

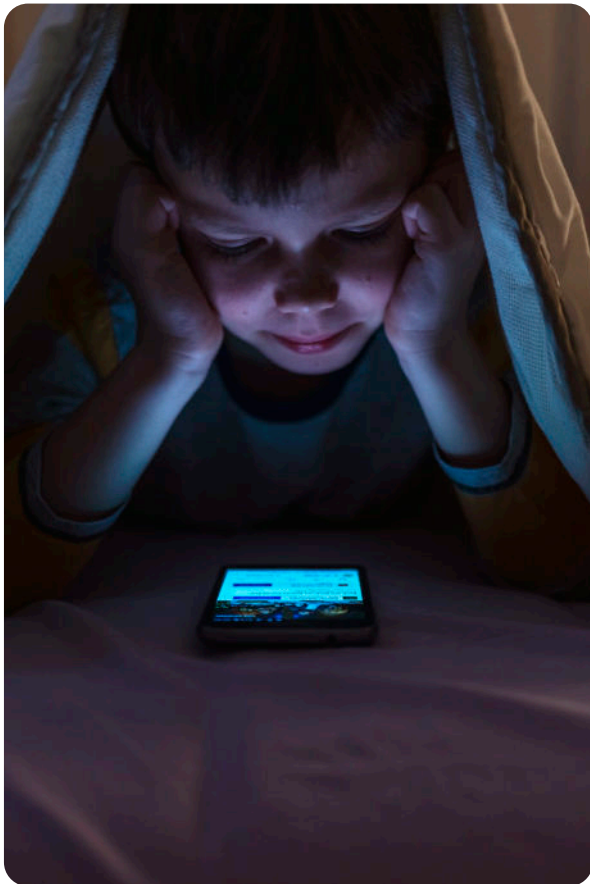
Protect Your Child Online

We live in a screen-saturated culture. Many parents are aware there are dangers lurking online. But there's a lot of bad information and myths — sometimes they even come from trusted sources. Learn how to protect your child online!

Online Harms (direct): *cyberbullying, access to drugs, sextortion, pornography, dangerous challenges, access to gambling, and content encouraging eating disorders and other mental health problems (see our other one-pagers for more information).*

Online Harms (indirect): *With teens spending an average of 8+ hours on entertainment media per day, time online crowds out time for activities essential for teens' healthy development, including sleep, physical activity, time outdoors, in-person socializing, studying/learning, reflection, and daydreaming.*

▶ Myths vs. Reality



Myth 1: If your child has strict limits on their tech and/or does not have a smartphone or social media, they will not develop the 21st century skills necessary to be a successful adult.

Reality: Kids can learn to type, email, do research, etc. through school and/or shared family computers. Digital devices frequently crowd out time to build the skills children actually need to be “future-ready” personally and professionally, like interpersonal skills, empathy, and creative problem-solving.

Myth 2: Teens' peers are most important for their mental health.

Reality: Teens' relationship with their parents is a more powerful predictor of their mental health than their relationship with their peers (Afriat et al, 2022).

Myth 3: Teens having smartphones and social media is inevitable, and once you've given it, you can't take it away.

Reality: It's not always easy, but parents can and do opt to *not* give their children these products. Parents can also take these products back from their children.

Scan for full kit and more resources on each topic's tab



Online Harms Prevention Action Kit
fairplayforkids.org/onlineharmskit



▶ Tips for Protecting Your Child

Every step you take can make a big difference to your child. You don't have to do it all or do it all at once. You can do this! And don't forget — it's okay for your children to be different.

- **Delay giving a smartphone/ social media** as long as possible.
- **You can opt *not* to give your child an internet-connected device or social media.** Some families find this easier than policing time and content on devices.
- **If you have already given your child/teen a smartphone, you can still transition back to a basic phone or no phone** (see tips here). If your child exhibits significant phone dependency, seek support from a mental health professional. Reset Your Child's Brain outlines a detailed plan.
- **Use text-and-call-only phones.** Here are a few options (NOT endorsements — please do your own research to see if these are right for you):
 - [Wisephone](#)
 - [Pinwheel](#)
 - [Light Phone](#)
 - [Sunbeam Phones](#)
 - [Punk Phones](#)
- **Use parental controls.** Often it takes a combined effort of 2+ parental control apps. Be aware that children sometimes find ways around these safeguards. *Note: Do NOT use parental controls created by social media companies. They make money by maximizing your child's time online.*

▶ Start a Conversation

- Ask other adults and caregivers in your child's environment about their thoughts/knowledge about online harms. Share the resources below.
- Be direct — ask your children:

What works well for you online?

What doesn't work well for you online? If there is one thing that hurts more than it helps — what is it?

What have you experienced or witnessed when it comes to online bullying?

Do you know someone at school who is being targeted, harassed, or who struggles to disconnect from their phone/online life?

Have you come across anything online that worries you?

- Make conversations about tech normal and proactive. [Tech Talk Tuesday blogs](#) has a large bank of topics with good conversation prompts at the end of each blog.

▶ Take Action

- **Create a shared knowledge base** — share the resources below with your partner, your children, other adults who spend time with your children, and your community.
- **Create a peer group of parents** — even finding just 1-2 other aligned families will make it much easier.
- **Give your child real-world independence.** Consider the [Let Grow Challenge](#).
- **Help your child build “protective factors.”** Protective factors increase resiliency and support your child's mental health.