Internet Safety Tips by Age: 11-13

From pre-teen to teen is a time of rapid change in kids' lives. Although at this stage they are still quite dependent on their families, they want more independence. Also, relationships with friends become more important and they start to take an interest in the world around them.

Kids in this age group live in a world of 24-7 communication: whether in-person, online or texting or chatting on cell phones. By Grade 8, 75 percent of kids have regular access to a cell phone and over half are engaged in social networking. They use the Internet to research school projects, but also spend much time exploring the fun side of the Net, as they download music, movies and TV shows, play online games and get the latest on their favourite celebrities.

All this socializing can lead to becoming engaged in online conflict and cyberbullying, so this is the time to have more focused conversations with your kids on the importance of respecting others online and what to do if they are being targeted.

11- to 13-year-olds:

- feel in control when it comes to technology
- are highly confident they know how to protect themselves online
- are intrigued by subcultures beyond the world of their parents
- are becoming more influenced by the values of their families and peers and less worried about punishment
- lack the critical thinking skills to judge the accuracy of online information
- accept entertainment and games uncritically
- are vulnerable to online marketers who encourage them to give out personal information through surveys, contests and registration forms
- are at a sensitive time in their sexual development; particularly boys, who may seek out porn sites
- are interested in building relationships (especially girls) with online acquaintances
- may be bullied or may bully others online

Safety Tips

General Supervision

- At night, make your child's bedroom a 'tech-free' zone: by Grade 8, 42 percent of kids report sleeping with their phones so they don't miss any messages.

- Keep online activities – whether on laptops, tablets or family computers – in common family areas where you can easily monitor what your kids are doing.

Managing Online Spaces

Preview websites or apps that your child wants to use or join so that you can discuss any concerns you might have.

Use – and show your kids how to use – 'safe search' features on search engines.

Building Safety Skills

- Start talking to your kids about building and maintaining a positive digital footprint. (For tips on how to do this, see the Building Your Brand tip sheet.)
- As your kids get older, review together and, if needed, revise family cell phone and online rules.
- For young teens who are joining social networking sites, explore with them the site's privacy settings and discuss the importance of using them to manage who sees what they post. (For ideas on rules for social networking, see the MediaSmarts tip sheet Social Media Rules.)
- Talk about healthy relationships and how to recognize the signs when someone may be seeking to abuse or exploit them.
- Talk about respecting others online and not using networked devices to spread gossip, bully or make threats against others. Kids also need to understand how easily things that are posted can be misunderstood or taken out of context, so need to start practicing 'think before you post'. (For tips on respectful sharing online, see MediaSmarts' Think Before You Share tip sheet.)
- Provide your child with strategies to respond if they witness bullying behaviour online.
- If your child plays multi-player games online, discuss the importance of not engaging in racist, sexist or threatening game play.
- Insist that your kids tell you first if they want to meet an "online friend" in person.
- Discuss the need to take care before sharing personal information online and the importance of only providing essential information when filling out registration forms and profiles, and entering online contests.
- Build mutual trust: ask your kids to put passwords for their online accounts into a piggy bank, on the understanding that you will access them only if you have serious concerns.
- Reassure them that they can come to you if they encounter anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened: and don't panic if they do!
- Talk to kids about online pornography and direct them to good sites about health and sexuality.
- Encourage ethical online behaviour – and protect your computers from malware – by talking to your kids about respecting copyright, especially when downloading music and video files. (Kids this age are less worried about getting in trouble and more about fitting in with the values of their social group, so it's best to approach this as an issue of showing respect for artists.)
- Make sure your kids know about the many safe, legitimate sources of music, video and other media online.