

Top 5 Things Parents Can Do To Keep Their Kids Safe Online

Tips for parents to keep their kids safe online.

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While the Internet and social media have revolutionized the world, they can also bring additional risks into our homes. Many of us watched the show *To Catch a Predator* where we saw police catching adult predators in online sting operations. Sadly, these are not isolated incidents as it is estimated that about 20 percent of teens will at some point receive a sexual solicitation from an adult stranger online. A recent study out of our research lab found that 12 percent of teens who met an adult online went on to meet them in person for a sexual relationship. So, what do we do as parents to protect our children from falling prey to these on-line predators? Below are the top five things that parents can do to keep their kids safe online:

1. Emphasize the importance of online privacy. Teach your children that they should not share identifying information such as their name, location, age or school. Further they should never send pictures to strangers. Also make sure that their user names are not identifying and do not contain sexual content as offenders often select vulnerable individuals or individuals that imply that they may be open to discussing sexual content.

2. Talk to your children about online dangers. While you do not want to unduly scare your children, you do want them to know that there are people out there who may have malicious intent. Let them know that if they receive communication from someone they do not know or someone that makes them uncomfortable—they should show it to you or a trusted adult. The most important thing that parents can do is keep the lines of communication open, letting your child know that they will not be in trouble even if they have already chatted or shared photos with someone.
3. When your children start to use internet devices (and the ages get younger and younger these days!), discuss your family rules and regulations. Some families create their own digital use or cell phone use contract. These contracts stipulate usage regulations; failure to adhere to family regulations should result in the suspension of online privileges.
4. Know your children's passwords. While many parents give their children privacy on-line, you should reserve the right to check their texts, browser history and social media accounts periodically or if you feel that something is up.
5. Do not allow internet enabled devices in bedrooms at night. While you may permit the use of phones and laptops in their rooms during the day, these devices should be returned to a common area at night for recharging. This not only promotes healthy sleep habits, but our research also found that the majority of on-line solicitation of minors takes place after 11pm at night, when parents are not around to monitor.

References

For more information, see: Jeglic, E.J., & Calkins, C.A. (2018). Protecting you child from sexual abuse: What you need to know to keep your kids safe. New York: SkyhorsePublishing.