

APSAC ALERT



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Special Points of Interest:

- Children and teenagers need guidance about what they can do online, including how often and when they can use technology, what platforms they can use to post content, and appropriate privacy settings.
- Professionals and parents should learn about online child exploitation and be aware that any platform that children use online is an opportunity for offenders to gain access to potential victims.
- For more information about child safety online including conversation starters, tip sheets, and interactive videos, go to www.missingkids.org/netsmartz. Check out *Protecting Children Online* for a summary of these tips.

Online Safety for Children During the COVID-19 Crisis

Susan Kennedy, EdM

Widespread school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic bring a variety of challenges to families and communities. Child abuse professionals are concerned about children quarantined at home away from important sources of social connection and safety resources including teachers and school counselors. Many of us are also concerned about the increased time that children are now spending online—most of it likely unsupervised—as parents balance their own stress, work, and family obligations in this “new normal.” At the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), we see reports of online child sexual exploitation every day through our CyberTipline®, and our analysts expect reports to continue, if not to increase, during this crisis.

To combat these risks, how can professionals support parents in promoting online safety during this unprecedented time?

1. Encourage parents to connect with their children’s online lives. Children and teenagers need guidance about what they can do online, including how often and when they can use technology, what platforms they can use to post content, and appropriate privacy settings.
 - Parents should monitor young children closely while online and should not permit young children to have online devices behind closed doors in private places such as bedrooms and bathrooms.
 - Older children and teenagers will inevitably have more privacy when using devices, but parents should still convey clear expectations about appropriate behavior online through frequent conversations and regular monitoring of online activities.

- Parents should be sure to “check in” regularly with their children of all ages about online activities. Parents should ask specific questions about online friends and activities and invite children to share about positive and negative experiences online.
 - Urge parents to engage with their children online. Look through social feeds with them, make funny videos to post together, team up to play games online. The more youth perceive that adults respect their interests, the more willing they will be to engage in conversations about rules and expectations.
2. Professionals and parents should learn about online child exploitation and be aware that any platform that children use online is an opportunity for offenders to gain access to potential victims.
- Adults should know what red flags to watch for in their children’s behavior (like those in the tip sheet linked below) and how to report to NCMEC’s CyberTipline®, as well as on the apps/websites themselves.
 - Caution parents against taking away access to online devices as punishment. The ability to maintain relationships online is critically important during this time of social distancing and isolation. If necessary, parents should consider incremental restrictions on device use instead of total restrictions. Working with the child or teenager to resolve conflict or mistakes together will also help build trust that encourages them to come to caregivers and other trusted adults when there is a problem or they find themselves in a dangerous situation online.
- For more information about child safety online including conversation starters, tip sheets, and interactive videos by topic, go to www.missingkids.org/netsmartz. Check out [Protecting Children Online](#) for a summary of the tips found here—the tip sheet is available for download in English and [Spanish](#). NCMEC also offers a free online training for adults called [Teaching Online Safety](#) that includes an overview of various types of online child exploitation.

Find Digital Spaces for Collegial Connection with APSAC’s Online Training Opportunities

Introducing the APSAC & Foundling Online Course

APSAC and the [Vincent J. Fontana Center for Child Protection](#) of the New York Foundling are proud to present the [APSAC & Foundling Online Course](#). Access our comprehensive Online Course featuring national experts sharing their expertise on child maltreatment. Questions? Please contact onlinetraining@apsac.org. A special introductory rate of \$25 is available to APSAC members!

[Become a Member and Save](#) or [Register Now!](#)

Need resources around COVID-19? [Click here!](#)

Need ideas for commemorating Child Abuse Prevention Month while social distancing? [Click here!](#)

About the Author



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