

# Balancing The Benefits With Online Vigilance

Online safety is a huge issue in today’s world. Users worry about the effects that identify theft, viruses, hacking, pornography, phone addiction, and piracy can have on their lives. Children and teenagers are even more vulnerable to these dangers than adults are, since they have not yet learned to recognize important warning signs. As a parent, you can, and must, take decisive action to protect your child from a wide range of legal, financial, emotional, and sexual hazards on online.

## Identity Theft, Scams, and Malware

Unfortunately, websites and apps are wide open to unscrupulous companies that are constantly coming up with new ways to deceive users. Often, these companies have a single goal: to get a user to click on a block of text, picture, or other feature. This click opens the door to all sorts of damaging software, viruses, and spyware that searches for personal information. The naturally trusting, curious nature of children makes them ideal victims for scammers and thieves. Worst of all, if there is no visible effect of an action, a child might not even think to tell an adult about it. Children should never click on anything they are not already familiar with, even if it looks important or exciting.

## Illegal Activity

The risks associated with sexting can go far beyond the social cost of embarrassment, shame, or guilt. If someone who is underage sends an explicit image of themselves via text message, they may be violating child pornography laws. Each state has its own laws, but under federal law, child pornography involves any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving someone under the age of 18. This standard also applies to selfies. Criminal charges can be brought in both federal and state courts. While these laws were designed to protect minors from sexual exploitation or abuse, some minors have been prosecuted under child pornography statutes. The penalties for violating these laws are severe and can include having to register as a sex offender.

TALK TO YOUR CHILD  
ABOUT NOT OVER  
SHARING

## RESOURCES

### Online Safety:

[enough.org](http://enough.org)  
[kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org)  
[staysafe.org](http://staysafe.org)

### Social Media Safety

[safesearchkids.com](http://safesearchkids.com)

### Cyber Security And Safety Resources

[www.staysafeonline.info](http://www.staysafeonline.info)

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# A PARENT’S GUIDE: Online Safety



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## Child Predators

If you've ever opened a social media account, you've probably thought, "I could put up any name, information, or photo I want to." The anonymity of the internet makes it possible for people to misrepresent who they are in a way that was nearly impossible before. Your child may think they are building a friendship with a peer, but if he has never met the other person face to face, there is a real danger that they could be an adult predator instead. These criminals often use techniques to gain the trust of children over a long period of time, only to hurt them in the end. It is very dangerous to allow your child to have his own "private" network of acquaintances on the web without your direct supervision and familiarity with each friend.

## Inappropriate Content

The natural curiosity of children and teens can expose them to adult content, or even child pornography online. If a child wants to find sexually explicit material, it's easily available. However, even a misspelled word or naive

mistake can expose your child to inappropriate language, photos, video, and other material.

There are various apps and programs you can install on your child's device to keep them safe. These apps can help you enforce boundaries, monitor the time spent online, restrict access to inappropriate content, and monitor your child's activity on social media. To prevent "sexting," make sure that your child knows that any photo or video that they send is out of his/her control.

## Cyberbullying

The power of being online expands the ability of bullying behavior to impact the lives of children and teens. Intentionally hurtful rumors, stories, and mockery can spread to an entire circle of acquaintances in seconds. Sharing of personal videos, texts, and pictures create embarrassment for the victim. If your child seems unusually moody, agitated, and protective of their online accounts, cyberbullying may be going on. Several teen suicides have shown just how devastating this activity can be to a young person's self-image.

## Strategies For Safety

How can you protect your child from online hazards? Three simple activities are key: Educate, supervise, and take action.

### Educate

Your child will not know what activities are dangerous unless a responsible adult informs him. Tell children what kind of activity is illegal, what sites/apps are safe, and what information they should not post online. A child or even a teenager may not understand why posting a phone number, address, or upcoming plans is dangerous. Warn your child that making new friends online is not as simple as it looks. Discuss how opening up to friends online or over text can expose those conversations to others.

### Supervise

Know what your child is doing online! You should have free access to any accounts your child holds at any time. Talk to them regularly about what they are seeing and doing online and in various apps. Content filters and parental security apps are critical. A reliable one is worth its cost, since you can not expect to monitor every keystroke your child makes. These tools will block a child from viewing inappropriate sites, and firewall/virus protection software will minimize the damage if your child accidentally opens the door to harmful programs.



### Take Action

If you become aware of cyberbullying, illegal file sharing, or inappropriate material that is deliberately targeting children, report it to the correct authorities. If you discover that a predator is communicating with your child, contact local law enforcement immediately.

Your child should feel comfortable communicating with you about their activity online. If they see something inappropriate, receive a confusing request from someone they don't know, or think they might have clicked on something wrong, it is important for them to tell a parent right away. Never make your child feel ashamed or afraid to tell you about something that happened online. On the other hand, also stress the importance of adhering to your family's online safety rules.

The internet and social media give access to the world at the tip of your fingertips, but this improved access comes at a price. However, the dangers are manageable.

**By proactively engaging in your child's online activities, you can protect them from harm.**