



Social Networking, Digital Safety & Cyberbullying – A Tip Sheet for Parents



“Back when I was a kid..., things were different.” Yes, they were.

And because they are, we are often asked for tips and resources for keeping young people safe in our rapidly changing digital world. As you read through these tips, note that many of them are **NOT** technology oriented. That’s because many of the issues young people face are very much the typical social-emotional, growing up issues which we faced in the past. However, today, they are now infused with and magnified by technologies.

1. **Talk** to your kids. The first, best piece of advice: keep the lines of communication open. Ask questions about things you don’t understand. For some great conversation starters, check **Questions Parents Should Ask Their Children About Technology** (<http://cyberbullying.us/questions-parents-should-ask-their-children-about-technology>).
2. **Listen** to your kids. Learn their lingo. Also listen for the names of websites and apps which they may be accessing. Different ages, different schools, different social groups often use social networking sites – many of which *you have never heard of!* Build that into your **talks**.
3. **Sign a contract**. Be clear. Be straightforward. Establish the expectations and rules by which *you* and they will use their technologies. This **Technology Use Contract** is a sample you can adapt. (http://www.cyberbullying.us/technology_use_contract_2014.pdf).
4. **Check**. As part of your contract, let them know that you will check on their activities from time to time. Know, too, that you may not have knowledge of nor access to all their personal sites. (See #2.)
5. **Filter. Block. Monitor**. Use whatever filtering, blocking or monitoring software you have and are comfortable with. However, *do not rely* of these technological tools. Remember, digital safety issues are social, developmental, human issues. Also remember, kids are savvy enough to work around the software tools!
6. **Teach** appropriate online behavior. Respect, honesty, personal values in “real” life should be reflected online. Savvy as young people are, they often do not consider the speed at which things occur, the very public nature of life online, the permanency of their posts and pictures, and the fact that, once posted, *nothing can be taken back*. They also need to understand that they are *not anonymous!* Whatever is spilled on the internet cannot be swept away.
Check **A Student’s Guide to Personal Publishing** (http://people.uwec.edu/patchini/cyberbullying/students_guide_to_personal_publishing.pdf)
7. **Watch** for warning signs. Be aware of signs of distress related to tech use: anger, fear, talk of violence. Be aware of names of new “friends”, or the absence of known friends, becoming withdrawn or obsessively online. Watch for signs of secrecy – beyond the norm. Watch for disrupted sleep patterns.
8. **Model** appropriate behavior, yourself. Do you send inappropriate messages or pictures? Do you text while driving? Do you tease, harass or otherwise torment others? Young people watch us, and learn from what they see us doing.
9. **Talk among yourselves**. Talk with your kids’ friends’ parents. Talk within your community. Talk to your school. Create a parent support group. Sometimes, a young person will share with someone else what they wouldn’t share with their own parents.
10. **Remember**, and this is very important, most young people are perfectly safe online most of the time. They are doing amazing things. Creating rich communities. Living with great, self-generated rules and protocols. But sometimes, they do need **us**.

Resources for Parents

These are links to documents and sites designed to help adults better understand what social networking is and how to use it safely. They can also help adults to more easily talk with youth about appropriate behaviors and safety issues, and to be better prepared to be help when necessary.

- **A Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying** (PDF)
<http://www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter/InternetSafety/pubdocs/AParentsGuidetoCybebullyingConnectSafely.pdf>
- **A Parents' Guide to Cybersecurity** (PDF)
<http://www.connectsafely.org/wp-content/uploads/securityguide.pdf>
- **A Parents' Guide to Facebook** (PDF)
<http://www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter/InternetSafety/pubdocs/AParentsGuidetoFacebook.pdf>
- **A Parents' Guide to Instagram** (PDF)
http://www.connectsafely.org/wp-content/uploads/instagram_guide.pdf
- **A Parents' guide to Snapchat** (PDF)
http://www.connectsafely.org/wp-content/uploads/snapchat_guide.pdf
- **Family Online Safety Guide** (PDF)
http://now.symassets.com/now/en/pu/images/Promotions/onlineSafetyGuide/FamilyOnlineSafetyGuide_4thEd_Final.pdf
 - [Links to document in multiple languages](#)

Other Family-Focused Links:

- **ConnectSafely**
<http://www.connectsafely.org/>
- **Cyberbullying Resource Center**
<http://cyberbullying.us/>
- **Facebook Family Safety Center**
<https://www.facebook.com/safety>
- **Family Online Safety Institute**
<http://www.fosi.org/>
- **NetFamilyNews**
<http://www.netfamilynews.org/>
- **OSPI School Safety Center – Cyberbullying & Digital/Internet Safety**
<http://www.k12.wa.us/Safetycenter/InternetSafety/default.aspx>



Image from : <http://www.dangerpoint.org.uk/about/programmes/internet-safety/>