

Online Safety by Age

A comprehensive guide to keeping your children safe online at every stage of development. Navigate the digital world with confidence using age-appropriate strategies and tools.



Toddlers: Building Foundations

Key Guidelines

- Limit screen time to 1 hour per day of high-quality content
- Always supervise online activities and co-view all content
- Use dedicated kid-safe devices or tablets with parental locks
- Teach basic concepts: never share real name or location

Recommended Apps

PBS Kids Video, Khan Academy Kids, ABCmouse - educational content designed specifically for early learners with no ads or in-app purchases.



Conversation Starter

"Let's only watch shows together! Tell me if you see something that makes you feel funny."

AGES 6-8

Early Elementary: Exploring Safely

1

Screen Time Management

Establish 1-2 hours daily with clear boundaries. Create a family media plan that includes tech-free zones like bedrooms and dinner table.

2

Safe Browsing Habits

Teach them to ask permission before clicking links or downloading anything. Introduce the concept of stranger danger online - not everyone is who they say they are.

3

Privacy Basics

Never share personal information: full name, address, school name, or photos without permission. Practice identifying what's safe versus private information.

4

Device Recommendations

Shared family devices in common areas only. Consider kid-friendly tablets like Amazon Fire Kids Edition with robust parental controls built-in.

AGES 9-11

Upper Elementary: Growing Independence

Digital Citizenship

Teach responsible online behavior: be kind, think before posting, and understand that online actions have real consequences.

Social Media Prep

Most platforms require age 13+, but prepare them now. Discuss cyberbullying, peer pressure, and the permanence of digital footprints.

Gaming Safety

Monitor in-game chat features, teach them to block/report inappropriate users, and understand in-game purchases and time limits.

Parental Controls

Use comprehensive filtering: **Bark, Qustodio, or Net Nanny**. Monitor search history, set time limits, and filter content by category. Review activity logs weekly together.



Middle School: Navigating Social Pressures

Social Media Readiness

They may start using platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok. Start with private accounts, friend/follower approval, and regular check-ins about their experiences.

Critical Thinking Skills

- Question sources and verify information before sharing
- Recognize manipulated images and fake news
- Understand algorithms and targeted content
- Identify phishing attempts and scams



Warning Sign

Sudden secrecy about online activities, hiding screens when you approach, or emotional changes after device use warrant a conversation.

Middle School: Building Trust & Boundaries

01

Establish a family media agreement

Collaboratively create rules about device usage, consequences for violations, and expectations for transparency.

03

Monitor appropriately

Balance privacy with safety using tools like **Bark** that alert to concerning content rather than showing everything. Maintain open communication.

02

Discuss online relationships

Talk openly about meeting people online, emotional manipulation, and the difference between healthy and unhealthy digital relationships.

04

Practice scenario-based learning

Roleplay responses to cyberbullying, inappropriate messages, or uncomfortable situations to build confidence in handling real situations.



AGES 15-18

High School: Preparing for Independence



Digital Reputation

Everything posted can impact college admissions and future employment. Practice privacy settings and Google yourself regularly.



Advanced Privacy

Use strong passwords, enable two-factor authentication, understand app permissions, and protect financial information.

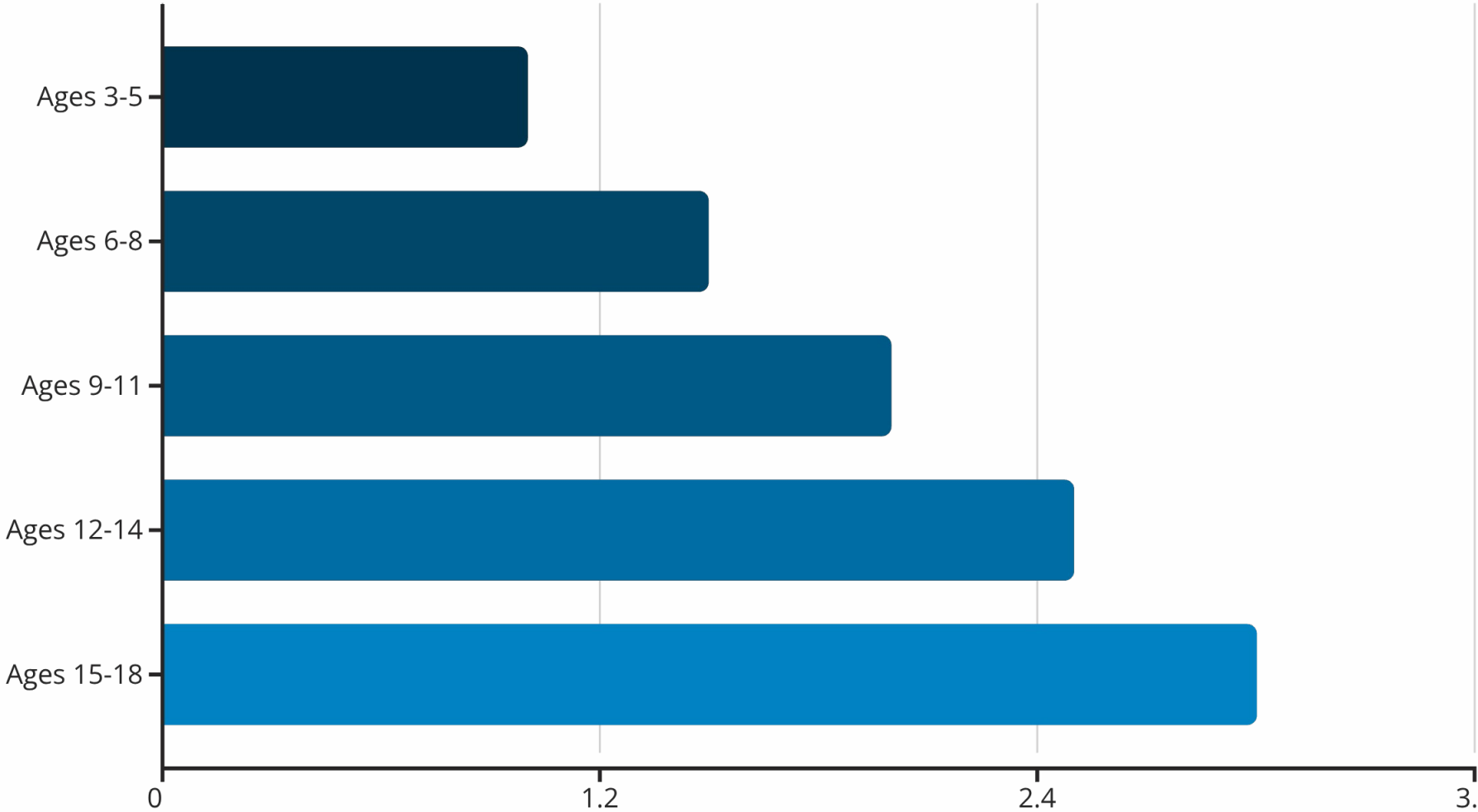


Healthy Boundaries

Recognize and avoid toxic online relationships, sexting risks and legal consequences, and mental health impacts of constant connectivity.

This age group needs guidance, not surveillance. Focus on building judgment, critical thinking, and open communication about their digital experiences.

Device & App Recommendations



Ages 3-8: Starter Devices

Amazon Fire Kids Edition, iPad with restrictions, LeapFrog tablets - durable, pre-loaded with educational content, strong parental controls

Ages 9-14: Transition Devices

Basic smartphones (iOS/Android), Chromebooks for schoolwork - introduce communication tools with monitoring capabilities like Bark or Google Family Link

Ages 15-18: Full Devices

Standard smartphones, personal laptops - focus on teaching self-regulation, privacy tools, and digital wellness rather than strict controls

Parental Control Tools by Age



Ages 3-8: Heavy Filtering

YouTube Kids, Amazon FreeTime, Circle Home Plus - whitelist-only browsing, curated content libraries, no social media access, device time limits



Ages 9-14: Active Monitoring

Bark, Qustodio, Net Nanny, Norton Family - content filtering, activity monitoring, screen time management, social media oversight, alert systems for concerning content



Ages 15-18: Privacy Balance

Built-in platform tools, Google Family Link, Apple Screen Time - location sharing for safety, app limits by mutual agreement, focus on education over restriction

Conversation Starters for Every Age

Ages 3-5

"What was your favorite thing you watched today? Let's talk about why you liked it!"

Ages 6-8

"If someone online asked you to keep a secret from me, what would you do? You can always tell me anything."

Ages 9-11

"Have you seen anyone being mean online? How did it make you feel? What do you think we should do about it?"

Ages 12-14

"What's the most interesting thing you learned online this week? Have you seen anything that worried or confused you?"

Ages 15-18

"How do you manage your digital footprint? Let's review your privacy settings together and talk about your online reputation."

Regular, judgment-free conversations build trust and help children feel comfortable coming to you with concerns.

Warning Signs & Quick Action Guide

Red Flags to Watch For

- **Behavioral Changes**

Withdrawal from family activities, sudden mood swings after device use, secretive behavior about online activities

- **Digital Warning Signs**

Multiple social media accounts, deleting browser history frequently, receiving gifts from unknown sources

- **Emotional Red Flags**

Anxiety about missing notifications, sleep disruption, declining school performance, reluctance to discuss online friends



If You're Concerned

1. Stay calm and approach with curiosity, not accusation
2. Have a private, judgment-free conversation
3. Document concerning content with screenshots
4. Contact your child's school if cyberbullying is involved
5. Report illegal content to [NCMEC.org](https://www.ncmec.org) or local authorities

Cybersecurity Non-Profit (CSNP)

Making cybersecurity knowledge accessible to everyone through education, community, and practical resources.

Business & Non-Profit Security

Family Cybersecurity

Kids Safety

Senior Digital Safety

Women's Security

Parents & Educators

Everything we offer is completely free. Visit us at csnp.org for comprehensive resources at csnp.org/resources