

INTERNET PRIVACY AND SAFETY TIPS

Protecting your *internet privacy* is more important now than it has ever been.

The average teenager has social media accounts across multiple platforms. Here's how you can make sure that they're not making you unsafe.



Spring Cleaning

Social Media is an incredible tool, source of entertainment, and also serves as a medium to spread information and news quickly. But too many people share more information than they realize, and to more strangers than they anticipate. We know it seems harmless, but just turn on the news or search online for cases of predators using social media to target young people. You'll quickly realize just how dangerous and widespread it can be. Take some time to scrub your social media accounts of personal info, and/or update settings that decide who is allowed to see your profile. Facebook especially has an advanced set of changes that can be made to your security so that it's custom to you. You can set exactly which people you'd like to see your posts, which is a big deal when it comes to staying safe. Don't put this off until another day or fool yourself into thinking it doesn't matter—imagine yourself going to every train station on earth and taping every picture of yourself and all of your personal information to every wall. That's essentially what you're doing when you leave your social media unprotected.

Think Before You Post

You might think pictures and status updates can't hurt, but predators can use them to target you and find out info about you and where you live. Remember, for some very bad people, it's their *job* to use what you post for wrong and illegal activities. Think before posting racy pictures or revealing statuses.

Today, more employers are utilizing the internet and social media to find out information about potential hires. Consider what pictures you've posted on the internet recently and think about whether those photos make you look like an honest, trustworthy employee?

Save Friend Requests for Your Friends

Ever feel like it's easier to just accept every friend request you get? This is a *bad idea*. It's like opening your front door without ever checking to see who's knocking. Even if their profile picture looks like someone your age who seems normal, faking a profile is easy. If they're not your friend or at least someone you know in real life, they probably shouldn't be your friend online.

Nothing is Private

If you think that sending a picture to one person means only one person will see it, you might be living under a rock. Every day there's a new story about sexts or racy pictures that are meant to be private and end up plastered all over every computer and cell phone in the school, neighborhood, or

even the world. If someone pressures you to send pictures of yourself that you're not okay with, they're only thinking about themselves.

It's also important to remember that relationships change all the time. The sad truth is that your boyfriend or best friend might not be your boyfriend or best friend a year from now. If you ever have a fight or argument with someone, they might want to hurt or embarrass you. Then they'll remember that revealing or damaging picture of you that they have saved on their phone, and they will think about sending it to everyone they know.

The Power of Screen shots

Remember when everyone thought they could use certain apps to safely send pictures because they would be deleted right after they were seen? It turns out that taking screen shots is an easy way to get around that. It is no longer safe to assume that anything can be kept private if it crosses the internet in one form or another.

Get Your Parents Off Your Back

What's the easiest way to make your parents worry about you less? Tell them about what you're doing! If you leave your parents guessing, they'll always assume the worst. Tell them about your friends, what you do online, and how they spend your time. You'll find out they trust you a lot more than you think they will. Remember—you and your parents don't have to get along all the time or agree on everything to be on the same page when it comes to internet privacy. Your parents don't enjoy limiting what you do online—they just want to make sure you are protected. If they give you rules for internet usage, try not to go crazy and get upset. You take driving classes before you can get a learner's permit, and you get a learner's permit before you can drive on your own, and the internet should be no different. A little bit at a time.

About Online Predators and Internet Privacy

Online predators take many forms—they can be men, women, young, old, attractive, flattering, polite, kind, flirty, aggressive or timid. But while they can appear as any type of person, many of the methods they use can be similar. Many predators will also utilize social media, Tumblr profiles, etc. to target their victims. For this reason, it is important to keep your internet privacy as strong as possible. If parents and their kids both learn to spot the signs of a predator in action, they can be better protected from these criminals.

Here is our list of common ways to spot predators, including some of the methods they use to gain access to children and teens. This is by no means an exhaustive list – predators adjust their methods every day to keep up with technology and increased awareness. This will be a valuable resource as you and your family work to be informed about internet privacy and safety.

What Do Predators Look Like?

An online predator can be anybody. There are some common similarities between many predators that can help you try to identify them, however. Most of them are not social outcasts, living normal lives in the real world. They're often **white males that are in their middle-ages or younger, and they usually seem like trustworthy individuals at first.** This is how they're able to gain the trust and comfort of children and teenagers online. We highlight this information because it's an

important reminder that most predators aren't skeezy-looking, creepy people who look like villains. Most of them look like someone you would trust.

“Grooming”

Online predators make children and teenagers feel comfortable talking to them (and more) through a process known as grooming. Predators will take time and effort to appear trustworthy and likable to the child. They will research popular bands and trends in order to relate to them more easily. Predators will agree with whatever the victim says, making the child feel like no one else on earth truly understands them. Predators lie about their age and other personal information to establish themselves as a peer.

Over the course of this process, the predator will be gathering little bits of information that the victim shares. They will begin to make sexual comments or send sexual images. This tactic sparks curiosity and makes the victim feel more comfortable talking about sex.

Signs and Symptoms

Parents – watch for these signs if you suspect your kids might be falling victim to an online predator.

- Spending far more time online than is normal for them.
- Lying, redirecting, or ignoring questions about their internet usage and what they're doing on the computer.
- A new obsession with computer access and becoming unreasonably upset when they can't get online.
- Making or receiving phone calls from unknown numbers or receive gifts or letters that they can't explain.
- Losing interest in their usual hobbies, friends, or family members.
- Acting suspicious when someone enters the room while they're on the computer.
- They suddenly develop an interest in pornography and/or sexual activity that was absent before.

THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE

The best defense is a commitment to staying a step ahead of predators. Establish rules and internet usage limits with your children, and be proactive about discussing the dangers of online predators. Make sure your children understand the importance of internet privacy. Stay persistent – it will be easier for them to make the right choice in the moment.

<https://www.erasechildtrafficking.org/internet-privacy-tips/>

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