# **Internet safety for kids**

**Source: ShreiyaAggarwal-Gupta, Owner & Founder, Kidpillar& Columnist, Ed Tech, TOI**

There’s no getting around technology today; it’s everywhere, from when you wake up till you rest your head at night. Kids have non-stop access to the internet, from smartphones to tablets to computers and even televisions.

Understanding and knowing how to use technology is undoubtedly essential in today’s world. However, you also need to be ever-vigilant and aware of what your kids are doing online. The internet exposes your kids to an expansive place, making them vulnerable to cyber attacks, catfishing, cyberbullying, and other harmful situations.

**Teaching Your Kids About Internet Safety**

The intention isn’t to scare you or make you want to lock down all of your electronic devices. As previously mentioned, in today’s technology-driven world, kids need to understand and use the internet. But, the key is to teach your children exactly how the internet works and how to explore the web safely.

Children are innately innocent creatures, full of trust and never expecting that someone could mean them ill-will. Therefore, when a potential predator initiates a conversation online, claiming to be a fellow 9-year-old, your child has no reason not to believe them. This common occurrence is catfishing, when someone misrepresents themselves online to try and get something from someone else.

So, your kid proceeds to chat with this person, unwittingly providing them with critical personal information. Even more chilling, they can make this faceless person privy to their whereabouts, ultimately leading to a potential abduction.

**Is Your Child a Victim of Cyberbullying?**

Now, what happens if the person who’s harassing your kid online is actually a fellow 9-year-old? The unfortunate truth is that approximately 36% of students have reported being victims of cyberbullying in their lifetime. Cyberbullying typically occurs through messaging, social media, and other electronic or digital means, including derogatory comments and even threatening messages.

How do you know if your child is dealing with cyberbullying?

Signs Your Child Might Be a Victim of Cyberbullying. Here are a few signs to look out for that your child might be a victim of cyberbullying:

* Your child doesn’t want to talk to you about what they do online
* After spending time on a computer, tablet, or phone, your child seems stressed or upset.
* When your child gets a text or some other type of online message, they suddenly seem nervous.
* Your child abruptly closes their tablet or puts down their phone while using it and walks away.
* You notice behavioral changes in your child, such as not sleeping well, loss of appetite, or feeling depressed.
* Your child could experience physical problems like headaches or an upset stomach.
* You notice your child doesn’t want to hang out with their friends anymore or go to school.

**Dealing with Cyberbullying**

If you believe your child is being cyberbullied, talk to them and encourage them to gather evidence. Take screenshots, save messages, and so on.

Don’t confront the bully or the bully’s parents directly. Instead, if it’s a student at school, bring it to the attention of the teacher and principal.

If the bullying includes threatening messages or any other suggested criminal activity, alert the police. Consider bringing your child to a counselor to help them deal with the issue. Finally, let your child know you are always there for them if and when they need you.

**How to Protect Your Kids on the Internet**

In addition to making your children aware of the potential risks of internet use, it’s a good idea to put some practical protections in place. Set up parental controls and passwords that only allow your children to access certain websites.

When applicable, use the kid versions of messaging platforms. For example, Facebook has a Messenger Kids that features more parental controls and links your kid’s chats to you. Therefore, whenever they receive or send a message, you see it.

To keep your kids safe online, you also need to educate yourself. Know how predators try to find and contact their victims (it’s often through chat rooms). On your internet settings, go to the Privacy & Security page and carefully read through every section.

You can choose what information various sites have access to. For example, you can deactivate your web camera and microphone, and deny sites from knowing your location or sending notifications. You can also get covers for your web camera, so it’s not always accessible.

**Avoiding Cyber Attacks**

People who want illegal access to your computer and private information are very savvy and know their way around many protections. It’s estimated that hackers attack computers through the internet every 39 seconds. Therefore, you need to be highly proactive in protecting your computers and other devices.

* Ensure your Wi-Fi router is password-protected and your Wi-Fi connection is secured.
* Don’t make your kids administrative users on your computer. Let everyone have their own account, and ensure yours is password-protected.
* As much of an inconvenience as it may be, don’t let your computer remember your passwords for different websites. Instead, set it up where you have to enter your password every time.
* It’s also a good idea to routinely change your passwords and make sure you use different types of passwords for various sites. In other words, avoid using the same password for everything.
* Install anti-virus and anti-spyware software and update it regularly.
* Use a firewall for your internet connecAttac

**Have an Open-Book Policy When It Comes to Internet Use**

The most important thing you can do to keep your kids safe online is to maintain an open line of communication with them. As a parent, you need to know what your kid is doing, both off-line and when on the internet.

While you want to respect your children’s privacy, you also need to know what sites they visit, who they’re talking to, and what they’re doing on social media. There needs to be a non-negotiable rule that whenever you ask to see your kid’s computer or phone, they let you see it.

There’s no question the internet opens up all sorts of possibilities for learning and growth, but it also opens the doors to internet predators. But, with the proper precautions and protections in place, and open communication with your kids, you can make sure that your children stay safe online.