



WHY IS INTERNET SAFETY FOR KIDS SO IMPORTANT?

ARE YOU WONDERING WHY INTERNET SAFETY FOR KIDS IS SO IMPORTANT?

Your children are online at school, at home and with their friends. Laptops, smartphones, tablets gaming consoles and media players mean they can use the internet wherever they go.

Whenever they are online they are at risk from unsuitable content, accidentally disclosing their personal data, illegal downloads, file sharing, spyware, viruses, inappropriate advances and cyber bullying.

Children are learning to navigate the world. They tend to be enthusiastic and trusting. The flip side of these wonderful qualities is that they can lack caution and the ability to discern when they might be at risk. When we meet people face to face, they give us multiple cues that help us understand whether their intentions are good or unpleasant. The internet masks these signals and it's far more difficult to tell whether a person you meet online really is who they say they are.

So it's vital that you teach your children how to use the internet safely.

I would like to share here some of the things I hope will help you have constructive conversations with your children about internet safety.

WHAT ARE THE KEY RISKS YOUR CHILD FACES ONLINE?

- Online bullying and harassment
- Sexting/Sextcasting (Web Cam Chat Sites eg Chat Roulette)
- Inappropriate and unwanted contact or advances
- Revealing personal information that can make a child vulnerable or open to fraud
- Accidental exposure to inappropriate images or content
- Viruses, spyware, phishing scams etc
- Illegal file sharing or piracy of music, film or software

INTERNET SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUR CHILDREN

- Be aware of what children are doing online. Show interest in their online activities and talk with them about what they do on the web.
- Discuss the internet with your kids and explain to them what you consider to be appropriate use of the Internet.
- Make a clear set of rules for using the Internet with your children. Consider writing these out and putting them next to your family computer.
- If necessary consider, putting computers in the main living area of the house, where you can keep tabs on how they are being used.
- Teach your children how important it is to be cautious online, particularly when they are chatting or corresponding with people they don't know. Discuss with them that all that they are told and read online may not be true.
- Be sure your children understand that they should be very cautious about giving out personal information on the internet like their name, home address, school name, or telephone number.
- Invent an online nickname with your child and explain that they should use this nickname rather than their real name when they are playing games online, using virtual worlds or chatting online with people they don't know.
- Emphasise to your children that they should *never* arrange a meeting with someone they met online and that they should let you know if someone they meet on the web tries to arrange a meeting.

AS YOUR CHILDREN GET OLDER

- Keep talking with them about their online activities. This may become more challenging, but keep trying, as it is even more important you know what they are doing online at this age. Keep your chats positive and open, let them tell you what they are thinking and don't get upset if they touch on topics you find challenging, as maintaining an open dialog will help you understand what your child is doing online and why.
- Talk with your kids frankly about the nature of the internet. Discuss its dark side. Talk about the contrast between healthy sexuality and porn. Make them aware of the scams and schemes out there. You don't have to be alarmist, but you can be honest.
- As your children become teenagers and use social networking more it is important to reiterate with them the value of online anonymity and why they should be very cautious about sharing their personal information in their online profiles. Discuss privacy settings for social networks and whether they should share pictures with anyone outside a close circle of friends and family.
- Discuss what is, and what is not, appropriate online behaviour with your child. Teach them that gossiping, sharing inappropriate information or images and bullying are all unacceptable. Teach children never to respond to messages or posts that are "suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing".
- If your child meets a new friend online, *insist* they tell you or remove / block.