common sense education®

Help Kids Make Friends and Interact Safely Online

So much of kids' social lives happens online. Whether they're texting with their study group, flirting on social media, or voice-chatting on game platforms, middle and high schoolers can learn to communicate in safe and healthy ways. These skills will help kids -- and the people they're communicating with -- have positive experiences online.

Check out these 4 tips ↘

1

Give them the right words.

Kids learn about appropriate verbal and physical communication from watching you. But online conversations can be invisible. Occasionally, narrate as you're writing texts or social media comments when your kids are in earshot.

2

Learn about their worlds.

Tweens and teens have unique communication styles–especially online. As much as possible, keep an eye on what they're saying and doing online to understand the norm in their worlds. Don't police everything they say, but keep an ear out for aggressive trash-talking, hate speech, rude images, or anything hurtful. If you see stuff that crosses the line, speak up. Kids need to understand that their words have consequences.

3

Empathize with the pressure to overshare.

Tweens and teens might feel pushed into sharing a sexy photo for different reasons: a dare, fear of damaging a relationship, or just because "everyone else is doing it." But this one is nonnegotiable. Tell them that you understand how bad it can feel to disappoint a friend. Then help them imagine how much worse it would feel if a private picture were shared with their whole school.

4

Develop their instincts.

Help kids learn to trust their guts so they can suss out creepy, risky, or otherwise unsafe online situations. Playact a few scenarios: What if someone asks to take a conversation private? What if someone asks for your phone number? What if someone invites you to a private chat room? Be aware that some kids (even "good" kids) will explore iffy stuff online out of curiosity. But the minute they feel uncomfortable, they need to shut things down.

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