



Keeping Your Kids Safe in a High-Tech World

The best way to protect your kids online is to take an active role in teaching them how to be safe. "Have regular discussions, make online rules or a family media contract, and monitor children's activity by limiting screen time and moving devices to common areas of your home," says Dr. Sarah Brown, pediatrician at Bronson Children's Hospital. "Don't forget to include all devices – computers, laptops, tablets, and phones are more obvious, but gaming devices, internet TV and music players also connect to the internet."

Dr. Brown says it's important to discuss what social media sites your child may use and come up with a plan for how you will monitor their activity. The internet can feel anonymous to kids, so talk regularly about respectful online communication. Most experts recommend not allowing children to use chat rooms. Limit texting and IM contacts to a short "buddy list."

Check out these tips to help keep your child safe while he/she is using the computer.

Tips for Parents:

Prevent – Set up parental controls and filters on all devices that your child uses. Don't forget that the best "filter" is teaching your child to make good decisions about inappropriate material. Check out safetynet.aap.org for more information.

Set boundaries – Set limits for your child, including a screen time limit for all devices (except for school projects). There are time-limit apps if your child needs more reminders. Keeping your child's devices in an open, public space can also help you watch what sites they are accessing and who they're talking to. Make a contract about what personal information will never be shared online.

Learn – Ask your child to decode acronyms and phrases you do not understand, or look them up at a site like www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php.

Tips for Children:

Protect yourself – Guard your personal information. Don't share your full name, address, school, or phone number on any website or profile. If you're ever prompted to create a username, avoid using your name. Also, it's important to never give out your passwords.

Protect your computer/phone – If you receive any links or files from a stranger, don't open it. Ask a parent before downloading programs as well. They could contain viruses that may hurt your computer.

Stay smart – Don't meet up with anyone you've met online. A person may not be who they claim to be. Tell an adult if an online friend wants to meet in person.

Be nice – Follow the golden rule: treat others online how you would want to be treated. Posting mean comments or sending unkind messages can hurt people's feelings. When chatting with someone online, keep in mind how your words might affect them.

Report Problems – If you ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe, stop using your computer or phone and talk to an adult. You might want to report what happened to the CybertipLine at: <http://www.missingkids.com/CybertipLine>

Sources: us-cert.gov, dhs.gov, onguardonline.gov and aap.org

This article is brought to you by Bronson Children's Hospital, southwest Michigan's only children's hospital. For more information about children's health, visit bronsonhealth.com/children