

## MEDIA SAFETY TIPS: MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (6-9 YEARS OLD)

Students in the primary grades are already active users of digital technologies. While they are usually supervised when they go online there are still many issues that need to be considered. Over this period they start to integrate computers and the Internet into their daily lives. By the end they typically are highly active in games and virtual environments. They develop their ability to understand abstract concepts over this period, but these need to be introduced in the context of everyday activities. For instance, the importance of online privacy can be introduced by making them think of times or places in the home that they would want to keep private.

### Media risks

The risks that kids encounter in media fall into four categories:

**Content** risks, where kids are exposed to or engage with harmful content such as violence, hate, or sexualized media;

**Conduct** risks that come from what kids do or how they interact with other users;

**Consumer** risks related to money, advertising, and data collection;

And risks that come from being **Contacted** by other people.

### CONTENT

Almost eight in ten children this age use YouTube, and a third use TikTok. They are much more likely than younger children to see inappropriate content, either online or in traditional media.

During this time children generally narrow their interests and enjoy getting better at different skills and topics. Two-thirds use the internet to learn more about their hobbies. Developing a high degree of skill or knowledge can become a source of status at this age. This may lead them to a broader range of apps and websites as they look for trivia or expert instruction.

Children at this age have the ability to understand the difference between fantasy and reality. They generally accurately identify clearly unreal texts like cartoons and texts that are meant to be taken as real, like news. However they are less sure about more realistic works. Anything that blurs the line between fact and fiction, like reality TV, will probably be taken as real.

They understand and respond to simple morals in media works, but more complex messages can be misunderstood. They give more weight to the behaviours that they see more often. For instance, if a character engages in a negative behaviour for most of a program and only behaves positively at the end. However, a short explanation that makes the message or moral explicit makes up the gap.

This is actually the age group that is most likely to be scared by things they see in media. Unlike younger children they're aware of tension and can be scared of things that haven't happened yet, especially when there are cues like frightening music.

## CONDUCT

This is the age where habits around screen use are established. It is much easier to set good habits at this age than later on. Rules and routines can be set about when and where using devices is allowed, time limits, and so on

Kids at this age use digital platforms to talk to friends and family. **One-third** of children this age have been targets of cyberbullying. Half of those said it happened in an online game, while a quarter said it happened by text or message and a fifth said it happened on a social network. A third said they turn to their parents for help when that happens. One in five say they do nothing, to show the bully they aren't hurt. Another fifth say they just hope it will stop.

They are gaining in their ability to manage their thinking and their emotions and to navigate more complex relationships. However, the need to fit in with the group is also becoming stronger. **One in six** kids this age have cyberbullied someone else. By far the most common way of doing this (71%) is calling someone a name, but one-sixth of cyberbullies have posted or shared an embarrassing photo.

The most common reason given for bullying someone was that they were "just joking around." They're less likely than older children to try to get back at someone who bullied them or because they were bored. Kids this age typically care strongly about fairness and

equality and can develop empathy over this period if it is fostered and encouraged.

## CONTACT

Many kids at this age use video sites with social networking elements like YouTube and TikTok. Between a fifth and a quarter use social networks such as Instagram or Snapchat. Many also play online multiplayer games like Roblox or Fortnite where they may come in contact with people they don't know offline. Just over half have their own smartphone.

Kids at this age have a more complex understanding of privacy than younger ones. They are considerably more likely to share personal content with their friends, but less likely to share it with people in general. While this makes them more protective of their privacy overall, it also means that they may share personal information with an online contact they see as a friend.

One in five have been send something that made them uncomfortable by someone online. When this happens, they are most likely (71%) to tell a parent or guardian. Half block the person who did this.

## CONSUMER

At this age kids are able to begin to understand that apps, websites, games, etc. are all connected. They are starting to understand the idea of sensitive data or personally identifying information. You can help them understand this by talking about private spaces (like the bathroom) or things they would not want anyone to know about (such as times they were mean to someone or told a lie).

They are starting to understand the risks of sharing information online, but still mostly trust others

-including apps and websites - to respect their privacy. “Privacy” is still thought of in very concrete terms like phone number, address, and so on. They don’t understand that things like their searches or that what they do online can be seen by others and influence what content they see.

Many apps and games aimed at kids this age include online purchases. Kids may feel social pressure to buy these, and the app itself may pressure them as well. (Some apps have characters encouraging kids to buy things, or show characters being sad if they don’t.)

They can start to learn about copyright and fair dealing. This is a time when ethical use of online content becomes increasingly relevant as they are beginning to use the internet for school research projects.

## Safety tips

There are four main strategies to help kids become resilient to online risks. We can:

**Curate** our kids’ media experiences;

**Control** who can access our kids and their data;

**Co-view** media with our kids;

and be our kids’ media **Coaches**.

### CURATE

Take the time to research any new game or app before you let them download it, even if it’s free. Let them have more time for online activities that are educational, creative, active or genuinely social.

Good quality media can build knowledge and literacy. Help them find appropriate media for school and personal needs and use tools like bookmarks, playlists, and custom search engines to limit unwanted exposure to inappropriate content. Internet filtering is helpful, but what’s most important is helping your child find reliable and appropriate sources of information and entertainment.

Most children at this age never go beyond the first page of results during a search. Similarly, they do not know how searches or content is curated or delivered. They can begin to identify journalism genres, recognize newspaper structure and sections, understand the newsroom organization: who does what, deadlines, daily routine. They can also start to become familiar with basic journalistic standards.

It’s easy for parents to overestimate the ability of children this age to deal with frightening or disturbing content. Be particularly careful when they are sharing media with older siblings.

Three-quarters of kids get their first phone during this stage. In most cases, it is because their parents wanted to be able to call or text them. Before choosing to give a child a phone, think about whether or not they understand the rules and values you expect them to follow when they’re using it. If you choose not to give them a phone, go over strategies they can use to reach you if they ever need to. (These will also come in handy when they’re older if their phone runs out of power.) You can also give them a “dumb” phone that doesn’t have apps or internet access. Remember that to kids, a phone means more independence. That means if the phone doesn’t give them more freedom online, it should mean more freedom offline (like being

able to go places or make plans with friends on their own.)

## CONTROL

In general, kids at this age are less likely to use privacy settings than older youth. It's important to investigate the privacy controls of any apps or other tools they use, to start these off at the strictest levels, and to start to teach them how to manage their own privacy.

Use messaging or video-chat apps so that your kids can talk to their friends when gaming, without having to use the game's chat system.

Kids at this age who have phones are less likely to have data plans than older children and more likely to rely on Wi-Fi. Scammers sometimes set up fake Wi-Fi networks with names like "Library Network" so they can spy on users, so you should help your kids find sources of secure public Wi-Fi and make sure they recognize the legitimate network.

## CO-VIEW

Co-viewing (and co-playing) with family members and friends can be a positive social experience, but kids this age still need prompting and encouragement to critically engage with media content. When you're watching or playing with kids, don't be afraid to use the Pause button so you can talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable – or to point out positive examples.

It can be an eye-opener for children to realize that all media are written and created by people with their own biases and experiences, as well as the media the creators themselves have seen. Understanding that

media are not "windows on reality" but instead the result of choices that media creators made has a big effect on media's impact on kids.

You can point out the people who were involved in making a media work that you're co-viewing: How did their choices – about what was included, what was left out, and how things were presented – affect its impact? Making media can be a great activity to do together, too, and helps them understand that all media were made by people.

Ask kids whether they think their favourite YouTuber, streamer or influencer was paid to promote a particular game, toy or other product: "Do you think she was paid to unbox that? If not, do you think the company gave it to her for free? Would that change what you think about it?"

Children this age still benefit from physical reassurance after seeing something frightening. It's also possible to help them understand that a media work isn't real and to recognize conventions – such as the idea that the hero always wins in the end – that will let them put a frightening image or moment into perspective. It can also help to talk about the ways that media create tension or provoke fear (like frightening music) so they can recognize when it's being used.

## COACH

Kids this age may seem tech-savvy, but eight in ten still think their parents know more about tech than they do. Establish and clearly communicate rules about using devices and about what kids can, should, and should not do online. They understand the reasons behind rules but, at the same time, are more likely than younger children to push back against rules they

don't think are reasonable, so make sure the rules are practical and reflect values instead of being arbitrary.

It's also important to revisit rules you established earlier on and remind them to come to you if anything unpleasant happens to them online.

This is also a stage where children begin communicating more with offline friends through digital means such as instant messaging, but they need to learn coping mechanisms and explicitly learn and practice how to deal with the absence of emotional cues in that medium. Remind them to pay attention to things like tension and heart rate to identify what they're feeling when using media. Help them develop conscious strategies for avoiding, minimizing, and resolving conflict online like assuming the best about the other person, talking things out in person and taking a break before responding.

Digital parenting expert Devorah Heitner suggests asking these questions:

- What would you do if you're on a group text and someone says they want to restart the group text without you?
- What will you do if someone says something mean about a teacher or another friend?
- What could you say to a friend who is texting you too much, and you need a break?

## Additional Resources

### FOR PARENTS

[Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#)

[Dealing with Fear and Media](#)

[Family Guidelines for New Tech Devices](#)

[Four Tips for Managing Your Kids' Screen Time](#)

[Helping Kids Get a Healthy Start with Phones](#)

[Protecting Your Privacy on Commercial Apps and Websites](#)

[Talking to Kids About Advertising](#)

[Understanding the Rating Systems](#)

[Using Parental Controls](#)

### FOR KIDS

[Break the Fake: How to Tell What's True Online](#)

[Digital Citizenship: Building Empathy and Dealing with Conflict Online](#)

[How to Search the Internet Effectively](#)

[How to Be an Active Witness](#)

[What to Do If Someone is Mean to You Online](#)