

Stay Safe Online

A Platform-by-Platform Safety Guide for Kids and Teens

A fifteen-page kid-friendly safety guide — what each major platform looks like from the inside, what to watch for, and what to do if something goes wrong (including a step-by-step sextortion playbook on page 11). Pairs with the parent-side platform walkthroughs on this site.

Free to print, photocopy, and share. No login, no email capture, no tracking.

Page 1 — The Internet Is Powerful. And Risky.

The internet is one of the most amazing tools ever invented. You can learn anything, build anything, find your people, share what you make, and stay close to friends and family. None of that is going away.

But the same tools that connect you to good people connect bad people to you. Predators, scammers, and bullies use apps you already have on your phone. They are good at what they do. They count on kids not seeing them coming.

A few truths to start with:

- Not everyone online is who they claim to be. The cute teen in the DMs may be a 40-year-old in another country.
- “Disappearing” messages do not actually disappear. Anyone can screenshot or screen-record.
- “Private” group chats can be screenshotted by any member.
- Once something is sent, you no longer control where it goes.
- Your safety always matters more than being polite or not making someone mad.

This booklet is organized by app:

Flip to the page for the platform you actually use. Each section explains how predators and scammers use that app, and exactly what to do to stay safe. The last few pages cover what to do if something goes wrong — read those even if you do not think you will ever need them.

*If something online ever makes your stomach drop, that feeling is information. Trust it. Tell a trusted adult.
You will not get in trouble for keeping yourself safe.*

Page 2 — TikTok

The algorithm is fast. So are the bad actors.

What can go wrong:

- Viral “challenges” that pressure kids to do dangerous, illegal, or humiliating things.
- Strangers sliding into DMs after they see your video go up.
- Predators commenting on videos of younger kids.
- Posting videos that accidentally show your school logo, street, bus stop, or house number.
- Algorithm pulling you toward harmful content (eating disorders, self-harm, hate, extreme views).

Protect yourself:

- Set your account to private. Approve every follower yourself.
- Turn off DMs from people you do not follow.
- Turn off comments from strangers, or restrict to friends.
- Never duet, stitch, or react to videos from random adults.
- Look at every video before you post: is your school name in the frame? Your address visible? A street sign?
- If a stranger says they are a “scout,” “model agent,” or “manager,” it is almost always fake.
- If a challenge could hurt you or someone else, it is not worth a single view.

Real talk: a “dare” that goes wrong does not get you views. It gets you to the ER. The internet does not love you back.

Page 3 — Instagram

Where curated feeds quietly hurt people.

What can go wrong:

- Predators in DMs pretending to be teens, photographers, or modeling agents.
- Fake “sugar daddy” and “money flip” scams aimed directly at teens.
- Catfish accounts using stolen photos of attractive people to build trust.
- Body-image damage from comparing yourself to filtered, edited, professional photos.
- Story location tags showing exactly where you are right now.

Protect yourself:

- Keep your account private. Block any unknown follower without guilt.
- Never accept “modeling,” “brand deal,” or “sponsorship” offers from strangers in DMs.
- Turn off location tags on stories and posts.
- Audit your followers. If you do not actually know them in real life, remove them.
- Reverse-image-search a stranger’s profile photo before trusting them — you can usually spot a catfish in seconds.
- Mute or unfollow accounts that make you feel worse about yourself. Your feed should not hurt.

If anyone offers you money, gifts, or “sponsorships” in exchange for photos — even “innocent” ones — it is a trap. Block, screenshot, and tell an adult.

Page 4 — Snapchat

“Disappearing” is a marketing word, not a safety feature.

What can go wrong:

- People believing snaps are gone forever. They are not. Screenshots, screen-recording apps, and second cameras all exist.
- Sextortion that almost always starts on Snapchat — because predators count on you trusting that the snap will vanish.
- Snap Map showing your exact location to your contacts.
- “Streaks” pressuring kids to send photos every single day, even when they do not want to.
- Strangers added through Quick Add or by username trade groups.

Protect yourself:

- Turn on Ghost Mode in Snap Map so no one sees your location.
- Only add people you actually know in real life. Real life. Not “met on Discord.”
- Never send a photo you would not be okay with the entire school seeing.
- If someone pressures you for photos, that is your sign to stop the conversation, not your sign to send one.
- If you get a screenshot threat, do not delete the messages. You will need them as evidence.

Assume every snap is permanent. Predators record. Friends screenshot. Apps glitch. There is no truly disappearing message.

Page 5 — Discord

Servers are not always what they look like.

What can go wrong:

- Private servers built around a game or fandom that slowly turn into grooming spaces.
- Adults pretending to be teens to befriend you, then move you to DMs.
- Direct messages full of explicit images sent without warning.
- Pressure to move conversations to other platforms (“Let’s talk on Snap, it’s easier”).
- Fan servers run by people who use mod power to manipulate younger members.

Protect yourself:

- Only join servers you trust — official ones, or ones run by people you actually know.
- Turn off DMs from server members in your privacy settings.
- If a stranger tries to move the chat off Discord, that is a red flag every single time.
- If a server’s vibe shifts — sexual jokes, secrets, weird “initiations” — leave. You do not owe anyone an explanation.
- Never share your real name, school, address, or photos in any server.
- Report and block. Mods of decent servers want to know about creeps.

If anyone asks you to keep your friendship a secret from your parents, that is not a friend. That is grooming.

Page 6 — Roblox, Fortnite, Minecraft & Other Games

Voice chat is the most underrated risk in gaming.

What can go wrong:

- Strangers using voice chat to befriend kids, then escalate.
- In-game scams (“trade me your skin, I’ll give you something better” — they will not).
- Adults building “guild” or “clan” friendships that move into private DMs.
- Free-Robux, free-V-Bucks, and free-skins links that steal accounts or worse.
- Custom servers and private worlds with no moderation.

Protect yourself:

- Never share your real name, school, age, or location in voice chat or in-game.
- Use a username that is not your real name and does not include your birth year.
- If a player asks to move to Discord, Snap, or text “to talk more,” say no and tell a parent.
- Never click “free currency” links. They are 100 percent of the time scams.
- Turn off voice chat with strangers if you are under 13. Use party voice with friends only.
- Report toxic, weird, or suggestive behavior in-game. Then block.

A grown-up who really wants to be friends with a 12-year-old in a video game is telling you something important about themselves. Believe it.

Page 7 — YouTube

The recommendation feed has its own agenda.

What can go wrong:

- Comment sections full of predators targeting younger creators.
- Algorithms that push you from “normal” videos toward extreme content (eating disorders, hate, conspiracy, self-harm) very quickly.
- Channels that look like kids’ content but contain disturbing material designed to slip past filters.
- “YouTuber” challenges that are dangerous, illegal, or staged to feel achievable.
- Predators messaging young creators through YouTube DMs or off-platform once they find their other accounts.

Protect yourself:

- Disable comments on any videos you post if you are under 18 — or use heavy moderation.
- Do not engage with strangers in comments, even when they are nice. Especially when they are nice.
- If your watch history starts feeling dark or extreme, clear it and reset your recommendations.
- Tell an adult if a content creator messages you privately or asks you to come to another platform.
- Treat “support my channel by sending…” requests as scams unless they come from someone you actually know.

Becoming a young creator can be wonderful — but it also makes you a target. Talk to a parent before posting publicly under your real face or name.

Page 8 — Dating Apps

These are not made for you. Predators know that.

Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, Grindr, and other dating apps are for adults. Adult dating apps with “teen modes” do not exist for your safety — they exist because the company wants the data of as many users as possible. Predators target teens on adult apps on purpose.

What can go wrong:

- Adults posing as teens to lure kids who lied about their age.
- Human traffickers using these apps as a recruiting tool. This is not a scary movie plot. It is real and documented.
- Blackmail after meeting in person, taking photos, or being filmed without consent.
- Sexual assault — because there is no real verification that the person you are meeting is who they said.

Protect yourself:

- If you are under 18, do not download these apps. Period. There is no clever workaround that makes it safe.
- Never meet anyone in person you only met online — on any app.
- If a friend is using an adult app, tell a trusted adult. You may save their life.

Trafficking starts with a stranger online who seems to really get you, who promises to take you somewhere better, and who asks you to keep the relationship secret. If any of those three things happens, tell an adult right now.

Page 9 — Group Chats

The fastest way to lose control of a photo or a reputation.

What can go wrong:

- Bullying that pile-ons happen in seconds, often when one person is asleep or off their phone.
- Pressure to send embarrassing or explicit photos to “prove” you belong.
- “Burn books” and rating chats that target a specific kid.
- Photos and screenshots from “private” chats spreading to the whole school in a day.
- New members getting added without your knowledge — including adults posing as classmates.

Protect yourself:

- Never send a photo or message in a group chat you would not be okay with everyone in your school seeing.
- If a chat turns into bullying or pressuring, leave. You do not owe anyone an exit speech.
- Save evidence before you leave — screenshots of the worst messages.
- Report cyberbullying to a school counselor or trusted adult. They have tools and procedures you do not.
- If you are the one being bullied, this is not your fault. Period. Get help.

Walking away from a toxic group chat is one of the most underrated forms of bravery there is. The kids who do it usually look back later and feel proud.

Page 10 — AI and Deepfakes

Photos and videos can now lie. Confidently.

AI tools can now create realistic fake photos, fake videos, and fake voice recordings of real people — including you. This is sometimes called “deepfake” content. It is being used to bully classmates, blackmail kids, and create fake explicit images of real teens (this is illegal and is being treated more seriously every year).

What can go wrong:

- Someone takes a normal photo of you off social media and uses AI to create a fake explicit image.
- Bullies create a fake video of you saying or doing something you never did.
- Scammers clone a parent or grandparent’s voice and call you with a fake “emergency.”
- Fake news, fake quotes, and fake screenshots designed to ruin reputations.

Protect yourself:

- Keep your accounts private. Less public photos = less material for AI tools to grab.
- If something a relative says on a phone call sounds off, hang up and call them back on a known number.
- Set a family code word for emergencies. If a caller cannot say it, they are not who they claim to be.
- If someone uses fake content to threaten or bully you, save everything and tell an adult immediately.

If anyone creates fake explicit images of you or a friend, this is a serious crime in most states and under federal law. You are the victim. Tell a parent and report it. NCMEC has a free service called Take It Down that can help remove fake explicit images of minors from the internet (TakeItDown.NCMEC.org).

Page 11 — Sextortion: If Someone Threatens You

The most important page in this booklet. Read it before you need it.

Sextortion is when someone gets a sexual or embarrassing photo of you — or claims to — and threatens to share it unless you pay them, send more photos, or do something else they want. The FBI says reports of sextortion of minors have exploded over the last few years. The good news: there is a clear playbook for what to do, and it works.

If it happens to you, do this:

- 1. **STOP** responding. Do not argue, beg, or negotiate. Every reply gives them more power.
- 2. **DO NOT** pay. Paying does not stop them. It tells them you can be squeezed for more.
- 3. **DO NOT** send more photos. Not even “one last one” to make them go away. They will not.
- 4. **SAVE** evidence. Screenshot the threats, the username, the profile, every message. Do not delete the conversation.
- 5. **BLOCK** and **REPORT** the account on the platform. Then close the app, but do not delete it — investigators may need the data.
- 6. **TELL** a trusted adult **RIGHT NOW**. Parent, school counselor, coach, pastor, doctor — someone who can actually help. You will not be in trouble.
- 7. **REPORT** to NCMEC at [CyberTipline.org](https://www.CyberTipline.org) or 1-800-843-5678. They work directly with the FBI and tech companies and can move fast.
- 8. **USE** Take It Down (TakeItDown.NCMEC.org) to help remove explicit images of yourself from major platforms — free, anonymous.

You are not in trouble. You are not ruined. You are the victim of a crime. The adults you tell will be on your side, and there are entire teams of FBI agents whose actual job is catching the people who do this. They want your case.

If you are reading this and it has not happened to you — fold the corner of this page. Show it to a friend. Tell them where the page is. The kids who survive sextortion best are almost always the ones who already knew the playbook before they ever needed it.

Page 12 — Cyberbullying and Scams

Cyberbullying — what to do:

- Screenshot everything. Save it before you block.
- Block the accounts. You do not owe a bully your attention.
- Report the accounts on the platform.
- Tell an adult — a parent, teacher, or counselor. Schools take cyberbullying seriously, especially with evidence.
- If threats are involved, contact police. Threats are not protected speech.

Cyberbullying — what NOT to do:

- Do not retaliate. It gives them what they want and can get you in trouble.
- Do not post revenge content. Once it's up, you cannot take it back.
- Do not handle it alone. Bullies count on isolation.

Common scams aimed at kids and teens:

- “Free” Robux / V-Bucks / skins / followers — always a scam.
- “Money flip” — “send \$50 and I’ll send back \$500.” Never works.
- Fake giveaways from cloned celebrity or influencer accounts.
- Crypto and “investment” pitches from someone in your DMs.
- Fake “sugar daddy” offers — the goal is photos, account access, or worse.
- “Gift card emergencies” — “My phone is broken, can you buy iTunes cards for me?”

The universal scam-spotter test:

If a stranger online is offering something for free, asking you to keep a secret, asking for money or gift cards, or pressuring you to act fast — that is the scam. Every time. There is no exception.

Real adults do not ask kids for money, photos, or secrets. If a grown-up is doing any of those things, they are not a real friend. They are a problem you should report.

Page 13 — Protect Your Information

The single best thing you can do online is share less. The less a stranger can find out about you, the less they can use against you.

Never share online:

- Your full name.
- Your school name, mascot, or jersey number.
- Your home address — or photos that show your house, street, or driveway.
- Your phone number.
- Your daily routine (“I walk home from practice every day at 4”).
- Passwords — not even with your best friend, not even “just to log in real quick.”
- Private photos. Anything you would not want a teacher or grandparent to see.
- Vacation plans before or during the trip — “we’re gone all week” is a gift to burglars.

Lock things down:

- Use strong passwords. A long phrase is stronger than a short scramble.
- Use a different password for every important account. Use a password manager if your parents help you set one up.
- Turn on two-factor authentication on every account that offers it.
- Set every social account to private.
- Turn off location sharing in apps that do not actually need it.
- Audit your followers and friends every few months. Anyone you would not invite to your birthday — remove.

“Oversharing” is not a personality. It is the front door predators walk through. Sharing less is a power move.

Page 14 — If Something Bad Happens

Maybe something has already happened to you. Maybe it has happened to a friend. Maybe you are reading this just in case. Whatever the reason, here is the plan.

The five steps, in order:

- 1. Stop communicating with the person. No more replies.
- 2. Screenshot everything. Profile, username, messages, threats, photos they sent you, the URL.
- 3. Block and report the account on the platform.
- 4. Tell a trusted adult immediately. Not in a week. Not after you “handle it.” Now.
- 5. Report to authorities if it involves threats, sexual content, or someone trying to meet you in person.

Who counts as a trusted adult:

- A parent or guardian.
- A grandparent, aunt, uncle, or older sibling.
- A teacher, school counselor, or principal.
- A coach you trust.
- A pastor, youth leader, or family friend.
- Your doctor.

Numbers and websites to know:

- NCMEC CyberTipline: 1-800-843-5678 or [CyberTipline.org](https://www.CyberTipline.org) — the place to report online exploitation.
- Take It Down: [TakeItDown.NCMEC.org](https://www.TakeItDown.NCMEC.org) — helps remove explicit images of minors from the internet.
- FBI: tips.fbi.gov or 1-800-CALL-FBI — for sextortion and serious online threats.
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988. For any kind of crisis, not just suicide.
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741.
- 9-1-1: If you or someone else is in immediate physical danger.

Page 15 — One Last Thing

If something has already happened, please hear this clearly:

You are not in trouble. You are not ruined. You are not alone. You deserve protection. And it is available.

Predators count on shame. They count on you not telling. They count on you thinking you are the only one this has ever happened to. None of that is true.

Every single day, kids tell a parent, a counselor, or law enforcement what is happening to them — and every single day, those kids start getting their lives back. The hardest part is the first sentence. The rest gets easier from there.

Be the kid who tells. Be the friend who listens. Be the one who already had this booklet folded open before anyone needed it.

Stay safe. Stay loud. Stay free.

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Citations follow Chicago Notes-Bibliography style.

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