

Privacy Starts at Home: Teaching Minors About Online Safety

The internet provides kids and teens with an array of valuable information and educational resources, but it can also be a dangerous place for them to navigate. To protect the health and well-being of these vulnerable internet users, it's important that parents monitor their children's online activities and teach them basic rules for staying safe online.

Elementary School (Ages 5-10)

Start the Conversation

- » Ask questions to help kids establish an understanding of computers, the capabilities of the Internet, including social media, what's considered personal information¹ and why it's important to protect.
- » Follow up by offering basic explanations and filling in the gaps in kids' understanding.
- » Help kids understand not to give out any information online (just as you would tell them not to talk to strangers).

Establish Rules:

- » Define a list of appropriate websites, applications, games and other programs.
- » Use parental controls to limit access, block inappropriate sites and the downloading of apps without parental consent, and double-check your online set-up with some [tips from the Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#).

¹ Personal information (under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)) means individually identifiable information about an individual collected online, including:

- (1) A first and last name;
- (2) A home or other physical address including street name and name of a city or town;
- (3) Online contact information as defined in this section;
- (4) A screen or user name where it functions in the same manner as online contact information, as defined in this section;
- (5) A telephone number;
- (6) A Social Security number;
- (7) A persistent identifier that can be used to recognize a user over time and across different Web sites or online services. Such persistent identifier includes, but is not limited to, a customer number held in a cookie, an Internet Protocol (IP) address, a processor or device serial number, or unique device identifier;
- (8) A photograph, video, or audio file where such file contains a child's image or voice;
- (9) Geolocation information sufficient to identify street name and name of a city or town; or
- (10) Information concerning the child or the parents of that child that the operator collects online from the child and combines with an identifier described in this definition.

Monitor Usage:

- » Avoid sharing passwords with kids to maintain control over what they can access and prevent accidental online purchases.
- » Keep a close eye on what programs kids are using to ensure they aren't unknowingly providing any personal information to the site.

Middle School and High School (Ages 11-18)

Continue the Dialogue:

- » Maintain a dialogue about how kids access and use the Internet as they start to buy things online and use social media.
- » Explain how to [keep their information safe when making purchases](#).

Keep an Eye on Social Media:

- » Establish ground rules on what information is and isn't okay to share via social media, regardless of the site.
- » Set profiles to the "private" setting, and make sure they are online friends with only the people they know.
- » Disable location services in social media platforms.
- » Report any suspicious pages [to the FTC](#) or other government enforcement agencies.

Teach Cell Phone Safety:

- » Talk to them about not answering calls from unknown numbers, locking their phone with a password and only downloading apps from known sources.

Know Your Rights Under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA):

The [Children's Online Privacy Protection Act \(COPPA\)](#) requires sites collecting personal information from children under 13 years old to obtain '[verifiable parental consent](#)' prior to collection of the information. Become familiar with this concept and understand your rights as a parent.

For More Information Contact VA Privacy Service

Privacy Hotline: 202-273-5070

[Email VA Privacy Service](#)

[VA Privacy Service Website](#)