

Internet safety for Teenagers - Tips for adults

Why Internet safety matters for teenagers

Teenagers use digital technologies for everyday activities like keeping in touch with friends on social media, relaxing and doing schoolwork. They may also go online to look for support for physical or mental health problems or to experiment with different ways of expressing themselves.

Therefore, because they are online so much without your supervision, **teenagers need to be able to identify acceptable and unacceptable online content independently.** They also need to know how to behave respectfully online and avoid online risks.

Internet safety risks for teenagers

There are four main kinds of Internet risks for teenagers as follows:

1) Content risks

For teenagers, these risks include coming across material that they might find upsetting, disgusting or otherwise uncomfortable, especially if they encounter it accidentally.

This material may potentially include:

- pornography or sexually explicit content in videos, movies or online games;
- real or simulated violence;
- fake news that seems believable;
- harmful user-generated content like sites about drug use, self-harm, suicide or negative body image.

2) Contact risks

These risks include coming into contact with adults posing as children online, strangers who persuade teenagers to meet them in real life, and online scammers.

3) Conduct risks

Conduct risks include behaving in inappropriate or hurtful ways, or being the victim of this kind of behaviour:

Some examples could include:

- cyberbullying;
- sexting;
- misusing people's passwords and impersonating people online;
- making unauthorised purchases using other people's financial details;
- creating content that reveals information about other people.

4) Contract risks

Contract risks include teenagers signing up to unfair contracts, terms or conditions that they aren't aware of or don't fully understand.

As a result, teenagers may be open to identity theft or fraud, receive inappropriate digital marketing messages or scam emails or even have their personal data collected from apps and devices like fitness trackers etc.



Protecting teenagers from internet safety risks

Your child is probably an independent Internet user now, but you can help your child keep building the skills and knowledge they need to identify and manage Internet safety risks.

Here are some basic things you can do to protect your child/teenager from potential Internet safety risks:

- Talk with your child about upsetting and inappropriate content. If you can talk with your child in an open and non-judgmental way, they're more likely to talk with you if they come across something disturbing or have a bad online experience.
- Stay in touch with what your child is doing online and how much time they are spending online. This will help you to spot when your child might be having problems.
- Ask your child to 'friend' you on social media. Younger teenagers might be OK with this, but older teenagers might prefer not to add a parent as a friend.
- Encourage and remind your child to explore and use the Internet safely and remind your child to check privacy settings.
- Find out how to make complaints about offensive or illegal online content.



Identifying and managing Internet safety risks with teenagers

It's important to **help your teenage child manage Internet safety risks**. This lets your child build digital resilience, which is the ability to respond positively and deal with risks they come across online.



You can do this by,

1) Being a role model for healthy Internet use

All children – including teenagers – do as you do, so being a role model for your child is a powerful and positive way to guide your child's behaviour when it comes to Internet use. You can be a role model for safe and healthy screen use by using digital media and the Internet in the way you want your child to use it. For example, you might keep Internet-connected devices out of bedrooms, avoid using your phone during mealtimes, or balance screen use with other social and recreational options. It is also good to model positive technology use like phoning friends and family and sending supportive messages.

2) Talking with your child about online content and behaviour

Talking openly about your own digital media and Internet use and encouraging your child to do the same will help them feel they can talk to you if they have a bad experience online. You can get your child talking by asking them to explain the apps, games and content they are interested in. You might say, *'Snapchat posts disappear quickly, but a screenshot can capture what's been said. Is that right?'* Or *'Talk me through the differences between YouTube and TikTok'*.

It's good to encourage your teenage child to develop a sense of what they like and don't like online and to defend their choices with friends. For example, you could say, *'It's great that you chose not to get involved in that online argument'*.

Talking about **online hoaxes and fake news** with your teenager will help them develop the ability to tell whether a website has good-quality information. You and your child can find out how to recognise, avoid and report scams. **This is all part of digital and media literacy.**

3) Reminding your teenage child about privacy and personal information.

You can help your child look at and choose appropriate privacy, location and safety settings on devices, programs and social media, and talk about why this is important. For example, you might say, *'Employers often do online searches to find out about job applicants. Make sure that anything you make public online is OK for future employers to see'*.

It's also important for your teenage child to be careful about sharing personal information. Remind them not to give out their name, address, date of birth or any other identifying information to people they don't know in person and not to send or post images to people they don't know.

As your teenage child moves towards adulthood they may be exposed to or come into contact with online dating. It's a good idea to reinforce how important it is when dealing with a potential "stranger" online. For example, you may choose to say, *'There's always a risk if you go to meet someone you only know online. It can lead to dangerous situations. For example, the person might want to hurt you.'*

In some cases you might find that your child knows more than you do about privacy settings and data collection on YouTube, streaming services, gaming platforms, social media and fitness devices. You can make the most of this by asking your child to share what they know and then working together to adjust the settings on all your devices, services and apps.

4) Teaching your child about online purchases.

If your teenage child is starting to shop online, it's important for them to use reputable shopping sites, check customer reviews, and look into the transaction and security software the site uses. You could talk with them about shopping online and explain the risks associated with online transactions.

Please refer to the GRA's guidance on Safe Online Shopping for further information.

