



digital dignity

Online Safety Handbook



DefendDignity



The Internet can be many things, but can it be safe?

The internet has become the main place where children spend their free time—scrolling social media, chatting with friends, gaming, or watching videos. While it can be positive and creative, it has also become a space where predators, exploiters, and traffickers operate. In Canada and around the world, we are seeing alarming increases in sextortion (threatening to share a child’s intimate images unless they send more or pay money), sexual exploitation (pressuring or coercing a child into sexual acts or sexual content for payment or favours), and sex trafficking (manipulating or forcing a child into sexual activity, often for someone else’s profit). Many of these crimes begin online—with someone the child has never met in person.

Predators use every kind of platform to connect with kids: long-standing apps like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Discord; messaging tools like WhatsApp and Kik; gaming spaces like Roblox and Fortnite; and a constantly changing “revolving door” of lesser-known apps, anonymous chat sites, and secret photo vaults disguised as calculators. Some apps appear and disappear in weeks, making it hard for parents to stay up to date.

Social media is also designed to be addictive. Notifications, likes, and endless feeds give quick hits of dopamine—keeping kids scrolling for hours, often late at night, afraid to “miss out” on what’s happening in group chats. This constant connection can increase anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation. Since social media took off in the early 2010s, teen mental health has sharply declined, with self-harm, cyberbullying, and suicide rates more than doubling in some regions.



We also know that children are being exposed to sexual content younger than ever—sometimes as young as eight years old—shaping unrealistic and harmful ideas about sex. They are being pressured to send sexual images (“sexting”), often believing the person on the other end is their age, only to be blackmailed later. Sextortion cases have surged, especially among boys, and most often happen on platforms like Snapchat and Instagram. Traffickers and exploiters often pose as romantic partners, friends, or business opportunities, slowly gaining trust before making demands.

Any space where a child can post publicly, message strangers, or be found through location features carries risks. But with awareness, ongoing conversations, and clear safety practices, we can significantly reduce the chances of children falling victim. This guide will equip you with the knowledge, signs to watch for, and practical tools to keep your child safe in today’s digital world.

Tips for Caregivers with Younger Children new to devices, Social Media & gaming.

When children first start using devices, every tap and click opens a door. Early guidance builds safe habits before risky ones take root. Here's how to set boundaries and teach safety from day one.

01 Delay connected devices.

Young children do not need connected devices until they're old enough. For example, when parents believe their child is mature enough to go out independently, they may require a phone.

02 Introduce a Mobile Phone & Social Media Contract

Parents can set clear boundaries and expectations for how, when, and where their children must use phones and social media. For instance, devices should not be allowed in private spaces or bedrooms.

03 Keep an eye on children's social media use

- We should keep our children's passwords for social media and other accounts.
- We can establish a schedule for checking our children's messages, followers, and friends.

04 Revisit the Contract regularly

It's best if parents regularly review the safety rules and expectations outlined in the Mobile Phone and Social Media Contract with their children.

05 Use parental controls (ie. Time limit on apps)

We can use parental controls on our children's devices, such as setting time limits on apps. For example, 30 minutes of YouTube per day.

06 Adopt a "tech together" approach as a family

Parents and their children can intentionally practice technology together, just like how families watch TV together. For example, exploring the features of SnapChat together.

07 Model healthy device use

We can apply healthy boundaries with our own devices and show that to our kids. They can also explain why and how they're using a device, even if it's to play Candy Crush!



As They Grow, Keep the Conversation Going

Our children's online world will expand as they get older—and so will the risks. Staying connected through open, ongoing conversations helps them navigate new platforms and pressures safely.

Talk regularly

- Parents should **discuss boundaries** openly with children. Boundaries exist in every aspect of life, such as in a scene from a family-favourite TV show. When the opportunity to discuss expectations on boundaries presents itself, like when a friend is supposed to come over, we can guide them. We can show our kids what healthy relationships look like.
- We can use the term “**unhealthy followers or friends**” to address strangers on the internet.
- We can show our kids what **healthy relationships** look like. For example, how to have boundaries with a friend/partner. How do we, as parents, set our boundaries with others in front of our kids?



Ask Them:



What do you already do to keep yourself safe?



What do you know about this topic?



Have you or your friends ever received a message that made you or them feel uncomfortable?



Remind them to trust their gut feelings:

Tell them to pay attention to their feelings whenever they're online. I.e, the feelings they get when someone unknown starts a conversation.

What isn't safe to post?

Photos Not to Post	Info Not to Post
Their bedroom	Hobbies- They can share about a movie they recently watched, but not where and with whom.
Their house	Family member's names, Universities, office locations.
The city that they live in	Friend's names, schools, locations.
The school they go to	School name, location or class.
Themselves in non-public clothing, i.e, swimsuits, and identifying clothes, i.e, clothes with their name on it.	Any insecurities they might have.

Safety in the world of gaming

Gaming can be fun and social, but it also connects children with strangers through chat, voice, and video. Predators use gaming communities, especially on platforms like Roblox, Discord, Minecraft, and multiplayer games, to befriend children and build trust. The good news is that we have a list of safety measures which can be used:

Is Roblox safe for my child? Tips to minimise the risks



Most video games and gaming platforms have age recommendations and rules. Review them with your kids.



Ensure your child signs up with the correct age as the platform's safety settings and parental controls are enabled according to the child's age. It's important that they sign up with the correct details.



For children under 13, you can manage who your child can speak to by disabling chat completely or limiting it to friends only. You can also switch off their inbox to stop them from receiving direct messages.



Build a list of age-appropriate games. Not all games on the platform will be appropriate for your child. Depending on your child's age, you will be able to build a list of games they can access. The games that are not age-appropriate can be excluded or blocked until the material is appropriate for their age.



Ask your child to give you a demonstration of the platform to help you understand how they use it. If they are under 13, you can explore some of the parental controls together. You could even consider setting up your own account and playing the games yourself – if you have an account, you can adjust parental controls for your child from there.



Ask your child to teach you their favorite games, and join or watch them from time to time. If you take an interest in your child's cyber-pastimes, they are more likely to take an interest in your guidance.



Continue to have regular conversations with them about what they are doing online. Ask your child open questions like 'What games have you been playing on Roblox recently?' or 'What platforms have you been using to play games?'.



Is Minecraft safe for my child? Tips to minimise the risks



Players can opt to play in single or in multiplayer mode, with multiplayer enabling them to chat to one another – this comes with the risk of being exposed to inappropriate content or language. If you want to, you can turn off both the multiplayer mode and the chat functionality from your own account. If you don't wish to do this, you could talk to your child about who they are playing with. Tell them that in-game chat should be about the game only. If someone asks them something private, or to message on another app, then they should speak to you or another trusted adult.



A profanity filter is turned on by default for all Minecraft accounts and can't be turned off for child accounts.



Explore Minecraft before you let your child use it and choose child-friendly servers for them to play on. You could ask friends or family members who have children which servers they use or try searching 'child-friendly servers on Minecraft' for recommendations and reviews.



Minecraft can be a very immersive and time-consuming game, so you could try to agree on an amount of time that is acceptable (keep it realistic) that includes regular breaks from the screen.



Many children watch Minecraft videos/tutorials (for ideas on new things to create) on YouTube, or sites like Discord. Some tutorials can include bad language or inappropriate comments. To avoid your child encountering this, encourage them to watch some of the 'best for children' channels – you can find recommendations online.



How Can You Keep Them Safe?

TECHNOLOGY ALONE CAN'T PROTECT CHILDREN—PARENTAL ACTION IS VITAL. THESE STEPS EMPOWER YOU TO STAY INFORMED, SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS, AND CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT AT HOME AND ONLINE.

01 Make all their social media accounts private

to ensure that online predators won't easily reach out to them.

02 Block any unknown accounts

that post sexual, illegal, or violent content.

03 Turn off their location sharing on mobile apps

which can be done in the settings for each app.

04 Never meet in-person with unknown followers online

followers on the internet are not the same as friends in real life.

05 Never share intimate content to anyone online.

to ensure predators do not blackmail the sender or more images.

06 Keep their identity private in online communities.

to prevent personal information from getting into the wrong hands.

07 Provide you with their passwords and usernames.

for in case if you need to step in when there is a a serious situation.



MAKE SURE AS A PARENT, YOU:



Don't Post Publicly

Avoid sharing photos of your kids to public social media accounts. Share privately with family and trusted friends.



Pick and Choose

Be vigilant of what you're sharing about your kids online. Are the pictures you posting putting your kids at risk? I.e. Back-to-school photos, photos of the kids in bathing suits.

BE THEIR SAFE PLACE IF THINGS GO SIDEWAYS ONLINE TELL THEM:



You won't be in trouble.

I just want you to be safe

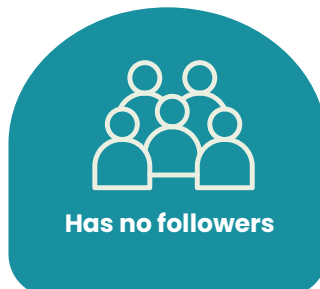
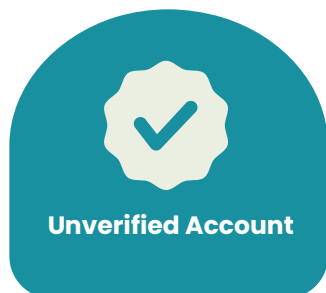


I am there for you no matter what



What are the Red Flags?

Predators often hide behind friendly profiles. Knowing the signs of suspicious accounts can help you step in before harm happens.



How to know when boundaries have been crossed:



Love bombing

When harmless displays of attention and affection go over-the-top.



Isolation

When attempts at offering support and trust pull the child away from others.

Spotting harmful behaviours SUSS acronym

S

stuff

Gives gifts often

U

nusual age

Has an age gap of 4+ years

S

exual

Becomes sexual within 48 hours

S

witches

Switches to another platform

What are the Warning Signs in Your Child?

Changes in behaviour, mood, or routines can signal something is wrong. Recognizing these red flags early can make all the difference in protecting your child.

Withdraws from friends and family

They stop meeting their best friends to do fun activities. They don't respond to your conversations as much as before.

Closes devices around you

When you walk into a space your child is in, they switch off any device that they're using almost immediately.

Uses phone in the bathroom

They start using their phone more in the bathroom, often spending more time in there.

Secretive about online/offline friends

When you ask questions about their new friends, they give you very little to no detail.

Shows a lack of sleep

They look more tired than usual and less energetic.

Use sexual language

You start to catch them using sexual language more often.

Mood shifts- more anxiety and depression

Your child refuses to meet people, shows irritability and gets nervous without their phone.



Conversations that Protect – Empowering your Kids with the Knowledge of Intimacy

Parents need to be the first and best source for sexual education. This is not one conversation, it is many, many bite-sized conversations over a period of time.

01 How to Start the Conversation:

- Keep it short and simple Start the
- conversations earlier than you probably think you should Use simple family
- conversations with “fun” questions to lay a foundation of trust and open dialogue. Some examples are:
-

Who is your favourite Disney character?

If you had a million dollars, what would you do with it?

02 What to Talk About:

- Start with the anatomy of their bodies and use the correct language for body parts.
- Talk about relationships:



*What is romantic love?
What is friendship love?
What is the difference?
What is puberty?*



03 A Supportive Approach

- Ask them: *What do you know about this? What have you heard?*
- Don't wait for kids to ask you questions about sex – you start the conversations with a simple question like: *Do you know how babies are made?*
- Give your kids no reason to feel shame
- Let kids know that sex is amazing & beautiful
- Each child is unique – individualize the conversation that is appropriate for each of them

You are the right parent for your child. Make mistakes – learn from them – forgive yourself and don't stop being their guide in these important conversations.

Let Your Kids Get Their Sex Information from a Credible Source: You!

For More Great Information on Sex Talks:

Dina Alexander's books can be purchased at:

https://www.amazon.ca/s?k=30+Days+of+Sex+Talks&crd=30HSQY1M2ZNR&srefix=30+days+of+sex+talks%2Caps%2C125&ref=nb_sb_noss_1

Free resources on the website:

<https://educateempowerkids.org/>

Digital Balance at Home: Smarter Control of Devices

01 Games & Online Spaces

- Popular platforms like Minecraft and Roblox involve user-generated content.
- Risks that exist in social media or online spaces can also appear in games.
- Instead of “danger lists,” families are encouraged to assess each platform individually – risks vary by age, maturity, and resilience.
- Every game can have bad actors, but most include built-in parental controls (chat restrictions, profanity filters, PINs).
- Safety is unique to each family – discuss what concerns matter most to you and set parameters accordingly.
- Consider creating a parent account to monitor settings and permissions.

02 App Safety: Focus on Snapchat

- Snapchat offers many creative features but poses risks with disappearing messages and image sharing.
- Parents can use Snapchat Family Center or create a parent account to review privacy settings, friend lists, and location sharing.
- Remind youth that nothing online truly disappears – screenshots and data recovery options make a digital footprint permanent.
- For younger kids, [Kinzoo Messenger](#) is a safer alternative for family-friendly communication.

03 Device & Wi-Fi Safety

- Routers are the gateway to your home network. You can [purchase advanced routers](#) to set user profiles, block sites, and set time limits.
- No product is perfect – awareness and education remain the best tools.
- Smart TVs and other connected devices may lack strong parental controls.
- [Safe phone options](#) like Pinwheel Phones have youth-focused operating systems but may be costly or harder to find. (<https://www.pinwheel.com/>). Pinwheel phones may be the same price as a regular smart phone, because they are not as popular – but they are a safe option.
- Good rule: no smart devices in bedrooms overnight.

For More Great Information:

The White Hatter – excellent for digital parenting education:

<https://www.thewhitehatter.ca/>

Our past webinars:

<https://defenddignity.ca/digital-dignity-webinar-series/>

Our Online Safety Handbook:

<https://defenddignity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Online-Safety-Handbook-Standard-Print.pdf>



Online safety doesn't require perfection—just presence. When we keep the conversation open and stay curious, we are supporting our children as they navigate the digital world.

We're not alone, and we're more prepared than we think.

Resources & More!



Books & Courses



Our Website

<https://defenddignity.ca>



Facebook

https://www.instagram.com/defend_dignity/



Past Webinars

<https://defenddignity.ca/digital-dignity-webinar-series/>



Instagram

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1BLU38Fqgg/>



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