

Promoting Ethical Online Behaviours with Your Kids — Tip Sheet

RESPECT PEOPLE'S PRIVACY

RESPECT PEOPLE'S FEELINGS

RESPECT PEOPLE'S PROPERTY

Most kids live as much of their lives online as they do offline. But on the Internet there are lots of moral and ethical choices that don't have to be made offline. These tips lay out ways you can help your children develop a moral compass to guide them through those choices.

The foundation for helping kids to behave ethically is to teach them to respect themselves and other people. Online, this mostly falls into three categories: respect people's privacy, respect people's feelings and respect people's property.

RESPECT PEOPLE'S PRIVACY

Because nearly all of the services and platforms young people use are networked, every time a friend posts something they have to decide if – and how – to share it. Unfortunately, they often ignore the ethical issues of this choice, expecting others to tell them if they don't want something to be shared.

Teach kids to:

- Consider other people in photos or videos they are posting or sharing:
 - Do I have their permission?
 - How will they feel if I post this?
 - Is there anything they'd be worried about?

- Think about what might happen if something that they post or share gets sent to people they didn't expect:
 - How will the people in this photo or video feel if their parents see it? Their teachers? Their friends, girlfriends or boyfriends?

Parents can also model good habits by thinking about their children's privacy before posting videos, photos or other personal things about their kids. Having clear and consistent family rules about respecting privacy is a great first step in helping kids to make good choices.

RESPECT PEOPLE'S FEELINGS

Sometimes it can be hard to remember that the people we communicate with online are real people who have feelings. This is because we don't see or hear many of the things that trigger empathy in us, like a person's tone of voice, body language or facial expression.

To help kids better understand and respond to bullying, teach them:

- How some online spaces, especially ones that are popular with boys, encourage trolling (annoying people on purpose to get a response, which can include annoying pranks all the way to posting threatening or hateful comments) and the ways that trolling can be hurtful. Talking about this from an early age will help kids understand what is – and isn't – acceptable online behaviour.
- How to react appropriately to online drama (flare-ups with peers). This includes learning skills to mediate between friends to prevent situations from spiraling out of control as well as strategies that can be used to avoid drama themselves. This includes taking time to "cool down" before posting a reply, assuming the best about other people and not automatically thinking that comments are meant to be mean and talking face-to-face to make sure you haven't misunderstood an online conversation.
- Signs of an unhealthy relationship, like jealousy, possessiveness and constantly wanting to keep tabs on someone. As well, pay attention to what your kids are watching, playing and listening to and be ready to talk about how romantic relationships are depicted.
- Strategies for when they witness any kind of bullying. Confronting bullies publicly can be effective, but there are also times when a private conversation might be better, especially between friends. Remind your kids not to automatically take sides just to defend their friends; this can turn drama into harassment. Instead, suggest they mediate between the participants.
- What is and isn't acceptable online behaviour. Having clear and consistent family rules is a great way of communicating to your kids how you expect them to treat other people online.
- What to do if they are targets of bullying. Make sure your kids know you will support them if they come to you. Find out what their school's policies and procedures are for reporting bullying and make sure your kids know these as well.

RESPECT PEOPLE'S PROPERTY

One of the most common ethical decisions kids face online has to do with how they access and use things like music, games and videos. So much stuff is easily available online that it's hard to resist "putting your hand in the cookie jar," especially since we're not reminded – as we would be if we were to sneak into a movie or steal a video game from a

store – that people are hurt by what we do. There's also lots of confusion, among both kids and adults, about what's permitted and what's not; while some things are clearly unethical (like illegally downloading movies), many common activities (like watching movie clips on YouTube and similar sites) are less clear.

We need to teach kids to think about whether they're watching, listening to and playing things online in a way that shows respect for the people who made it and own it:

- Teach kids that just because something's online doesn't mean you can take it and use it. For things you are allowed to use, always give credit to the person or company who owns the copyright.
- Correct the idea that any use is okay as long as the author is given credit. While it's important to do this, kids need to know that crediting the author may not always be enough.
- Remind kids that when an artist creates a work, they own it and they deserve to control what happens to it. They may choose to give it away, but if they want to charge for it that's their right. Given all the stuff that's freely available online, if something isn't free it's because the person who made it expects to get paid.
- Kids may think that cheating a media company is not the same as cheating a person, so we need to explain that selling and licensing copyright is an important part of how artists make a living. If companies stop doing this because they aren't making profits, it's the artists who suffer. (Not to mention the hundreds of thousands of Canadians working in jobs that are supported by the film, television, video game and music industries.)
- Address the idea many youth buy into that "copying isn't stealing". One way to help kids think through this is to help them understand that when they pay to access music, games and videos, they're not really paying for a product but for a licence to access and enjoy that product.
- Show them where and when they can use music, games and videos legally and for free. (MediaSmarts' tip sheet "Getting the Goods Ethically" explains how this can be done.)
- Explain that plagiarism is not a victimless crime; the victims are the students themselves who miss out on a learning experience, the other students in the class who didn't cheat and the author of the material that's being copied.
- Reinforce the idea that plagiarism of any kind is disrespectful by putting your kids in the shoes of artists and other copyright owners (for example: "Remember how you sold your drawings at the school craft fair? What if someone took a picture you drew, copied it and started selling it? How would that make you feel? Is it fair?").
- Set clear and consistent family rules on using and accessing online content and using Internet materials for school work.