

E-safety for schools

Advice for
parents of
teens

It's a dialogue not a lecture! Use your parenting skills.

- **Model** decent digital citizenship yourselves.
- **Spend time having fun** on social media with your teenager. What are your friends and family using? Learn about new apps on the scene that could be harmful. Are in-App purchases a problem? Become partners in the voyage of discovery.
- Offline life is now so integrated with online life we have to **instil codes of behaviour**, safe habits and caring for friends in all social situations on or offline. Agree on values and what's acceptable. Digital literacy goes hand in hand with social and financial literacy. These are essential skills for 20st century life.
- **Avoid rigid rules or lecturing! Have your teens teach you about** new apps. Explore together how things work and what the risks might be. Look at age ratings on games TV content and apps. Ask them how they problem-solve.
- **Don't ban social media** you'll simply isolate your child from their friends and drive them to be deceitful. When they start on social media become a 'friend'. But remember to stay silent – never comment on their page – it's embarrassing. Kids of interfering parents simply set up alternative accounts to find privacy so, as they get older and wiser, you can bow out. Once you are familiar with their social media and online life you may be able to chat about it more easily and support them when friends are mean or upsetting experiences kick in.
- But, **don't overreact** or ever tackle bullies online yourself! It might have been an in-joke, language they are currently using, or a friendship fallout. If it is bullying or cyber-aggression, listen, keep evidence, make an action plan and try to stay calm. Know where to get help and use report buttons on sites. Being caring and available will help in tough situations. Inform yourselves on the law.
- **Don't threaten to take away their mobile phone** if they ever share intimate photos. This simply means that if they ever get into difficulties online they will not come to you for help. It's crucial they turn to you.

- **The most vital skill in today's world is digital competence.** They need to be safe online and in the connected world. Our research shows that this is the key to your teen's future. Their emotional health, studies, work and social lives will depend on it. Even shopping or booking travel! Those who lack confidence, feel depressed, isolated or lonely are often more vulnerable online. They might take more risks as they seek other ways to boost their self-esteem. Your job is to focus on their overall emotional health with love, support and guidance.
- **Work on what good relationships look like.**
- **Keeping in touch with your teen has never been easier.** You can leave a message while they are fast asleep for them to pick up when you have gone to work – beats messages on the fridge. Are you witty in a text?
- **Don't believe the screaming headlines about sexting** being endemic or cyberbullying being so widespread. Our kids should know that's not the norm. They should not fear the internet. In fact most young people are not sharing explicit images. In our survey of over 7000 young people 7% were doing so. Most teenagers enjoy their online lives and manage problem-solving with resilience. But we know that for others it seems that their negative experiences pile up. If they've been cyberbullied they may go on to experience further risky situations or victimisation. Seek help if your child is visiting sites promoting anorexia or self-harm or if your child is depressed and spending more than five hours a day online.
- **Yes there are parental controls and monitoring apps.** While very useful for young children, teens can evade most blocks and filters or simply use a friend's phone. What they have within them is the real strength you have instilled through loving parenting, skills for life and digital literacy. As parents we cannot control every experience our child encounters. They will see content you would rather they did not. Teens are curious. Plan how you will reduce the likelihood of deeply offensive/upsetting material and address it when it happens.