



Keeping Kids
SAFE
Online

Make Rules, Stick to Them

The Internet represents an exciting landscape for kids and teens, with the opportunities to make new friends and explore new things. But, it also comes with some inherent dangers.

Start early with your kids, and set boundaries at a young age. With those boundaries, keep a constant line of communication open.

As your child continues to grow up (and as technology changes), keep talking. The online and social media landscape is always evolving, and as that happens, the rules might sometimes need to change.

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

Children emulate what they see, and good social media and online protocols should start at the top. When trying to keep your kids safe online, be a role model with your own Internet and social media habits, since your child is likely to emulate your behavior. When your children see you making good decisions and being safe online, that sets an example they'll hopefully follow.

SOME BASIC RULES

When it comes to safely using the Internet, Scholastic recommends a few helpful tips:

- Limit usage. Permit your child free online time for a set amount of time (such as 30 minutes) right after school to chat with friends, play games or visit social networking

sites. But, make it a rule that family time starts with dinner.

- Keep kids in sight, and have them use the computer (or tablet or phone) in a centrally located area. A child is less likely to browse questionable content if they know a

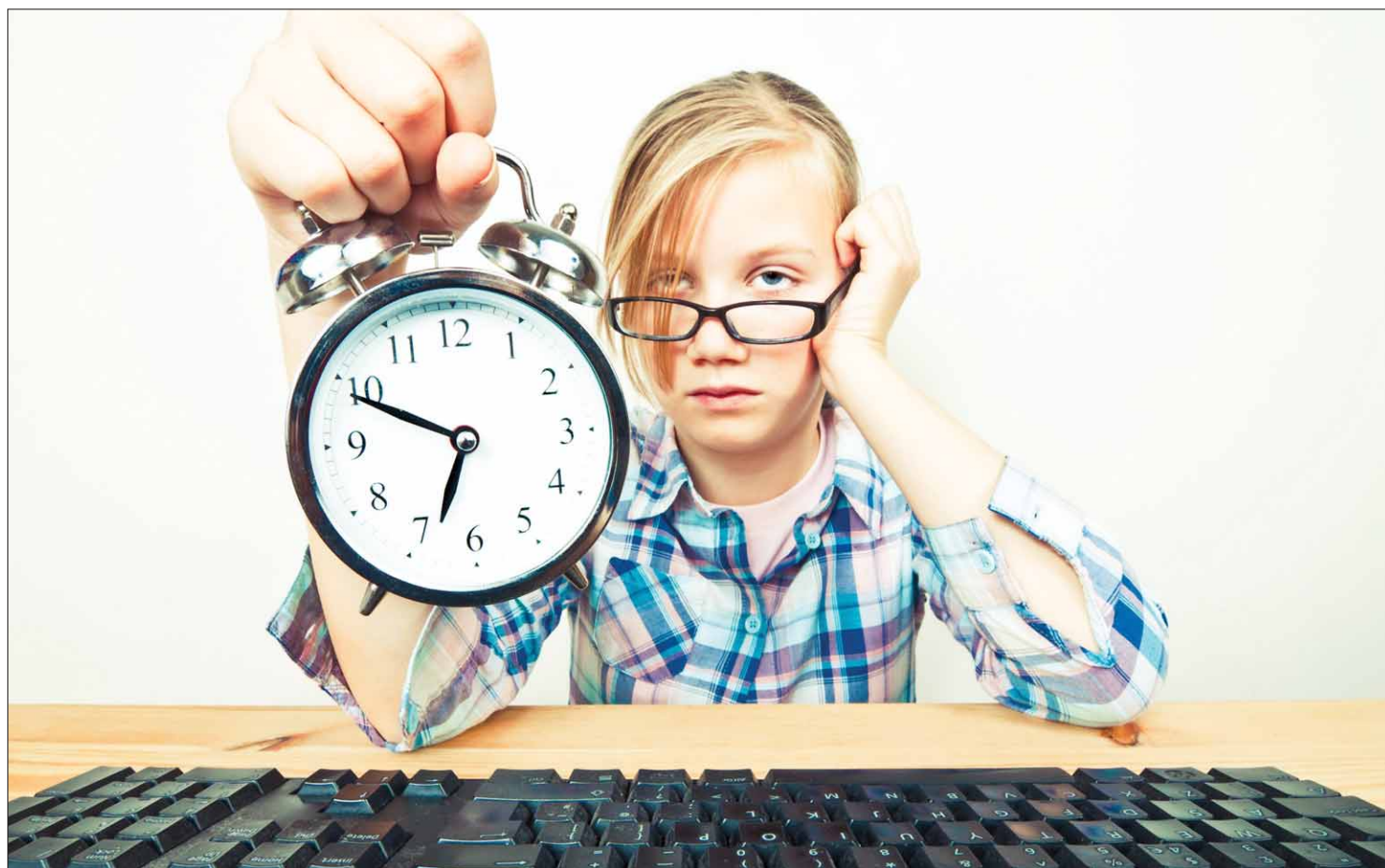
parent or sibling might walk by at any second. This makes it easier to monitor activity.

- Do your homework. Check browser history to know where your child goes online, and check the sites regularly. Use security tools

and privacy features — whether offered by your browser or Internet service provider, or purchased separately — for extra protection.

- Set a code of conduct and time limits. Keeping kids safe means setting guidelines

about suitable language, content and behavior. While it's important to direct your child to suitable websites, it's even more valuable to help them recognize the redeeming qualities of those sites and what makes them appropriate.



© FOTOLIA



Know the Landscape

From Xanga and Friendster to Twitter and Snapchat, the social media landscape has changed tremendously over the past decade. That can create a challenge when it comes to knowing how your kids are interacting with others online.

If you don't understand the virtual playground in which your child is spending his time, it can be hard to effectively parent and create boundaries.

STUDY UP

The first thing a parent should do is start researching, and make an effort to understand how social networks work and what teens and children can do on these sites. Depending on your level

of technological expertise, a crash course in social media is one of the best places to get started. Many community colleges, chambers of commerce and community groups offer training in Internet basics — often with at least some focus on social media.

Another solid option is to do some searching online. Major social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and

Instagram make information available about how the services work. Study up, and make sure you know the basics.

ASK YOUR KIDS WHAT THEY USE

Talk to your children about which networks they use and the sites they visit. Make an effort to understand how they work and who your children are communicating with on a

daily basis. The Internet represents a whole new world of social options. Knowledge is power, so make sure you know where your kids are spending their time.

REALIZE IT'S HARD TO KEEP UP

Technology evolves rapidly, and with that speed, new social networks and communication tools are cropping up every few months. Children

and teens are often among the earliest adopters for these technologies, so it can be hard for parents to stay on top of the latest trends.

While many adults frequently use programs like Facebook and Twitter, new networks spread by word of mouth and online buzz for kids. Teens might be drawn to these services by the sheer fact that their parents don't know about them.

Mobile: Where it all Happens

One of the biggest changes in the past few years is the proliferation of mobile devices among teens and children, and the new social networks to go along with them.

From services that are connected to geographic locations (such as campus- or school-specific apps), and apps such as SnapChat that delete messages after they're sent (which can make it extremely hard for parents to monitor), the Internet landscape is changing rapidly — and mobile is at the forefront.

TALK TO YOUR KIDS, MONITOR THEIR PHONES

It's likely your teens will know about these apps long before a parent will, and it's amazing how quickly widespread adoption can happen by word of mouth among kids.

Since mobile can be so hard to monitor, the best line of defense is an open and honest relationship with your child about the dangers of these tools and how they can be used responsibly. Set boundaries, and make them very clear.

Make it clear their use will be monitored, and make the difference between “monitoring” and “spying” very clear. Let your kids know you'll be checking in on them, and what's expected of them. Keep an eye out for unfamiliar apps, and ask your child to explain them to you if needed.



© FOTOLIA

ANONYMOUS GOSSIP TOOLS

A new type of social media tool popularized among college students is taking high school (and middle school) campuses by storm: anonymous gossip. It's basically a digital bathroom wall, where students feel they have the freedom to say any-

thing about anyone. Needless to say, these can become vicious and mean very quickly. From different mobile social apps to anonymous Twitter feeds with an email attached, these gossip forms can take several different forms. These are a relatively new phenomenon but have become extreme-

ly popular. Talk to your children about the negative effect they can have on someone else by participating.

CONSIDER LIMITING MOBILE TIME

For many kids and teens, mobile phones have replaced the desktop or laptop comput-

er as the primary communication tool. To that end, parents may want to consider setting boundaries for when and how much mobile phones can be used, and which apps are allowed. Cell phones are amazing communication tools, but like anything else, they should be used in moderation.

Bullying Gone Digital

One of the biggest challenges facing teens and kids online is cyberbullying, which is exactly what it sounds like: the playground and hallway social troubles now in cyberspace.

Unlike school children as recent as a decade ago, children face all kinds of new bullying and taunting issues that can be hard for adults to understand.

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services offers some basic tips that can help avoid or deal with cyberbullying issues.

- Don't respond to and don't forward cyberbullying messages.

- Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, emails and text messages. Use this evidence to report cyberbullying to web and cell phone service providers. Block the person who is cyberbullying.

- Report cyberbullying to online service providers. Cyberbullying often violates the terms of service established by social media sites and Internet service providers. Review their terms and conditions or rights and responsibilities sections. These describe content that is and is not appropriate. Visit social media safety centers to learn how to block users and change settings to control who can contact you. Report cyberbullying to the social media site so they



© FOTOLIA

can take action against users abusing the terms of service.

REPORT CYBERBULLYING

When cyberbullying involves these activities it is considered a crime and should be reported to law enforcement: threats of violence, child pornography or sending sexually explicit

messages or photos, taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy, stalking and hate crimes. Though it may seem “less real” because it’s online, cyberbullying is absolutely a real-world problem. It can cause major social issues for teens and lead to depres-

sion and anxiety. Serious threats can also manifest into real physical attacks.

BE AWARE OF ISSUES IN SCHOOL

Cyberbullying can create a disruptive environment at school and is often related to in-person bullying. The

school can use the information to help inform prevention and response strategies.

In many states, schools are required to address cyberbullying in their anti-bullying policy. Some state laws also cover off-campus behavior that creates a hostile school environment.

Careful What You Share

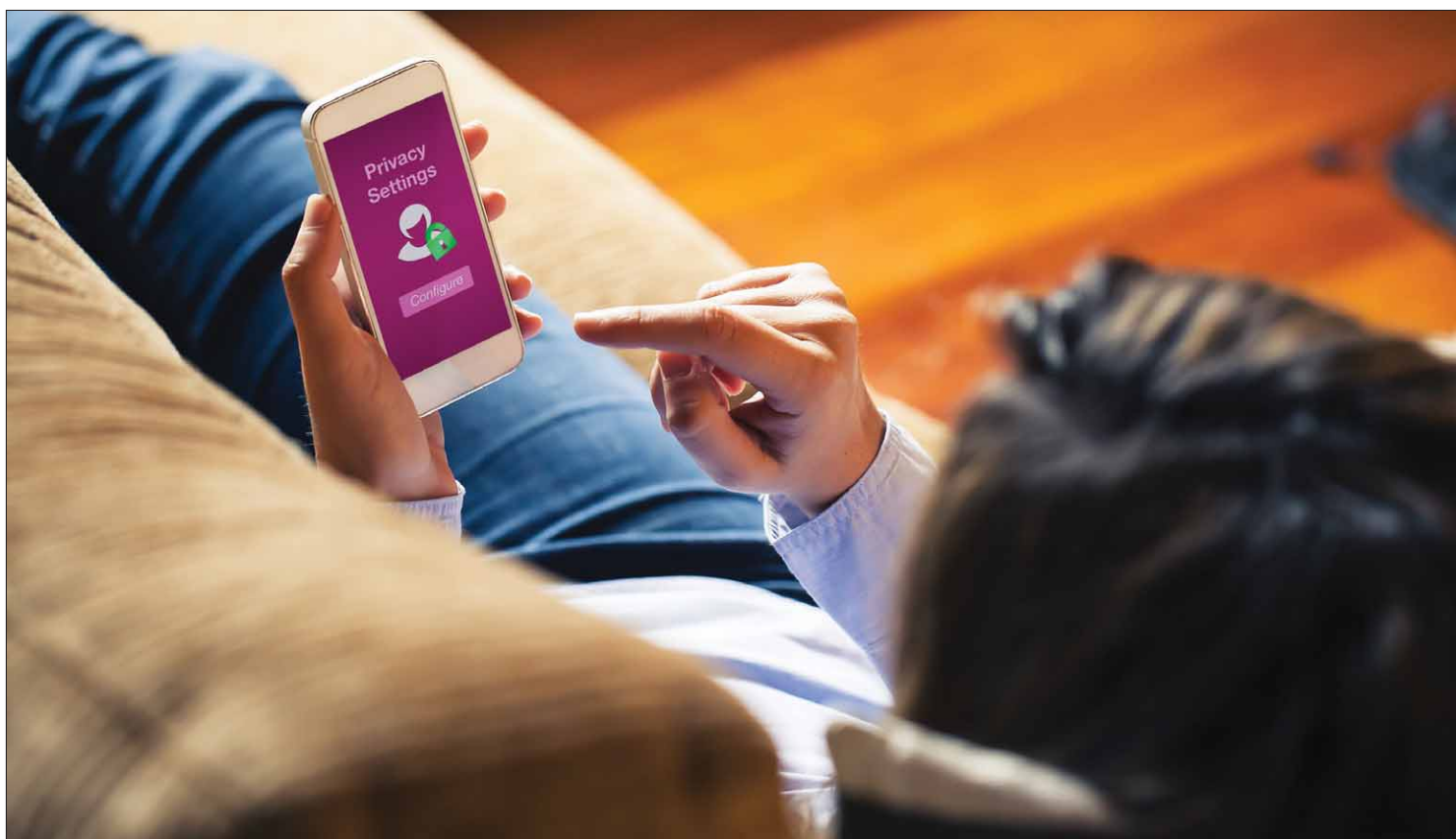
All it takes is a few moments on Google, and a few more skimming over social media sites, to realize a wealth of private information about your or your teen can be just a few clicks away. The reason? We share it.

From locations, to shopping and food habits, to our weekly schedule, we have become a culture that shares a ton of information online. But having grown up in a world with prevalent technology and social media, many kids and teens may not understand what is and isn't safe to share.

Talk to your kids about the potential threats. The National Children's Advocacy Center offers a few tips to keep kids safe:

THE BASICS

- Never post personal information, such as a cell phone number, home number, home address or your location on any social networking site or through mobile apps such as Snapchat or Instagram.
- Never meet in person with anyone first met on the Internet. Tell your kids that if someone asks to meet, they should tell you right away. Stress that people may not always be who they claim to be online.
- Talk to your children about sharing pictures online, and make clear guidelines about what is and isn't appropriate. Also, be careful of revealing potential locations in photos (such as a home address displayed in the background).



© FOTOLIA

NOTHING IS TRULY PRIVATE

- Remind kids that everything can be saved and captured via screen grab, so they should be extremely careful what they post or say — even in seemingly private chat conversations with friends.
- Teach your children to be vigilant about who they are friends with and follow online.

If they're a nuisance, or often post or share inappropriate content, remove them.

- Never, under any circumstance, should your child share their password with anyone other than a parent or guardian.
- Research how the privacy settings of the various social networking sites used by your

children work. Make sure they're set at a level your family feels safe and comfortable with.

MANNERS MATTER

- Stress manners to your children, even when communicating online. If it's not something they would say to another person's face, they

shouldn't text it or post it online. The seeming anonymity of the Internet is no excuse.

- Let your kids know that if anything makes them feel uncomfortable online, be it while gaming, chatting or texting, they should talk with a parent or guardian immediately.

Parental Controls

Some tech-savvy kids can get around software tools aimed at giving parents control over their Internet access — but there are some steps you can take to make it much harder for children to gain such access.

According to Parenting.com, everything from browser tools to third-party safety programs can be a major ally for parents looking out for the safety of their children

CHECK YOUR INTERNET PROVIDER, BROWSER

Many Internet service providers (ISPs) offer tools that parents can use to limit when and how their children access the Internet. Many services offer free, reliable parental controls that can limit access to certain content and communication tools. Many of those tools also can limit the amount of time children spend using the Internet.

GO A STEP FURTHER

Along with ISPs, many modern-day browsers and operating systems offer parental controls. All it takes is a bit of legwork and research to activate them with a parental password. Many browsers offer content filtering for free. If that doesn't fit your needs, there are dozens of relatively cheap and reliable software packages that can perform that function. There also are more advanced software and hardware solutions, and some offer a literal USB “key” to activate Internet access. No key, no Internet.

Many tablet devices also come with parental controls, which can be set to filter usage time and content access. These settings can be a great deterrent to keep a child from seeking out dangerous content, as well as help prevent them from accidentally stumbling upon it.

KEEP TABS ON THE HISTORY

It's hard to keep anything hidden these days, and all browsers come with cache and history settings that keep a detailed history of which sites have been visited. Use those tools, and let your children know you're keeping tabs on the data. Plus, even if they do erase their history, the gap in usage time should be fairly obvious to alert a parent that something has been hidden.



Parents' Posts Matter

When talking about Internet safety, most parents likely focus on teaching their kids and teens about proper protocols but may not give much mind to the content they share themselves about their children.

Considering we're still in the relatively early days of social media, that content could have a lasting impact on a child for decades to come.

FUNNY NOW BUT NOT LATER

Social media networks such as Facebook represent a fantastic tool to share family photos and keep distant friends and relatives up to date on your life. But, it's important to remember who you share that information with and how.

A funny picture of your toddler might seem innocuous now, but think ahead 5-10 years. Will your daughter still think that silly picture needs to be public once she's old enough to establish her own social media presence? By posting the photo, you're making that decision for her.

That's not to say you shouldn't share photos of your children, but it's important to think about the long-term effects.

RIGHTS ISSUES

Another thing to consider when sharing photos of your family on Facebook: You give up a certain amount of control when you publish those pictures into the world, especially when you're agreeing to host them on social media or



© FOTOLIA

photo-sharing services. More than that, you're posting something deeply personal (especially if your privacy settings aren't strict) that could be grabbed and shared by anyone else, anywhere.

KEEP PRIVATE INFORMATION PRIVATE

Another thing to consider is that posting photos of your children can reveal sensitive data about their lives. A cute photo of them on their first

day of school could reveal to strangers where they attend, while a shot of your son's science fair exhibit could include his full legal name on the placard. Posting birthday photos reveals birth dates. Putting this

information out into the online ether might seem innocuous, but it can be the perfect breadcrumbs for an identity theft, or worse, someone seeking to cause harm to your family.