

ONLINE SAFETY FOR TEENS

Your digital life is part of your real life. Protect both.

Social media, gaming platforms, group chats, and messaging apps are a huge part of how teenagers communicate, build friendships, and explore the world.

And while the internet creates incredible opportunities for connection, it also creates opportunities for manipulation, harassment, exploitation, and unwanted access to personal information.

Online safety isn't about being afraid of the internet. It's about understanding how to recognize concerning behavior, establish digital boundaries, and make informed decisions.

The same principles we teach in violence prevention apply online: awareness, boundaries, recognizing manipulation, and knowing when to disengage.

01 | PROTECT YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION

Not everyone needs access to your life.

Information shared online can reveal more than you realize.

Be thoughtful about sharing:

- Your full name, address, or phone number.
- Your school, workplace, or daily schedule.
- Your current location or travel plans.
- Photos that reveal where you live or regularly spend time.
- Personal information about friends and family.

Remember that even private accounts can have information shared through screenshots or other users.

REMEMBER: You get to decide how much of your personal life you share.

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02 | UNDERSTAND YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

What you post can travel farther than you intended.

Photos, videos, messages, and comments can be copied, saved, or shared without your permission.

Before posting, consider:

- Who can see this?
- Could this reveal personal information?
- Would I be comfortable if someone shared it?
- Does this involve someone else's privacy?
- Could this affect me later?

This doesn't mean you should be afraid to express yourself.

It means understanding that online information isn't always easy to control once it's shared.

REMEMBER: Think before you share, but understand that someone misusing your information is responsible for their behavior.

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03 | RECOGNIZE ONLINE MANIPULATION

Not everyone online is who they claim to be.

People can misrepresent their age, identity, intentions, or relationship to you.

Pay attention when someone:

- Quickly attempts to establish an unusually close relationship.
- Asks you to keep conversations secret.
- Pressures you to move to private or encrypted messaging.
- Offers gifts, money, or special attention in exchange for something.
- Asks for personal information or intimate images.
- Uses guilt, threats, or emotional manipulation.
- Attempts to isolate you from friends or family.

These behaviors can be associated with online grooming and exploitation, particularly when they occur together or escalate over time.

REMEMBER: Someone being friendly, attractive, popular, or familiar doesn't automatically make them trustworthy.

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04 | SET DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

You don't owe anyone unlimited access to you.

Just because someone can message you doesn't mean you're obligated to respond.

You have the right to:

- Decline friend or follow requests.
- Refuse to share personal information.
- Leave group chats.
- End conversations.
- Block or restrict accounts.
- Turn off location sharing.
- Report threatening or inappropriate behavior.

You don't have to justify your decision to stop communicating with someone.

If someone is threatening, stalking, or harassing you, consider preserving evidence and seeking help before deciding whether to respond, block, or report.

REMEMBER: Access to your social media isn't access to your personal life.

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05 | KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS OF SEXTORTION

Threats involving private images are manipulation, not your fault.

Sextortion occurs when someone threatens to share intimate images or information to pressure another person into providing money, additional images, sexual activity, or something else.

Warning signs include:

- Someone requesting intimate images.
- Threats to expose private photos or conversations.
- Demands for money to prevent images from being shared.
- Pressure to send additional images.
- Threats to contact friends, family, or school.
- Attempts to frighten you into keeping the situation secret.

If this happens:

1. Stop engaging with the person when safe to do so.
2. Do not send additional images or money.
3. Preserve messages, usernames, and threats without redistributing intimate images.
4. Tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
5. Report the situation to the platform and appropriate authorities.

For images taken when someone was under 18, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's **Take It Down** service may help limit their spread.

Visit takeitdown.ncmec.org.

REMEMBER: Being manipulated, threatened, or exploited does not make you responsible for someone else's actions. Help is available.

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06 | BE CAREFUL WITH LOCATION SHARING

Convenience shouldn't come at the expense of your privacy.

Many apps can share your location automatically or reveal it through posts, photos, and activity.

Review:

- Location-sharing permissions.
- Live location features.
- Geotagging on photos and videos.
- Public check-ins.
- Apps that track your activity.
- Who can see your location through shared accounts.

Consider sharing your location only with trusted people when appropriate.

Be especially cautious about publicly posting your location while you're still there.

REMEMBER: Not everyone needs to know where you are.

07 | RECOGNIZE CYBERBULLYING & HARASSMENT

Online harassment is still harassment.

Cyberbullying can involve repeated unwanted messages, humiliation, threats, impersonation, spreading rumors, or sharing private information.

If you're experiencing harassment:

- Avoid escalating the interaction.
- Preserve evidence when safe.
- Use appropriate privacy and reporting tools.
- Tell a trusted adult.
- Seek additional help if threats continue.
- Contact emergency services if you're facing immediate danger.

Remember that harassment can come from classmates, friends, former partners, or people you've never met.

REMEMBER: You don't have to handle online harassment alone.

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08 | THINK BEFORE MEETING SOMEONE IN PERSON

An online connection doesn't automatically establish trust.

Meeting someone you've only interacted with online can introduce risks, especially when their identity or intentions haven't been verified.

If you're considering meeting someone:

- Involve a parent or trusted adult.
- Verify their identity through appropriate means.
- Never agree to keep the meeting secret.
- Choose a public location.
- Arrange independent transportation.
- Establish a check-in plan.
- Leave if circumstances change or you feel uncomfortable.

For minors, meeting an online-only contact should involve a trusted parent or caregiver who can help assess the situation and accompany them when appropriate.

REMEMBER: You never owe someone an in-person meeting because you've been communicating online.

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PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

YOUR DIGITAL SAFETY CHECKLIST

Take 15 minutes to review your online accounts.

- ☐ Check your privacy settings.
- ☐ Review who can see your posts and personal information.
- ☐ Turn off unnecessary location sharing.
- ☐ Review your followers and friend lists.
- ☐ Use strong, unique passwords and enable multifactor authentication.
- ☐ Check which apps have access to your location, camera, and microphone.
- ☐ Identify how to block and report accounts on the platforms you use.
- ☐ Identify at least two trusted adults you could contact if something concerning happened online.
- ☐ Review whether your public profiles reveal your school, home, or regular routines.
- ☐ Talk with a parent or trusted adult about what to do if someone threatens or pressures you online.

FOR PARENTS: KEEP THE CONVERSATION OPEN

One of the biggest barriers to teens reporting concerning online interactions is the fear of getting in trouble, losing their devices, or being embarrassed.

If you want your teenager to come to you when something happens online, they need to believe you'll listen.

Make it clear:

"If something happens online that makes you uncomfortable, scared, or embarrassed, you can tell me. We'll figure out what to do together."

Address immediate safety first.

Listen without blaming.

And remember that online safety education is more effective when it's an ongoing conversation rather than a one-time lecture.

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REMEMBER

The internet isn't separate from real life. The people, relationships, boundaries, and decisions you encounter online can have real-world consequences.

You don't have to be suspicious of everyone or afraid to participate in online communities.

You simply need to understand that your personal information, privacy, boundaries, and safety matter just as much online as they do offline.

Think critically. Protect your privacy. Recognize manipulation. Know when to ask for help.

Knowledge creates options.

KEEP LEARNING. KEEP GROWING.

Knowledge is just the beginning. Take your training further with our free and paid online courses at Hero Self Defense Academy, where you'll build practical skills, strengthen your awareness, and learn to take a proactive approach to your personal safety.

Visit meangirlselfdefense.com to explore our training programs, find an instructor, or register for an upcoming seminar.

Built to Survive. Trained to Rise.