Childhelp | **PREVENTION EDUCATION**

ONLINE SAFETY CONVERSATION GUIDE

Youth today live as much online as they do offline. Unfortunately, any time a child is online, there is a risk of exposure to unsafe content or people. It's important to talk with kids (without scaring them) about potential risks, teach them to recognize unsafe situations by how their online interactions compare to healthy relationships, and make sure they know they can talk to you or another safe adult about anything – without feeling blame or embarrassment.

Start the conversation with your kids and teens about online safety with this conversation guide based on Childhelp's Prevention Education Program, ***Speak Up Be Safe***, and our supplemental module, ***Staying Safe from Online Harm***.

Use the **3 Keys to Personal Safety** to frame conversations with kids and teach them the following key points:

1. You have the RIGHT to be safe.

- You have the right to be safe online.
- By being aware and recognizing risks online, you can help prevent harm.
- You can be an active partner with your safe adults to help you stay safe online.
- Online abuse is never your fault, and if anything happens, help is available.
- Together we can handle any situation. You are not alone.
- It's never too late to get help.

2. You have POWER.

- You can recognize safe vs. unsafe people and situations, and take action to stay safe and get help.
- You can learn to recognize signs (red flags) of grooming, such as flattery, gifts, secrecy, and isolation.
- You have the power to choose healthy relationships (mutual trust and respect, kindness/empathy, safe behaviors, no secrets) over unhealthy/unsafe ones (manipulation, demands, inconsistent behavior).
- Respect, peer support, and talking to safe adults are powerful safety tools.
- Trust your instincts and know you can change your mind if someone's behavior seems unsafe or something feels off.

3. You can SPEAK UP.

- You can speak up through actions – say no, leave a site or chat, end the conversation, and block the person.
- You have a safety network of adults, peers, and resources to connect with for help.
- You can tell a safe adult, report unsafe behavior, and/or connect with a helpline.
- Speaking up also means supporting a friend or peer if they experience any harmful or unsafe behaviors online.

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Use the following information and talking points based on the **3 KEYS to Personal Safety** to help you talk to children and teens. Look for everyday opportunities to discuss online safety. Having open and ongoing conversations will normalize the topic and foster a sense of shared responsibility for safety between you and your child.

MAIN IDEA	TALKING POINTS
Key 1: You have the RIGHT to be safe.	
Begin with Curiosity • If possible, start the conversation early, before kids begin using online apps. • Normalize the topic and ask about their experiences, inviting them to talk first. • Ensure they know they can talk to you or another safe adult, no matter what. • You'll often hear people say teach kids to talk to trusted adults. But in many cases, the adults who harm children are people the child knows and trusts. Teach kids to identify and talk to SAFE ADULTS instead. Safe adults are defined by their actions, not by who they are or how they look.	• "I've been learning more about how people sometimes misuse the internet. I'm curious—what kind of stuff do you and your friends see online?" • "Technology changes so fast. What apps are popular with your friends or people you know?" • "A lot of people have experienced uncomfortable situations online. It's super common, so I wanted to make sure you know what to watch for and how to respond if anyone ever makes you feel uncomfortable or pressures you online. I want you to know you can always talk to me or another safe adult to help you."
Share Simple, Concrete Red Flags • Keep the focus on warning signs in someone's behavior, not scary scenarios. • Suggest that they compare behaviors to benchmarks of a healthy relationship: mutual empowerment, safety, trust, respect, and boundaries. • Use youth-friendly examples, like those in the talking points.	"Has anyone ever… • asked you (or a friend) to move to a private chat?" • asked you to keep a secret ("don't tell your parents")?" • "love-bombed" or complimented you intensely?" • asked for pics, personal info, or to meet in person?" • said they're your age but won't video chat or talk on the phone?"

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MAIN IDEA	TALKING POINTS
Key 2: You have POWER.	
Always Ask for Their Input • Children and teens love sharing what they know. • Asking for their input and thoughts reinforces their competence, opens dialogue, and empowers them. And you'll learn a lot.	• "You know way more about online apps and gaming than I do. What are some things you think will help you stay safer online?" or "What advice would YOU give to a younger kid about staying safe online?" • "If you were giving advice to someone you know about handling pressure online, what would you tell them?"
Risk Is Not Always from Strangers or Adults • Kids often think "online exploitation = creepy older adult." Research shows that a significant portion of online exploitation involves acquaintances and friends.	• "Sometimes peers pressure each other into stuff online—like asking for photos, sharing screenshots, posting personal info, or urging someone to talk or chat privately. This behavior may start out harmless, but it can escalate into unsafe or abusive behavior." • "You know, you have the power to decide who you interact with online. You can say no, end the conversation, block a person, and leave a chat or site." • "What would be some signs to watch out for that might indicate an account is fake or that someone isn't who they say they are?"

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MAIN IDEA	TALKING POINTS
Key 3: You can SPEAK UP.	
Empower Them with Choices • Kids and teens may shut down if all they hear is, "You can't do this." Instead, give them information, tools, and choices. • Make it clear they can come to you without fear of blame, and that there IS HELP available. This is the key factor that helps youth report problems. • Ensure they know they can also talk to another safe adult if needed, and brainstorm together who those safe adults would be. • Let them know there are websites and other resources that can help with online safety concerns. Provide the *Resources for Youth* handout available in this kit so they have information about where to turn for help.	• "If something feels off, trust that instinct—it's usually right. You can block someone, talk to me, and report it." • "If anything ever makes you uncomfortable—even if you're not sure why—I'm here to help. You won't be in trouble. I just want you to be safe." • "If something ever happens to you or a friend online, you are not alone and help is available. You can talk to me or another safe adult, like your school counselor or a teacher, or you can call or text a helpline. There are also websites that can help. I have a list I can share with you so you'll have it if you ever need it." • "There are services that can help stop the spread of personal images, provide resources, and offer support."
Keep the Conversations Going • Keep conversations short and ongoing; continued check-ins are more effective than one long "big talk." • Use the questions in the "Talking Points" column to begin conversations. • Depending on your child's response to questions, engage in further discussion about what their response was, what might be helpful in a similar situation in the future, and reinforce talking to safe adults with any questions/concerns.	• "What apps are popular with your friends right now?" • "Have you seen anything weird or concerning online lately?" • "Have your friends shared that they've seen any concerning or unsafe behaviors online?" • "Have you witnessed any drama online or in group chats lately?" • "Before you post or share about someone else online, do you ask permission? Do friends ask for your permission?"

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