



# How to Teach Teens Internet Safety



## THE CHALLENGE

News reports give you the impression that the Internet is a haven for cyberbullies, sexual predators, and identity thieves. You are concerned for good reason: Your teenager is often online and seems oblivious to the dangers.

You *can* teach your teenager Internet safety. First, though, consider some things you should know about life online.



## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

### **Teens can access the Internet on mobile devices.**

The rule that the computer should be placed in a common area of the house still has merit. But with a tablet or smartphone connected to the Internet, your teenager may have more access to the online world than ever—and *without* your supervision.

**Some teens spend excessive time online.** “I turn on the computer intending to check my e-mail for five minutes and end up watching videos for hours,” admits a 19-year-old girl. “I need a lot of self-control.”

### **Teens might reveal online more than they should.**

Shady people can piece together a teenager’s online comments and photos to find out such information as where he or she lives and goes to school and at what times no one in the family will be at home.

**Some teens do not understand the repercussions of what they post.** What is posted online *stays* online. Sometimes embarrassing comments and photos are discovered later—for example, by a prospective employer doing a background check on a job applicant.

Despite such concerns, remember this: *The Internet is not your enemy.* Rather, what leads to trouble is *unwise* use of the Internet.

▶ The fact that some people have auto accidents does not make it wrong to drive a car. The same principle applies to the use of the Internet. Your teenager needs to learn to “drive” it cautiously



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Teach your teen priorities and time-management skills.** Part of becoming a responsible adult involves learning to put first things first. Family communication, homework, and chores are more important than casual Internet use. If the amount of time your teen spends online is a concern, set limits—even using a timer if necessary.—*Bible principle: Philippians 1:10.*

**Teach your teen to think before posting.** Help your teenager to ask such questions as: Could the comment I am about to post hurt someone? How will this photo affect my reputation? Would I feel embarrassed if my parents or other adults saw this photo or comment? What would they conclude about me if they saw it? What would I think of someone who posted such a comment or photo?—*Bible principle: Proverbs 10:23.*

**“Kids know more about technology.  
Parents know more about life”**

### **Teach your teen to live by values—not just rules.**

You cannot look over your teenager’s shoulder every moment of the day. Besides, your goal as a parent is not to control your children but to help them “have their powers of discernment trained to distinguish both right and wrong.” (Hebrews 5:14) So, instead of emphasizing rules and punishment as the *primary* factor, appeal to your teenager’s moral sense. What type of reputation does he want to have? For what type of character traits does she want to be known? Your goal is to help your teenager make wise decisions, whether you are there or not.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 3:21.*

Navigating the Internet, like driving a car, requires good judgment—not just technological ability. Your guidance as a parent, therefore, is crucial. After all, it is as Internet-safety expert Parry Aftab observes: “Kids know more about technology. Parents know more about life.” ■

## KEY SCRIPTURES

“Make sure of the more important things.”—Philippians 1:10.

“Engaging in shameful conduct is like a game to the stupid one, but wisdom is for the man of discernment.”—Proverbs 10:23.

“Safeguard practical wisdom and thinking ability.”—Proverbs 3:21.

**“Before your child enters the online world, he should be consistently demonstrating the admirable character traits you’re striving to cultivate—such as kindness, restraint, tolerance, inclusiveness—because they will get tested.”**

—*Letting Go With Love and Confidence*, by Kenneth Ginsburg and Susan FitzGerald.