

# TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DIGITAL SAFETY

The internet provides an opportunity for children to learn, explore their world, and socialize with friends. By understanding the potential dangers your children face, you can educate them and help them have safer digital experiences.

## GENERAL TIPS & GUIDANCE

- Make sure your youth-serving organizations have and enforce communications policies that protect children. Teachers, instructors, and other youth workers should not be communicating privately with children. Instead, they should use group texts, messages, or other communications, and include parents.
- Do not underestimate the level of sophistication that an abuser will use to approach your child. Pay attention to all downloaded apps and their capabilities - even ones that do not seem to be chat-related.
- Smartphones and tablets have a “location services” feature that allows devices to broadcast their location to the users’ apps and contacts. Ensure this feature is turned off to ensure your child’s whereabouts remain private.
- If you discover questionable communications from your child to an adult or other youth, remain calm. Talk to your child without accusation and with the goal of resolving the situation.
- Report sexual solicitation, bullying, or child sexual abuse material immediately to your local law enforcement.

## FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Children under eight should have direct supervision while using computers, smartphones, and devices. Know which games, apps, and learning tools have communication and chat capabilities.
- Keep children’s personal information off online profiles and talk to them about what information is private and shouldn’t be shared.
- Parents, use your name and email when signing up for games or services. This ensures you are the primary contact rather than your child.
- Talk frankly with children about inappropriate questions and language. Use age-appropriate examples as you talk to them.



### STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Darkness to Light’s 5 Steps to Protecting Children™ is the foundation of everything we teach about prevention. You can also apply these steps to internet and device use to keep your children safe:

#### STEP 1: LEARN THE FACTS

Learn the access, privacy, and messaging policies of all digital games, social networks, and video games used by your children.

#### STEP 2: MINIMIZE OPPORTUNITY

Parental controls can help restrict access and monitor messaging. Privacy and language filters can also reduce kids’ risk of receiving solicitation.

#### STEP 3: TALK ABOUT IT

Spend time with children online and talk to them about potential dangers and what appropriate online conduct looks like.

#### STEP 4: RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

Stay tuned in to sudden changes in behavior - secrecy about computer use, sites visited, or online “friends” should raise warning flags.

#### STEP 5: REACT RESPONSIBLY

Understand how, when, and where to report suspicious behavior online.