

Common Sense on Internet Safety for Elementary School Kids

Keep your kids safe online

When elementary-aged children first start exploring the Internet, most parents are concerned about “stranger danger” — the chance kids will meet a dangerous adult. While parents do have to be aware of online strangers — and teach kids how to avoid them — keeping kids safe online is a lot more than watching out for strangers. Staying safe is about a child’s entire online experience.

Beginning at the age when kids start to interact on the Internet — playing games, watching YouTube videos, socializing in virtual worlds, getting homework help, and searching on Google — parents need to be actively involved in their kids’ online lives.

Some facts

In May 2009, children aged 2-11 made up nearly 10% of the active online universe (*Nielsen, 2010*).

18% of 8- to 10-year-olds spend time on some kind of social networking site daily (*Kaiser, 2010*).

71% of parents report having experienced one or more Internet-related issues with their children within the past year (*Harris Interactive poll, 2007*).

3 out of 4 parents think it’s just as important to know how to use digital media as it is to learn traditional skills like reading and writing (*Harris Interactive Poll, 2007*).

Teaching Internet safety includes reminding your kids not to give out private information online, to behave responsibly and respectfully toward others, and to understand the difference between ads and content. Being responsible about online life also means limiting the amount of time kids spend online and teaching them to balance online activities with other activities. Start by visiting the sites your elementary-aged kids enjoy. Ask them to show you what they like and why.

Why Internet safety matters

Keeping your kids safe requires active parental engagement and real conversations about online life. In today’s world, where kids turn to the Internet for just about all of their interests, education is a parent’s first line of defense in keeping children safe.

It’s harder than ever for parents to keep track of what their kids are doing online. Kids today can go online from so many different sources, including video game consoles, iPhones and smart phones, and even handheld gaming devices. Young people are increasingly living their lives online, and their digital devices are some of their favorite toys and tools. Shouldn’t this new playground be a safe and nice place? With your guidance, it can be. Teaching Internet safety in the elementary years will have lasting rewards for you and your kids.

Internet Safety Basics

Help your kids understand that they should:

- » Never share their names, schools, ages, phone numbers, or addresses;
- » Never send pictures to strangers;
- » Keep passwords private (except to parents);
- » Never open email from strangers — it may contain viruses that can harm a computer; and
- » Immediately tell an adult if something mean or creepy happens.

Strategies for a responsible — and safer — online life

- » **Visit only age-appropriate sites.** Check out the site before your kids visit it. Know what features and what content exist and make sure they're good for your kids.
- » **Search safely.** Use safe search settings for young kids or think about applying filtering software to limit inappropriate exposure.
- » **Avoid strangers.** Tell your kids that people aren't always who they say they are in cyberspace. Explain that if someone they don't know talks to them, they shouldn't respond but should let you know.
- » **Be a good cyber citizen!** Remind kids that an Internet playground is still a playground and they need to play nicely. A good rule of thumb: If they wouldn't do something in real life, they shouldn't do it online. Find out how your children can report mean behavior or unkind content on their favorite sites and teach them how to do it.
- » **Online cheating?** It's still cheating and it's a no-no — pure and simple.
- » **Keep the computer in a central place.** So you can see what's going on.
- » **Establish expectations and limits about the amount of time your children spend online and what they do.** Check out our family media agreement for a helpful place to start.
- » **View your own habits carefully.** You are their role models.
- » **But, mostly, be involved and have fun with them!** Keeping kids safe and teaching them how to use digital technology responsibly is all about staying involved. Start by showing interest in the sites they visit and the games they play and your job will be a lot easier when they start exploring these technologies more independently.