



Office of the Sheriff

ANOKA COUNTY
SHERIFF JAMES STUART

10 Tips to Keep Your Kids Safe on Social Media & Online Games

It all starts with you, the parent. There is no doubt that we live in a digital world. As our children become more and more tech savvy, it is important that parents maintain a vigilant sense of security when it comes to our children's online presence.

While having the ability to be instantaneously connected to the world around you and to share your experiences at your fingertips has several benefits, it also opens up a whole new world of risks. From predators to cyberbullies, a child's misuse of a social network can have serious consequences.

If your child is asking to use, or is already using social media, check out these 10 safety tips to keep them safe on social media and during online gaming.

1. Educate yourself about social media

Do you remember when the only big social media sites were Facebook and Myspace? That is not the case anymore. As a parent, it's important to familiarize yourself with what sites are out there and which are appropriate for your child. Here are some of the most popular social apps and sites for kids and teens:

WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Tumblr, Pheed, Kik, TikTok, Reddit, Roblox, Fortnite, Overwatch, Warcraft

2. Establish an age limit for your child to start using social media

While you are familiarizing yourself with social media sites, you should take a look at what the required minimum age is for each site. Most social media sites require users to be 13 or older to create an account without their parents' permission, according to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act ([COPPA](#)).

3. Regularly check your child's privacy settings.

Once your child has set up a social media account, it is important to remain vigilant about keeping their privacy settings updated. Social media sites are continually adding security settings to ensure that maximum protection is available, but oftentimes they need to be updated manually by the user.

4. Keep your child's profile private.

Most social media sites give you the option to make your account private. This means that only people who your child has friended will be able to see the content on their profile. This is an important step to take in order to keep their content private and away from people who may misuse it. Check their friend list often.



5. Make sure they are not posting personal details, including phone numbers, address, or check-ins.

Social media has become a normal part of people's lives that it is not uncommon for people to share information about themselves that should not be shared. It is important that your child understands what kinds of information should not be shared and why.

6. Do not allow them to post photos or videos which jeopardize their safety or character.

While most people post pictures and videos with the best intentions, it is easy for things to be taken the wrong way or out of context and when everyone is online, the wrong message can have long-lasting consequences. Talk to your kids about this and make sure they understand to only post pictures and videos that present themselves and others in a positive light.

7. Make sure they choose a strong password.

"1, 2, 3, 4, 5? That is amazing! I've got the same combination on my luggage!" The password scene from the 1987 comedy *Spaceballs* was funny back then, and it is still funny today because the implications are the same. Would you really use a password as simple as 1,2,3,4,5 to safeguard something important? No, of course you wouldn't, and you should get your kids into the habit as well.

8. Never allow them to accept friend requests from people they do not know.

This may be self-explanatory, but there are many people who use social media to stalk people and steal their information to cause harm. It is always best practice to only accept friend requests from people your child knows such as their friends and family.

9. Set guidelines/rules for their social media use.

Establishing rules or guidelines from the start is a great way to instill positive habits for your child on social media. However, you don't want to set up rules that are too strict. You may run the risk of your child actively and secretly trying to break them. Try to make rules that empower your child to make good decisions on their own.

10. Keep an open dialogue with your child.

You cannot monitor your child's social media activity 24/7, so maintaining a strong line of communication is important to understand what is going on with your child online. Ask them to inform you whenever they receive messages or invites from strangers. Talk to them about the consequences of misusing social media. Ask them to tell you if someone is teasing or harassing them as those could be signs of cyber-bullying.

We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to be involved in your child's app and online presence. Your kids are more than likely using apps and play games you have never heard of. Once you agree to let your child download a new app or game, make sure to look for the "Parent's Guide" that is often in apps and on games that are aimed at children. These guides are designed to show you how to use the tools built into the app to keep your kids safe and stop unwanted purchases. Some of these tools do things like disable chat or keep personal information hidden when you identify the user as under a certain age. Others can email you when your child logs in to their account from a new device, so you know if your child is online.

Establish limits with your kids and help them understand why they are important. You as their parent are the owner of the phone, taking it away when it is being misused is your right, and your responsibility. Open communication will allow you to teach your kids how to avoid some of the obvious traps online and do your best to create a safe online presence for them.