's back can feel like an invasion of privacy and trust. Instead, try making a deal with your child when you purchase them a device. For instance, you can make an agreement that if you buy them an iPad, you are entitled to check it whenever you'd like.

- Allowing your children to have access to their devices at night is like leaving the front door open for predators while you sleep. **Consider establishing a family device charging station** in a shared space or in a parent's bedroom. Not only will this practice keep your kids safe from online predators, but studies show it can actually contribute to a better night's sleep and increase your child's overall happiness.¹

As your children get older, they may resent your interference in their lives. How can you make them feel good about talking to you?

- **In a non-judgmental way, talk openly and often with your kids**, especially about friendships, relationships, and healthy boundaries.
- **Teach them how to respond** to various threatening situations, including unsettling online interactions and inappropriate attention from adults.
 - ➔ **Extra Credit:** Create a “password” they can use on the phone with you if they’re ever feeling unsafe (for instance: “I’m hungry for pepperoni pizza”). Let them know that if they say or text the password, you’ll immediately come pick them up without repercussions even if they aren’t where they are supposed to be. Always give them an out — and the confidence that you will be their ally no matter what, even (and *especially*) if they mess up. When you pick them up, try not to be angry, but instead ask: *What was making you feel unsafe? How can we make sure that you’re safe next time?*
- **Show them that you will always listen.** When they want to talk, put away your phone, set aside other distractions, make eye contact, and be present no matter what they want to talk about.
- **Teach them not to keep secrets** from you and to tell you immediately if another adult tells them *not* to tell you something.
- **If they are 12 or older, show them Shared Hope’s Chosen documentary.** While this resource doesn’t focus on *online* sex trafficking specifically, it does clearly outline how sex traffickers groom and exploit vulnerable youth. Sometimes teens have an easier time listening to someone who isn’t their parent when it comes to frightening or uncomfortable issues like sex trafficking.

MONITORING DEVICES

Parental controls are software and tools that allow parents and caregivers to set the controls on a child’s internet use. Although these controls are not entirely foolproof, they can act as a great first line of defense against internet predators.

Think about it like this: a teen has to practice, prepare, and take a test to get their driver’s license ... but all of this happens *before* they are handed the keys. Generally, as a parent, you would want to control their access to the vehicle, practice with them, quiz them, and remain in control until you know they are ready to take that next step on their own: driving! Even then, you’ll want to know where they are going,

with whom, and when they will be back. You support their growing independence and autonomy, but also set boundaries for their safety.

Internet access is no different and can be just as dangerous as an untrained, unmonitored person behind the wheel. Understanding and using parental controls is a great first step to protecting the kids in your life as they learn and grow within the technological world.





- **Guard your router/network signal**

Is it filtered? Do you worry about your kids (or their friends) stumbling upon inappropriate content while they're surfing the web? Check out [Episode 4 of Shared Hope's Internet Safety Series](#) to find out how you can arm your Wi-Fi router with parental controls. For additional information, [check out these easy instructions about how to filter your signal](#).

- **Guard the device**

Router protections are fantastic when your child is home, but once your child enters unmonitored territory with their device, these protections are essentially useless. That is why it is important that you utilize parental control options on each of your child's devices. To find out more about the parental controls available, watch [Episode 5 of Shared Hope's Internet Safety Series](#). For even more detailed instructions, check out [this go-to guide](#) to monitor and filter more than 20 devices commonly used by kids.

- **Understand and monitor social media**

Social media is an integral part of our children and teenagers' world. That's why it's important for parents to understand the various platforms, how they work, and how to talk to your kids about being smart when using social media. [Here is a handy overview document of social media platforms popular among teens and tweens](#). For more details on your child's favorite app, check out the apps themselves! For instance, take a look at [Instagram's Tips for Parents](#) and [Snapchat's Safety Center](#).

We recommend internetmatters.org as an additional resource to access step-by-step instructions on how to set up parental controls.

Information and links provided in this resource are solely for educational and informational purposes and do not constitute legal advice.

¹ Hughes, Nicola, and Jolanta Burke. "Sleeping with the Frenemy: How Restricting 'Bedroom Use' of Smartphones Impacts Happiness and Wellbeing." Computers in Human Behavior, Pergamon, 29 Mar. 2018, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0747563218301523.