

Kids... Smart Phones, Tablets and the Internet...What Do Caregivers Need To Know?

Technology can be a source for learning and entertainment for your children, but caregivers have to be one step ahead to protect them from potential dangers which can affect their development, friendships, mental health, and safety. We also have to keep our children safe from early exposure to pornography, online sexual predators, and bullies. Use this guide to start the conversation with your child so they can learn to demonstrate healthy digital citizenship.

Some tips to get started

Be clear on your expectations: Kids are less likely to get into dangerous situations when a caregiver has talked to them about **what's OK and what's not OK** to do when using technology *www.mediasmarts.ca. Set up parental controls on your devices, set up 'ad' blockers, turn on 'safe search' settings, block adult content through web filtering.

Build your child's confidence: let them know what to do if they come across inappropriate content, someone tries to get personal information from them, or if they see bullying online.

Teach them how to respond: for example, say "No", ignore, report online, block, tell an adult.

Create family rules, such as:

- **Be present.** No technology at certain times, such as at the table during dinner.
- **Privacy.** Accounts must be 'private', no sharing full name, address, or school name with strangers. Never send pictures unless you check with parents first. Never take or send pictures of private body parts. Never plan to meet with someone you don't know. Trust your instincts and always check with an adult first before sharing private information.
- **Not at night.** No tablets/phones in the bedroom after bedtime.
- **Must use in a common area** where adults can check in freely.
- **Ban on particular sites, games or activities.** This might include a particular video game, website, or social media platform which may be inappropriate for children due to violence, sexual content, or ability of strangers (and potential abusers) to chat with your child. Check your browsing history often.
- **Follow age guidelines for creating accounts:** Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube **are all 13+ years old for good reason.**
- **Turn off location settings:** in Apps and on phone through your settings and privacy buttons.
- **Responsibilities first.** No technology until family obligations have been met; such as homework or chores.
- **Rules about behaviour.** No viewing, making or sharing anything sexual, no bullying, and no bad language. Teach your child not to respond to strangers or bullies, but to block or report them online.
- **Fixed time limits.** Rules around how long children can engage with screens. When time's up, it's up.
 - Recommendations: Age 0-2 (no screen time), age 2-5 (monitored, and less than 1 hour/day), ages 6-17 (no more than 2 hours/day), not for 1 hour before bed *Canadian Pediatric Society
- **Be balanced.** Balance screen time with other activities, such as playing outside, reading, cooking, crafts.
- **Cost restrictions.** Rules around spending such as, no data without 'Wi-Fi' connection.

Warning signs that your child is not using technology safely:

- Your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night.
- You find pornography or porn 'ad pop ups' on your child's computer.
- Your child receives phone calls/text messages from people you don't know.
- Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know.
- Your child turns the monitor off or changes the screen quickly when you walk into the room.

If you think your child is communicating with an online sexual predator, you should:

- First, talk to your child openly about it. Tell them you're worried and have a conversation about online safety.
- Review what is on your child's device, either through the history or by other means.
- Check the caller ID to make sure your child hasn't been calling/texting any numbers you don't recognize.
- Monitor any chat rooms or instant message on video games/websites your child has been using.
- Save, screenshot, copy evidence and report to the RCMP.

Family Contract for Online Safety

As a caregiver you need to set clear rules for when your child is online. The contract below should help you establish rules and behaviours for both you and your child/youth for when they are using technology, so that healthy habits are established from the beginning.

- I understand that EVERYTHING I send/comment on/'like'/forward/watch/type online is traceable back to me and nothing I do is anonymous or disappears. I have a 'digital footprint' so I have to think carefully about my actions. I will strive to create a positive digital footprint.
- I understand that using social media, playing video games, using a tablet is a privilege and not a right.
- I understand that I will get my caregiver's permission and follow age restrictions before establishing an account with a social media site such as Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat **which are all 13+**.
- If I have an account I understand that they should be set to 'private' and do regular privacy check-ups so strangers and potential sexual abusers will not have access to me and my private information and pictures.
- I understand that my privileges may be revoked by my parent/guardian(s) at any time for not following rules.
- I understand that I should never use social media to torment or harass a schoolmate, teacher, or any other person. I will not participate in online fights, threaten others, or encourage others to behave badly. I know I can report to www.erasebullying.ca or www.needhelpnow.ca or to an adult/RCMP.
- I understand that my parent(s) or guardian(s) have the right to review my online behaviour and that they can have access to my password and accounts if the devices are in their name.
- I understand that I will not use inappropriate language on social media or post inappropriate photos that could be embarrassing to my family members, friends, or classmates. If someone does this to me, I will ask them to take them down, 'untag' myself or report the picture to the host site www.erasebullying.ca, www.needhelpnow.ca or the RCMP.
- I will not take pictures/video of my body without clothes on, or pictures that are sexually explicit and send them to anyone. I realize they can be used against me or shared without my consent. If that happens I promise to reach out for help or report to www.erasebullying.ca or www.needhelpnow.ca or to an adult/RCMP.
- I will not share someone else's picture without their consent. I understand what is legal/not legal from reading http://www.westcoastleaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Is-That-Legal_Web-Version.pdf
- I understand that I promise to tell my caregiver, counsellor, RCMP or www.kidshelpphone.ca, www.erasebullying.ca if others are using social media to bully, threaten or harass me or others. I will not forward or 'like' hurtful or mean comments/pictures.

Social Media Contract for Parents or Guardians

- I promise to model digital citizenship when I am online and responsible screen time usage in front of my children.
- I promise to establish clear ground rules and let my child know what is ok/not ok when using technology.
- I promise that I will check my child's social media accounts on occasion and monitor chats to be sure that they are staying safe and behaving appropriately.
- I will keep up to date on the latest technology my child may be using <https://saferschoolstogether.com/parent-resources/>, and <http://mediasmarts.ca/parents>
- I promise not to overreact if I see something concerning social media. Rather, I will calmly discuss the matter with my child and work through the situation together.
- I promise that should my child break our digital citizenship rules, I will enforce fair but firm consequences for their behaviour.
- I promise to take immediate action if I determine that my child's safety is, in any way, in question which may include confiscating my child's phone, contacting my child's school or the RCMP if necessary.

(Parent Signature)

(Date)

(Child/Youth Signature)

(Date)