

6 tips for keeping children and young people safe in the digital world

A guide for parents and carers

THE CENTRE FOR
EMOTIONAL
HEALTH



Porn

Over half of 11-16 year-olds report having seen porn online. 94% of these children saw it before 14.¹

Sexting

Sexting is sharing a sexual, naked or semi-naked image or video of yourself or someone else; or sending sexually explicit messages.

The law

Creating or sharing explicit images of a child is a crime, even if the images are shared between children.

It never shuts off

Both parents and children report feeling under pressure from the digital world and the need to “present themselves a certain way” online.²

1. Communication is key – keep talking!

Discussing the online world, and particularly porn and sexting, can feel difficult. However, **open and honest communication** is the most effective way of approaching these subjects. Try to start with a conversation about what may and may not be safe and respectful online. If you have concerns, consider working together to create some rules about what’s ok and what’s not.

Sideways conversations (e.g. in the car or when walking) can be a good time to talk.

2. Use filters as an additional measure

Filters and parental controls can be helpful, particularly to prevent younger children from stumbling across inappropriate content. However, the experts’ view is that **relying on filters or being too disciplinarian is counter-productive**.

3. Prepare, and hold boundaries

You’ll feel more equipped and confident about approaching a conversation about porn, sexting or the dangers of the online world by carefully having thought through what you’d like to say. It’s helpful to think in advance about what might make the conversation easier for the young person too.

Children need, and **feel safer with boundaries** around the digital world. Think through your stance so you’ll feel confident sticking to it.

4. Remember you're important

Parents can feel out of touch with the digital world and might worry they’re redundant. However **children need parents** and research shows parents of teenagers matter just as much as parents of younger children. You have an important role to play in your child’s experience of the digital world: helping them feel safe, raising areas of concern or risk, guiding their use of digital devices, and listening to their views. Remain interested and involved.

5. Model a healthy relationship with digital

You are an important role model for your child and the way you engage with the digital world will **influence them**. Why not ask everyone to put their devices in a box at meal times, or to leave their phone in another room overnight? You may find this liberating too!

6. Empathise with your children

Show that you understand their desire to stay connected with the digital world. Use empathic language like “It must feel...” or “I can imagine...”

Explaining that you can see things from your child’s point of view will also help you have conversations about why you might want to manage this.

emotionalhealth.org.uk/parent-zone



1. Children’s Commission, 2016

2. 4Children, Britain’s Families: Thriving or Surviving, 2016