Keeping Children Safe Online

By District Attorney Summer Stephan

Given the young age at which kids are accessing the Internet and the huge role technology is bound to play in their lives going forward, speaking with them about online safety early is the best strategy to keep them safe from online predators and scammers.

Not a day goes by that we don’t see a news story involving a company getting hacked, personal data being leaked or a threat of infrastructure failing due to malicious actors. The same is true for predators hacking into children’s lives.

Strangers approach children online daily through social media or games, for example. It’s important to be aware of ways predators can access your children, to set limits on what your child can access online and to set time limits.

Here are some tips to help you keep kids protected.

* Place your computer in a common area of the house.
* Do not allow smart phones to charge your child’s bedroom overnight.
* Encourage children to report bullying or if they have posted something they now regret.
* Make reasonable rules and set time and use limits. Also enforce them.
* Do not allow children to go into private cat rooms, especially when you are not present.
* Talk to children about how the Internet is not private, ever.
* Never allow your children to arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met online without your permission.
* Do not let your child give out any personal information of any kind on the Internet.
* Be sensitive to changes in your child's behaviors that may indicate they are being victimized.
* Be alert to a teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to your children or giving them gifts.
* Utilize your Internet service provider's parental controls and commercial blocking and filtering software tools.
* Monitor your child’s cell phone and social media accounts.
* If you allow your child to have a cell phone or participate in social media websites, ensure you have the password to their phone as well as their password to every social media app.
* Have privacy settings but remember even friends can share your child’s private posts by taking a screenshot.
* Remember, it’s common for kids to have more than one account on a social media site.
* Don’t ignore online bullying. Mean comments on social media hurts and harms a child as much as if it were done in person.

Make sure your children are comfortable speaking to you about cyber bullying or other incidents that make them uncomfortable. If any incidents happen that you believe may be criminal in nature, report it to local law enforcement as quickly as possible.

As your District Attorney, I’m committed to increasing communication and accessibility between the [DA’s Office](https://www.sdcda.org/office/meet-da.html) and the public. I hope these consumer and public safety tips have been helpful.