



Digital & Social Media Safety Tips for Caregivers

The digital world offers many opportunities for adults and children to learn. It has also dramatically changed how we communicate. Unfortunately, it is also a place where children and adults can be victimized. Cyberbullying, predatory behavior, and loss of privacy are just some of the risks. To effectively protect children, parents and caregivers need to be familiar with the ever-changing online and digital methods of communication and take the necessary steps to promote safety for the children and youth in their care.

Educate the Children

- Talk about the risks, such as what can happen when a child's identity, location, or other personal information gets into the wrong hands.
- Kids in care are at higher risk for online, digital, and other bullying. Children with mental health challenges, trauma histories, or other vulnerabilities may be especially targeted, as they can be more susceptible to manipulation or less likely to report problems. Cyberbullying often occurs on platforms like Snapchat (where messages disappear quickly, making it harder to document), TikTok (where algorithm-driven content can rapidly amplify harassment), YouTube (where comment sections can become hostile), Instagram (where social comparison and exclusion play out publicly), and Discord (where group chats can easily turn into spaces for targeted harassment). Discuss what bullying looks like, what to do if the child or someone they know is bullied, and how important it is to communicate with parents or caregivers if it's happening.
- Educate the child in your care about grooming behaviors. Predators don't begin conversations with explicit sexual requests. They start by acting like a friend and validating the child's feelings. Children in care may be at greater risk since they may feel afraid, isolated, or lonely. Predators often deliberately seek out children who appear emotionally vulnerable or who are seeking connection — making children with mental health challenges or trauma histories a particularly targeted group.
- Warn the child in your care that gifts, pressure to do things, requests for pictures, and other seemingly innocent actions by an acquaintance from the digital space could also be grooming.
- It's a good idea to discuss respectful and healthy digital behavior with everyone in your family.
- Help the child in your care distinguish between quality sites and social media messaging and those that distort and seek to exploit people.

Set Boundaries

Many families have established house rules for many behaviors and expectations. Yet sometimes they neglect to address the importance of developing clear and consistent rules for the digital and social media space. You might consider posting a written Family Agreement where everyone can see it. That agreement should:

- Establish clear boundaries about prohibiting posting or sharing personal identifying information in digital spaces, such as names, pictures, telephone numbers, addresses, or passwords/logins. For example,



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have the child avoid a username like “Jane.Doe2011.”

- List specific sites or apps kids should not be visiting and firm rules about the consequences of visiting those sites.
- Identify clear expectations about using video game systems or other household devices with digital capabilities.
- Specify time frames when kids can be online. For example, sleep is known to be disrupted when kids bring their cell phones or tablets to bed. Have a designated spot for devices when not in use.
- Communicate a firm message that kids should never meet someone in person from the digital world without talking to an adult first.
- Be shared with other childcare team members (birth family, social worker, school staff, respite providers, etc.).

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

- Teach the child in your care that if they get in a situation that feels uncomfortable, they can and should always come to you and won't get in trouble if they do.
- Avoid grounding kids from screen time for violations of the Family Agreement. Doing so may make the child more likely to hesitate to come to you if they are experiencing a problem online.
- Discuss with the child and the child's care team how you will monitor the child's digital activity. Help the child understand that family safety means all family members must act responsibly.
- Discuss any uncomfortable experiences with the children in your care and how you resolved and learned from them.

Educate Yourself and Supervise

- Become familiar with the latest digital platforms and apps, even if it's simply to know which ones are most frequently used. Whether the children in your home have their own devices or use yours, understand that devices are easily accessible to them.
- Ask the children in your care to share their favorite apps or to teach you what they already know. You're likely to learn something new, and teaching you something helps build a child's self-esteem.
- Utilize monitoring software and be diligent about using it. Inform the child's care team so that privacy issues can be handled with care.

Understanding Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly woven into the apps, games, and platforms children use every day — often without them realizing it. While AI can be a powerful learning tool, it also introduces new risks that caregivers should be aware of.

- Talk with children about AI-generated content, including images, videos, and voices that can be made to look or sound like real people. These are sometimes called “deepfakes” and can be used to spread false information or to embarrass and manipulate others.
- Be aware that AI-powered chatbots can simulate friendly, emotionally engaging conversations. Some children — especially those who feel lonely or disconnected — may form strong attachments to these tools. Predators have also been known to use AI to create convincing fake personas to gain

a child's trust.

- Help children develop healthy skepticism about what they see online. Encourage them to ask, "Is this real?" Who made this? Why? Teaching critical thinking about AI-generated content is one of the most valuable digital safety skills a child can have.

Explore Together

Learn from one another using online content and social media as teaching tools and educational resources. While the virtual world can be dangerous, it is also an invaluable resource for learning and growing together.

Resources

Learn in [the Champion Classrooms](#)

- [What to Do When You Think It Might Be Sex Trafficking](#)

Additional Resources

- [The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#)
- [NetSmartz](#)
- [Online Teen Safety Guide](#)
- [Life360](#)
- [Keeping Children You Foster and Adopt Safe Online](#)
- [A Guide to Internet Safety](#)
- [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Online Safety](#)
- [Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Center: Internet Safety](#)
- [Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association: Internet Safety](#)
- [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Interactive Safety Resource](#)
- [Protect Kids Online Podcast](#)
- [The Internet and Your Kids: 8 Tips for Keeping Safe Online](#)