

Internet safety risks for teenagers

There are four main kinds of internet risks for teenagers.

Content risks

For teenagers, these risks include coming across material that they might find upsetting, disgusting or otherwise uncomfortable, especially if they encounter it accidentally. This material might include:

- [pornography](#) or sexually explicit content in music videos, movies or online games
- real or simulated violence
- hate sites
- terrorist sites
- fake news that seems believable
- harmful user-generated content like sites about drug use, self-harm, suicide, or negative body image.

Contact risks

These risks include meeting adults posing as children online, strangers who persuade teenagers to meet them in real life, and online scammers.

Conduct risks

Conduct risks include behaving in inappropriate or hurtful ways or being the victim of this kind of behaviour. Examples include:

- [cyberbullying](#)
- [sexting](#)
- misusing people's passwords and impersonating people online
- making unauthorised purchases using other people's financial details
- creating content that reveals information about other people
- having trouble regulating online time, which can develop into problem internet use.

Contract risks

Contract risks include teenagers signing up to unfair contracts, terms or conditions that they aren't aware of or don't fully understand. As a result, teenagers might:

- be open to identity theft or fraud
- get inappropriate digital marketing messages or scam emails

- have their personal data collected from apps and devices like fitness trackers.

Protecting teenagers from internet safety risks

Your child is probably an independent internet user now, but you can help your child keep building the skills and knowledge they need to identify and manage internet safety risks.

Here are some basic things you can do to protect your child from internet safety risks:

- Create a family media plan. It's best to negotiate your plan with your child. Your plan could cover things like screen-free areas in your house and what online behaviour is OK.
- Talk with your child about upsetting and inappropriate content. If you can talk with your child in an open and non-judgmental way, they're more likely to talk with you if they come across something disturbing online or have a bad online experience.
- Stay in touch with what your child is doing online and how much time they're spending online. This will help you to spot when your child might be having problems.
- Ask your child to 'friend' you on social media. Younger teenagers might be OK with this, but older teenagers might prefer not to friend you.
- Encourage and remind your child to explore and use the internet safely. For example, it's OK to remind your child to check privacy settings.

Technical internet safety tools like **internet filters can actually increase risk** for children over 14 years. If children are using filters at this age, they might not be developing the skills they need to avoid disturbing content. They might take risks either accidentally or on purpose when they use the internet in unfiltered environments.

Identifying and managing internet safety risks with teenagers

It's important to **help your teenage child manage internet safety risks**. This lets your child build digital resilience, which is the ability to respond positively and deal with risks they come across online.

You can do this by:

- being a role model for healthy internet use
- talking with your child about online content and behaviour
- reminding your child about privacy and personal information
- teaching your child about online purchases.

It's all about trusting your child to become a [responsible digital citizen](#).

Being a role model for internet use

All children – including teenagers – do as you do, so being a role model for your children is a powerful and positive way to guide your child's behaviour when it comes to internet use.

You can be a role model for safe and healthy screen use by using digital media and the internet in the way you want your child to use it. For example, you might keep internet-connected devices out of bedrooms, avoid using your phone during mealtimes, or balance screen use with other social and recreational options.

It's also good to model positive technology use like phoning friends and family and sending supportive messages.

Talking about online content

Talking openly about your own digital media and internet use and encouraging your child to do the same will **help your child feel they can talk to you if they have a bad experience online**.

You can get your child talking by asking them to explain the apps, games, and content they're interested in. You might say, 'Snapchat posts disappear quickly, but a screenshot can capture what's been said. Is that right?' Or 'Talk me through the differences between YouTube and TikTok'.

It's good to encourage your child to develop a sense of what they like and don't like online and to defend their choices with friends. For example, you could say, 'It's great that you chose not to get involved in that online argument'.

Talking about **online hoaxes and fake news** with your child will help them develop the ability to tell whether a website has good-quality information.

This is all part of digital and media literacy.

Taking care with privacy, personal information, and personal safety

You can help your child look at and **choose appropriate privacy, location and safety settings** on devices, programs, and social media, and talk about why this is important. For example, you might say, 'Employers often do online searches to find out about job applicants. Make sure that anything you make public online is OK for future employers to see'.

It's also important for your child to be careful about sharing personal information. Remind your child not to give out their name, address, date of birth or other identifying information to people they don't know in person and not to send or post images to people they don't know.

And it's a good idea to update 'stranger danger' advice with your child as they move towards adulthood and meet online dating. For example, you might say, 'There's always a risk if you go to meet someone you only know online. It can lead to dangerous situations. For example, the person might want to hurt you'.