



Top Ten Digital Safety Tips For Parents **Gwenn Schurgin O'Keeffe, MD**

1. Privacy Settings “On” = You Are Cleared to Post!

By having your privacy settings “on” for posts and pictures, your information is completely private and only accessible by people you allow as friends. This is the best way to control your information in the digital world. As a second safeguard, change your passwords at least once a year and reinforce to your kids to not share passwords with friends.

2. Rules in the digital world apply in the real world, too.

We teach our kids how to function as good citizens in the “real” world from the time they are old enough to walk and talk. As they embark upon their digital lives, we need to take the same approach and reinforce the same lessons of good citizenship. It's really very simple: be as nice to people when communicating through technology as you do when communicating without technology.

3. Post digital messages the RITE way.

To help your kids and teens learn to post messages in a positive way, use these tips to make sure the message is **RITE**:

Read the message before you send it. Is it hurtful or misleading? If so, don't send it.
Image if you received the message. If the message would hurt you, don't send it.
Think about sending the message later so you can re-read it.
Enter button should only be pressed after RIT are done

4. Dr. Gwenn's Simple TECH Support For Your Family.

Catch up for you...safety for all.

Talk to your kids about their digital activities on all their devices.
Educate yourself on digital issues and apps that your kids are engaged in.
Check your child's computer, game systems and cell phone with your child and discuss any problem areas you may notice.
Have a family house rule plan for digital use that everyone follows - adults and kids.

5. Preventing cyberbullying and sexting truly takes a village.

Behaving well in the digital world takes practice and involves parents, teachers and the community. As our kids get older, share with them at home and school the resources they need so they can get help should an issue such as cyberbullying or sexting occur. Bullying and harrasment is never acceptable and for it to stop our kids at every age need to know where to turn to for help.

6. Monitoring Programs Best Use is For Family Discussion.

There are many programs available to help monitor your kids' computer and cell phone use. Some are free and some are via a fee. The biggest asset of all these programs is to monitor what your kids are doing and use what you learn to talk to your kids and help them improve their online behaviors. Most families, however, find that these programs are not necessary and open discussion at family meals works just as well.

7. Digital mistakes are as serious as real world mistakes.

Mistakes are how we learn. Our kids will make mistakes in the real world and in the digital world. Just as we don't blindly defend our kids when they make mistakes in the real world, we shouldn't blindly defend their digital mistakes, such as sexting and cyberbulling. While some mistakes may be inadvertent some may be more significant. If we discover our kids have engaged in one of these more serious digital activities, the best way to support our kids is to get them the help they need so the behavior will stop and they will learn from their mistakes.

8. What goes online stays online.

While it is true we can delete a post or an image, by the time we've done that, it's already been copied by that website's back up system so it never truly goes away. The only way to guarantee something we don't want others to see is not passed on is to not post it to begin with. In addition, we can protect ourselves with proper privacy settings and making sure the message we are posting is RITE (see above).

9.Friends are really people we know offline.

Our teens tend to collect online friends very quickly but they know few of them well. This practice opens our teens up to digital risk because they are sharing their lives with virtual strangers. The best rule of thumb is to coach our kids and teens to "friend" people they have a true connection with through school, teams, and community groups, as well as family.

10.You are your child's best cyber safety net!

Be involved with your kids digital life and show an interest in what they are doing. The digital world is a phenomenal and amazing place to co-exist with your kids. You can learn a great deal about them and they can learn a great deal about you. Be involved. Text with them daily. Share pictures and videos. By being connected together and sharing the digital space with them, you'll be closer as a family and, should a problem arise, they will know they can turn to you.