



Navigating the Digital Maze

A Parent's Guide to Keeping Kids Safe Online

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ago.nebraska.gov

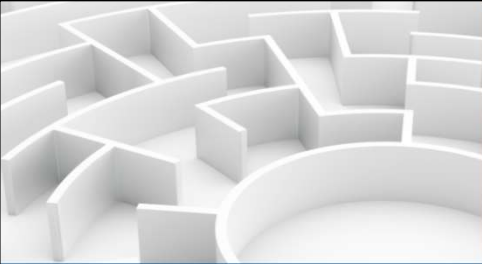
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Mike Hilgers
NEBRASKA ATTORNEY GENERAL

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| Consumer Protection & Charities | Medicaid Fraud | Open Government |
| Youth Link | Safe Communities | Human Trafficking |

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Navigating a Digital Maze:
An Online Safety Guide for Parents

Sextortion:

- Sextortion occurs when a scammer convinces a victim to send explicit photos and then blackmails that victim with that content and demands money, sexual activity, or additional sexual content.
- The victim's fear that somebody might share their private images or information with their parents, family, and friends can be intense enough to create suicidal thoughts for a victim or other mental health related issues. Sextortion has resulted in a loss of life for victims of all ages.
- Talk to your kids about the risks of sending sexually explicit photos, videos, or other compromising information, even to people who seem trustworthy. Sending these items allows a predator to share them with someone else, even after the victim decides they do not consent anymore.
- If your child has been the victim of sextortion, please contact your local law enforcement or the Omaha FBI (402) 493-8688. You can also visit NCMEC's information about [sexortion](#) and [scams from the internet](#).

Safe Communities > Parents

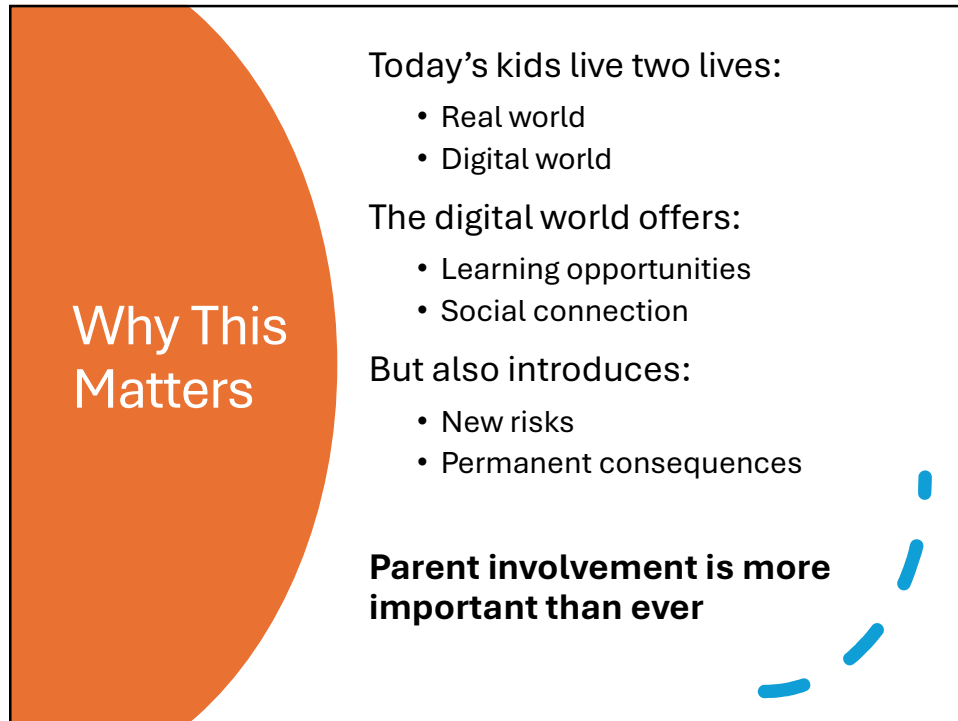
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Navigating the Digital Maze

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Why This Matters

Today's kids live two lives:

- Real world
- Digital world

The digital world offers:

- Learning opportunities
- Social connection

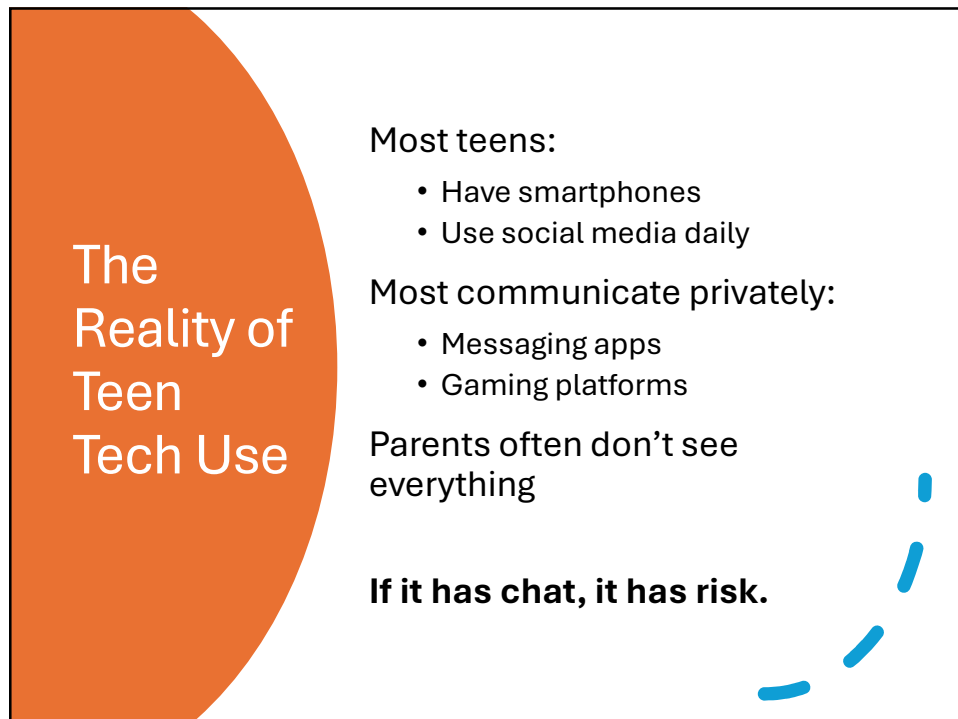
But also introduces:

- New risks
- Permanent consequences

Parent involvement is more important than ever

Decorative blue dashed line graphic in the bottom right corner.

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The Reality of Teen Tech Use

Most teens:

- Have smartphones
- Use social media daily

Most communicate privately:

- Messaging apps
- Gaming platforms

Parents often don't see everything

If it has chat, it has risk.

Decorative blue dashed line graphic in the bottom right corner.

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Your Role as a Parent

You're not just a monitor—you
are a **guide**

- Teach judgment, not just rules
- Keep communication open
- Stay involved without spying
- Build trust so kids come to you

Your best safety tool is
connection.



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Sextortion



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Sextortion



What it is:

- Someone tricks a child into sending explicit images
- Then threatens to share them unless demands are met

Demands may include:

- Money
- More images
- Sexual activity

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Why Sextortion Is So Dangerous



Victims feel:

- Shame
- Fear
- Panic

Can lead to:

- Severe anxiety
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts

This is happening to kids across the U.S.A.

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How to Protect Your Child

Tell kids:

- Never send explicit images—even to someone they trust.

Remind them:

- Once sent, it can be saved or shared forever.

Normalize mistakes:

- “You can always come to me—no matter what.”

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If Your Child Is Targeted

Do NOT pay

Save the evidence

Report to:

- Law enforcement
- School officials

Use NCMEC resources for image removal.

Act quickly—support your child emotionally first.

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Grooming & Online Predators

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What is Grooming?

- Building trust with a child online
- Moving conversations to a private channels
- Gradually introducing:
 - Secrets
 - Sexual topics



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Warning Signs

Teach your child to watch for:

- Someone asking to keep secrets
- Requests for private chats
- Pressure to share personal info or photos
- Rapid emotional closeness



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Important Reality

- Most abuse involves
 - Someone the child knows
- Not always strangers



Trust does not equal safety

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What Parents Can Do

- Monitor contacts and conversations
- Set clear rules for online interaction
- Encourage kids to report anything uncomfortable

**If it feels weird,
it probably is.**



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Social Media & Apps



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Not All Apps Are Safe



Even “innocent” apps may include:

Private messaging

Location tracking

Anonymous interaction



Always research apps before downloading


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Research Tool: Common Sense Media


The screenshot shows the Common Sense Media website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links for 'Movies', 'TV', 'Books', 'Gaming', 'Social Media', 'Parents' Guides', 'Tips & FAQs', and 'Celebrating Community'. The main content area is titled 'Parents' Guide to Clash of Clans'. It includes a star rating of 3.5 out of 5, an age rating of 'age 13+', and a 'Common Sense Says' section. A 'Common Sense Media Review' by Chris Meier is visible, along with a 'Parents Need to Know' section that provides detailed information about the game's content and age appropriateness. There are also sections for 'Why Age 13+' and 'Any Positive Content?' with sub-sections like 'Products & Purchases', 'Ease of Play', 'Language', 'Educational Value', 'Violence & Scariness', and 'Drinking, Drugs & Smoking'.

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Essential Safety Settings



**Accounts set to
PRIVATE**



**Location services
OFF**




Limit who can:

- Message
- Follow
- View Content


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Hidden Accounts



Many teens have:

A “main” account parents see
A “secret” account (sometimes called a ‘finsta’)



**Regular, open
conversations matter
more than surveillance**

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High-Risk App Features



Be cautious of apps with:

Disappearing messages
Anonymous users
Random chat matching



These features increase risk of exploitation

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Social Media Concerns

Research and Lawsuits Suggest

- Platforms may promote:
 - Harmful content
 - Addictive use
- Exposure to:
 - Eating disorder content
 - Self-harm content

Consider **if and when** your child should use social media


Remember: Child Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)

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What is Cyberbullying



Harassment through:

- Texts
- Social media
- Gaming platforms

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Impact on Kids



Cyberbullying can lead to:

- Low self-esteem
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts

The effects are real—even if it’s “just online.”

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How to Help Your Child



Ask:

- “Who can you talk to if something happens?”

Encourage:

- Blocking/reporting offenders

Work with schools.

Teach kids to be **upstanders, not bystanders**


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When to Act Immediately




If your child shows:

- Withdrawal
- Severe distress
- Talk of self-harm


Call/text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline)

Contact local authorities if needed

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Privacy, Passwords & Digital Footprint



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Strong Passwords

Teach Kids

- Long passwords are stronger
- Use variety: mixed case, numbers and symbols
- Never share passwords (except with parents)
- Need help choosing a long and strong password:
passwordmonster.com



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Digital Footprint

Everything online:

- Can be saved
- Can be shared
- May never fully disappear



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Digital Footprint

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“Would you be okay with a college or employe seeing this?”



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Teaching Digital Character

Ask your child:

- “What kind of person do you want to be online?”

Encourage:

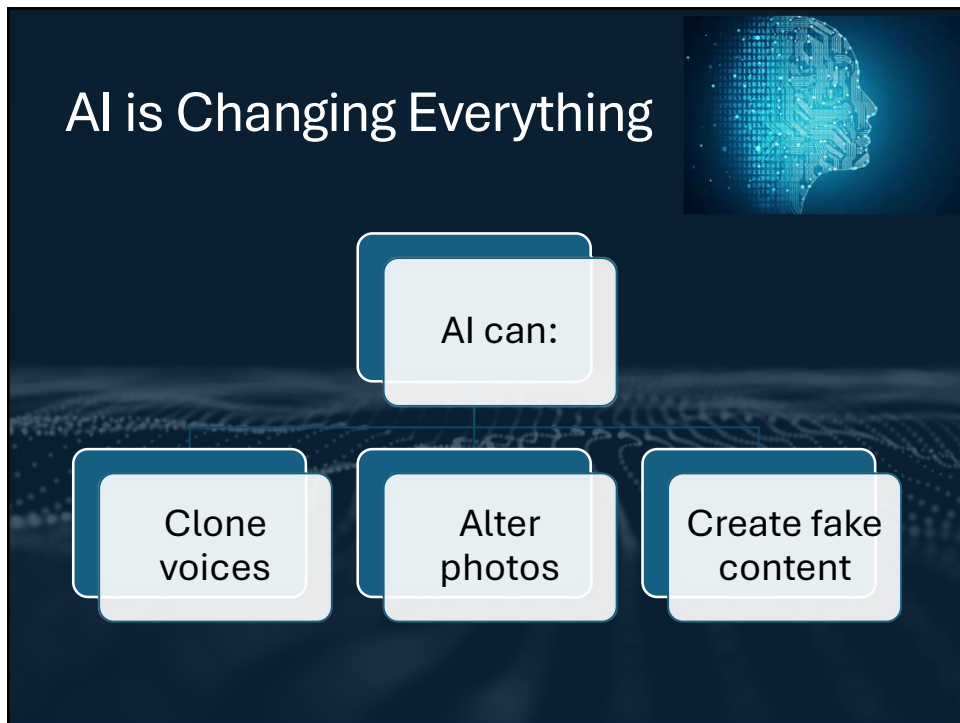
- Respect
- Kindness
- Thinking before posting



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AI is Changing the Online Landscape



AI technology can now:

- Mimic voices
- Alter photos and videos
- Generate realistic but completely fake content

These tools are becoming **widely available and easy to use**

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How AI Can Be Misused Against Kids


AI tools can be used to:

- Create fake images of someone
- Manipulate existing photos
- Impersonate a child or family member
- Generate harmful or embarrassing content

This can be used for:

- Bullying
- Harassment
- Extortion

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Why This Matters for Families

AI tools often rely on images and information already available online.

The more photos, videos, and personal details that exist online about a child, the easier it becomes to:

- Manipulate those images
- Create fake content
- Impersonate them digitally

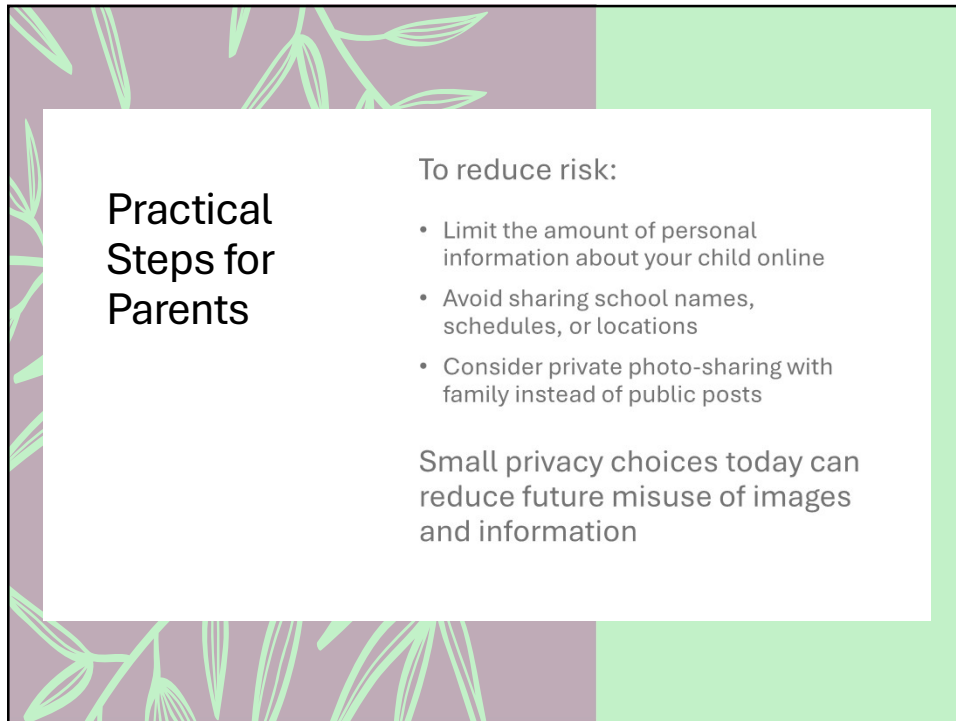
Once something is online, you lose control over how it may be used.

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Practical Steps for Parents

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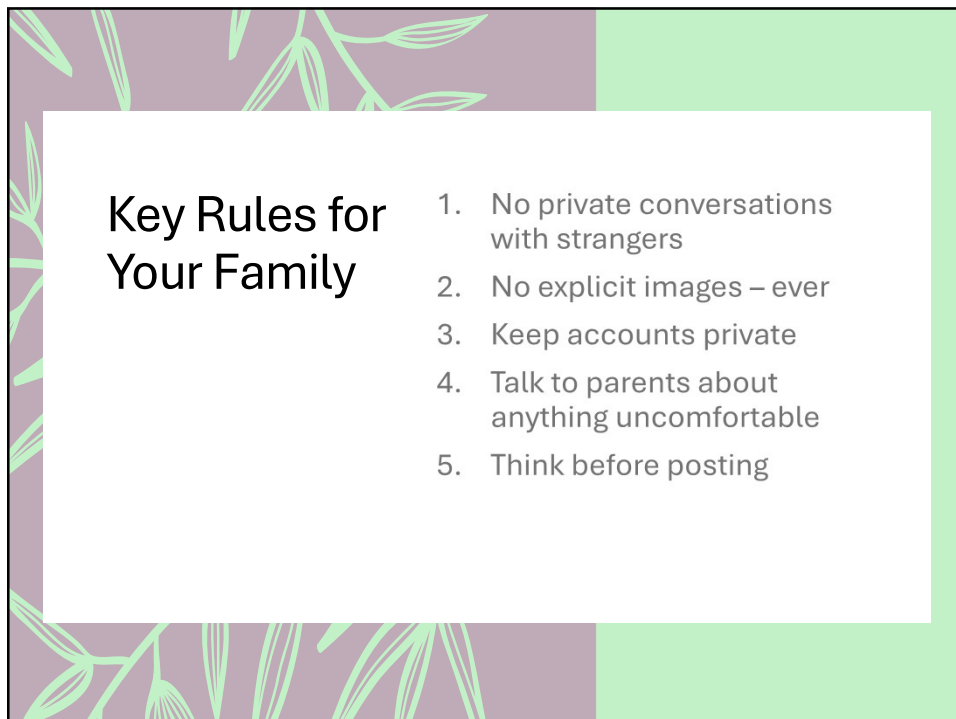
Practical Steps for Parents

To reduce risk:

- Limit the amount of personal information about your child online
- Avoid sharing school names, schedules, or locations
- Consider private photo-sharing with family instead of public posts

Small privacy choices today can reduce future misuse of images and information

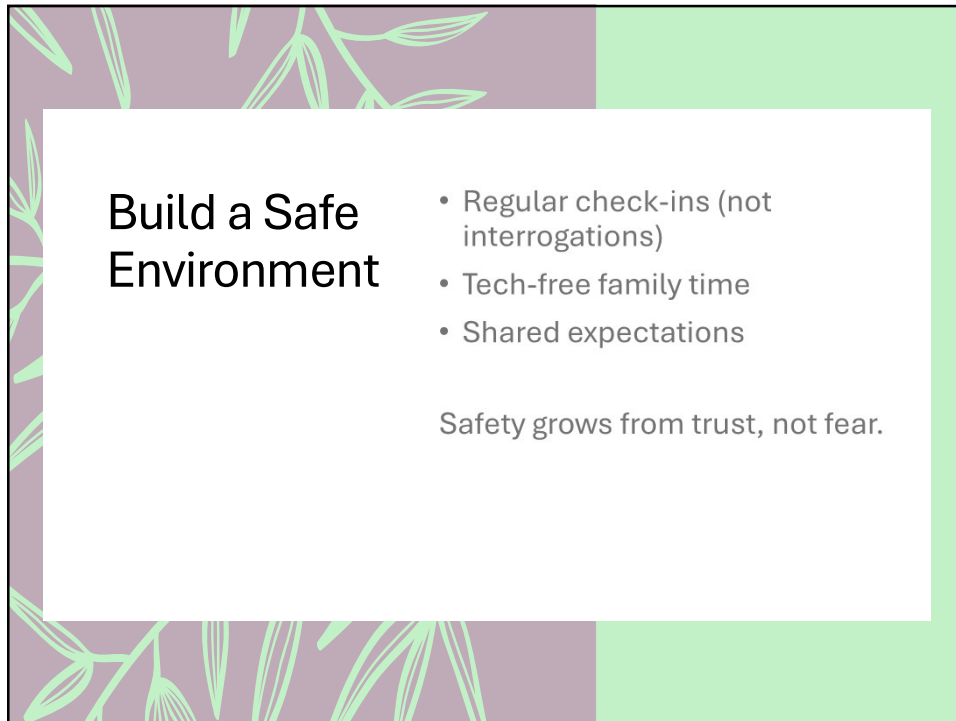
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Key Rules for Your Family

1. No private conversations with strangers
2. No explicit images – ever
3. Keep accounts private
4. Talk to parents about anything uncomfortable
5. Think before posting

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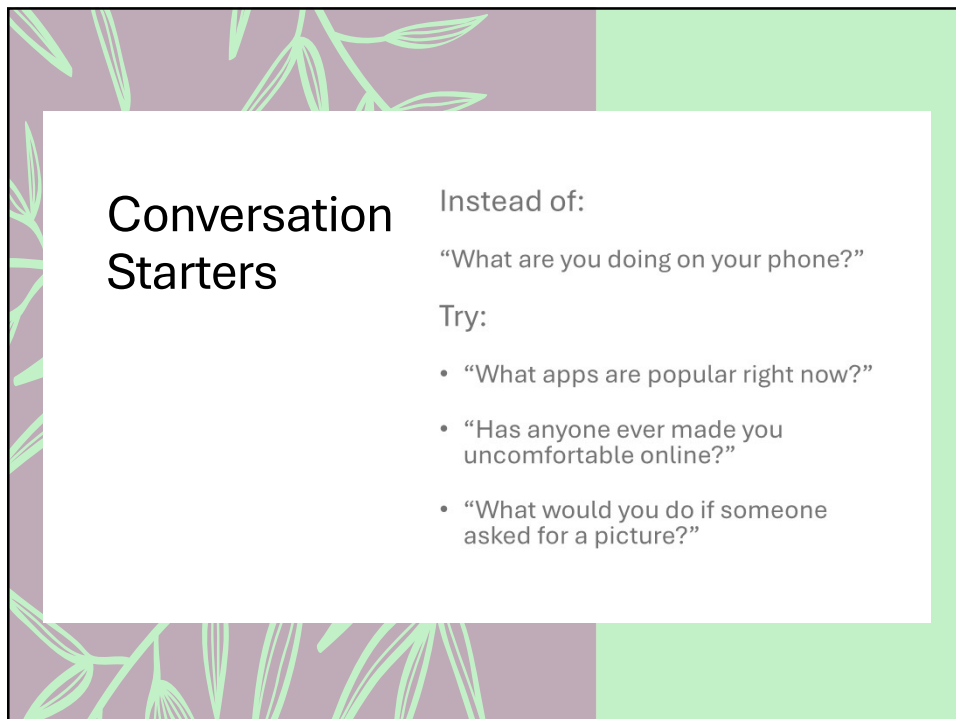


Build a Safe Environment

- Regular check-ins (not interrogations)
- Tech-free family time
- Shared expectations

Safety grows from trust, not fear.

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Conversation Starters

Instead of:

“What are you doing on your phone?”

Try:

- “What apps are popular right now?”
- “Has anyone ever made you uncomfortable online?”
- “What would you do if someone asked for a picture?”

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Final Takeaways

- The internet isn't going away
- Risks are real—but manageable
- The most powerful protection is:
 - An informed, involved parent.

Stay engaged.

Stay curious.

Stay connected.



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Resources

- Nebraska Attorney General's Office (ago.nebraska.gov)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) (missingkids.org)
- StopBullying.gov
- 988 Crisis Lifeline



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