

Irish Examiner

# Digital Parenting

Keeping  
your kids  
safe online

---

Part of the SAME RULES APPLY campaign  
#samerulesapply

---



# Welcome



We're delighted to be joining forces with the National Parents Council and the Irish Examiner, with the generous support of Accenture, to bring you this digital parenting guide. It forms part of our **#SameRulesApply** campaign and is aimed at supporting you as parents to navigate the often choppy waters of our children being online. Filled with practical tips and useful resources we hope it will help steer you in the right direction and give you confidence to support your children's online lives more effectively. We've loads more resources on our website, so visit the link below to learn more!

**Alex Cooney**, CEO, CyberSafeKids  
[www.cybersafekids.ie](http://www.cybersafekids.ie)



Thank you for accessing this resource which we've developed to support you in your digital parenting. There's a lot of information here which may feel overwhelming, but as well as reading it all at once, you can return to it as a useful reference tool when you need guidance. However you use this resource, remember the most important thing you can do as a parent to guide your child safely is to develop a strong relationship with them, make sure you listen, and have regular conversations about what is happening in their digital lives.

**Aine Lynch**, CEO, National Parents Council  
[www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie)

# Digital Parenting

## before we get started...

**It is never too early to think about your child's safety online**

Very young users should never access the internet alone: they should be supervised at all times. It can be easy to access inappropriate content without intending to. You should guide your child as they discover the online world.

As children mature, they will inevitably want more privacy but it's essential that you continue to regularly monitor and supervise their online activity in an atmosphere of trust and transparency. This might include checking their devices and apps for inappropriate content and contacts.

While challenges or harms in the online world may depend on the age of your children, ongoing dialogue and discussion around the online world is essential, regardless of age. This normalising of discussing online life is the only way to keep your children safe and ensure their experiences online are as positive as they can be.



# Contents

## GETTING STARTED

Introducing Technology.....	5
Developing Healthy Habits.....	6

## GOOD PRACTICE

Using Parental Controls.....	7
Establishing Ground Rules.....	8
Understanding Age Restrictions.....	9

## GETTING STUCK IN

Social Media & Gaming.....	10
Managing Privacy.....	11
Privacy Loss.....	12
Cyberbullying.....	13-15
Privacy Loss.....	16
Grooming.....	17
Sexting & Pornography.....	18
Gam(bl)ing.....	19

## TAKING A STEP BACK

Digital Media Literacy.....	20-21
-----------------------------	-------

## PARENTAL RESOURCES

Top Parental Tips.....	22
Developing a Family Agreement.....	23-25
Useful Websites.....	26

# Introducing Technology

As parents you may feel overwhelmed about how to protect your children from **the risks** of being online, but it's important to acknowledge **the benefits**: having fun and socialising, or learning and developing creative skills.

Providing support by guiding your child safely means they are less likely to go online secretly and access inappropriate content.

■ Talk with your child in an age-appropriate way about some of the important things to watch out for when going online

■ Have them think about who they talk to online

■ Talk about how they should behave (in the same way as offline!)

■ Supervise them at all times when they are young and first exploring the online world

■ Introduce devices and online platforms (social media & gaming) slowly and carefully

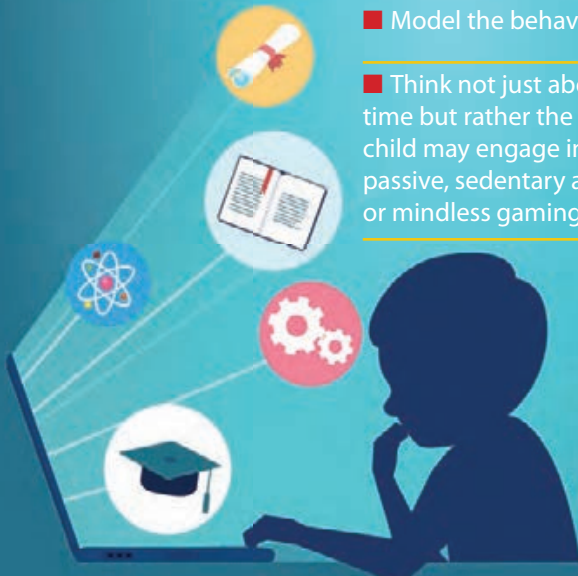


# Developing healthy habits

**Think quality not quantity!** Children need clear guidelines and boundaries. Screen time encompasses almost everything we do in our daily lives, and if you have set a time limit for each day – what is included? Their homework? What about talking to grandparents in another town or country?

Children might be doing something creative online, so **focus on the activities** and **achieving the right balance**, rather than focusing solely on the amount of time spent on screens.

- Agree clear screen time rules and the different types of online activities.
- Talk about when and where it's appropriate to use screens.
- Agree times when screens are and aren't allowed in the home (meal times and bedtime may be a good start to the not-allowed list!).
- Model the behaviours you want to see yourself.
- Think not just about the quantity of screen time but rather the **quality of activities** your child may engage in. Minimise time spent doing passive, sedentary activities - i.e. passive scrolling or mindless gaming.



## QUALITY OVER QUANTITY



# Using Parental Controls

**Most smart devices and online platforms** have built-in controls that allow you to limit time, restrict access to certain content, and switch off functions like direct messaging, chat rooms or shopping.

Both Apple and Android have **family management systems built-in** to monitor individual devices.



■ **Filtering controls** are useful at preventing children from accidentally encountering harmful content.

■ Minimise the risk of inappropriate content by **activating 'Safe Search'** in your search engine.

■ Many apps and games give their users the option of buying additional game functionality, and a host of extras. Children can easily make purchases without even realising. **Disable in-app purchases** using your phone or device settings.

■ There are many resources and websites to help, as well as device or console manufacturer's websites.

■ With so many devices and platforms, 'How to' videos on YouTube can often be a good place to start for all of these!

# Setting **Ground Rules**

**Be the best role model for your child.** Modelling behaviour is the most powerful way you can influence your child's behaviour.

If there is a rule about no phones at the dinner table – that means for everyone! Using **your** phone at the dinner table (**is it really that important?**) may send very mixed messages.

**As parents or guardians** we can justify our use of screens at the dinner table by saying that “it’s for work” or “it’s important”, but what young people are doing online is also very important to them.

■ This is really about modelling behaviour, so ask yourself... can it wait?

■ Be conscious of how many times you're picking your phone up and looking at the screen in their presence

■ Avoid relying on screens to keep your children occupied – this confuses messaging on healthy habits

■ There may be different rules for you as the parent when it comes to internet use, as for adults generally in life: it's important that you discuss and explain this to children.





# Establishing **Age Restrictions**

**Did you know?** GDPR regulations require an Age of Digital Consent. **In Ireland the digital age of consent is 16.** For data collection, teenagers between the ages of 13 and 16 years old must have parental permission to sign-up to social media services.

Most social media platforms and services have a minimum age requirement: 13 years old (others are set at 16 e.g. WhatsApp). **Children under the age of 13 should not have their own social media account.** However most social media platforms do not have robust age-verifications in place making it easier for underage users to sign-up, and research bears out the fact that 87% of 8-12 year olds already have their own social media accounts\*.

Trends show us that children who are younger are still going online, through tablets, gaming consoles and smartphones, with smartphones becoming the most popular device as the teenage years approach.

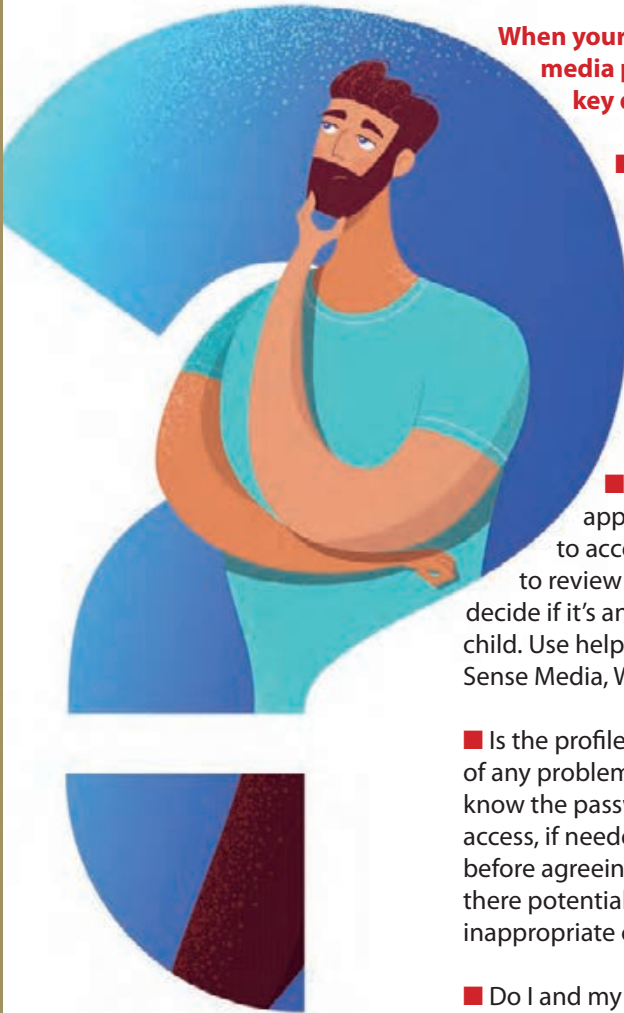


See [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org) for a comprehensive list of age requirements for social media platforms and games.

\*CyberSafeKids Annual Report 2021-22

# Social Media and Gaming

GETTING STUCK IN



**When your child goes onto social media platforms, these are the key questions to ask yourself:**

- Am I comfortable with my child using platforms not designed for children? Ultimately, you need to decide if your child is emotionally equipped to deal with the social pressures that arise such as 'fitting in' or 'being popular'.
- Have I researched the app or game my child wants to access? Take time as a parent to review the app and/or game and decide if it's an appropriate service for your child. Use helpful websites like Common Sense Media, Webwise or PEGI.
- Is the profile set to private? In the event of any problems occurring, do you also know the password to gain immediate access, if needed? Check out the platform before agreeing anything with your child. Is there potential for harassment or accessing inappropriate content?
- Do I and my child understand how the platform works, how to report and manage privacy settings together?

**Check out:**

"Play it safe" is an introductory guide to online gaming for parents



# Privacy: Managing Accounts



Make sure your children understand what different types of personal information exist and what is ok to share (and not to share) online. Many of the most popular social media platforms are set to **public** as a default. This means that **everything** a young person posts can be **seen by anyone** unless this setting is changed. Explore **private** or **friends/contacts only** settings.

It's a good idea to talk about your child's **friends list**. Sometimes, in their desire for popularity, young people become too relaxed about who they'll accept as 'friends'. You and your child should review their list

of online 'friends' regularly, so they are sharing their information only with people they trust. It is unlikely that a child knows 300 or more people offline, so they shouldn't have this many 'followers' online!

Emphasise that **children should NOT reply to any unwanted messages**. Although it may seem obvious, scam artists or predators use messages that draw responses from young people. Make sure your child knows how important it is to ignore them and to speak to you if something bad happens, or (before which) makes them feel uncomfortable.

# PRIVACY



## Location

Many apps and platforms will ask for access to your location through GPS tracking. There's never any occasion when anyone other than you should need to know where your child is, so make sure **location settings are set to off** both on the device your child is using, and within the specific apps and games they are using.



## Location

Similarly, turning **location settings off** means that video and photo content will not be 'geotagged' even if it is posted online, so no information on where or when the video or photo was created can be extracted from the metadata. This is especially important if your child is posting in real time, for example, taking photos on the beach and uploading them to a social media platform while still at the beach.

### Approaching tricky topics

Always ensure children understand that sometimes **inappropriate content will find them** – this isn't their fault or something that they'll be reprimanded for but they must come and tell you. Praise your child for coming to you about the problem, stay calm and don't overreact. Make a plan together to prevent it from happening again.



Location

# Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is something you should talk about before it happens. It's continuously evolving, and can happen to anyone of any age when online. Cyberbullying can be defined as **targeting someone deliberately online using technology such as social media platforms, instant messaging apps and websites**. It can include . . .

- hurtful messages
- excluding people from groups
- posting nasty comments
- using someone's photo without their permission
- threatening to share things about someone online
- using fake profiles or accounts to target, threaten or scare someone
- 'bandwagoning' (getting swept up in the momentum of a group chat)



### Be aware . . .

Cyberbullying does not require face to face contact. It can occur 24-7!



## What Advice Should I Give my Child?

### Tell a Trusted Adult

It may be tempting to try and deal with it by themselves, but parents, guardians and teachers can help.

### Don't Reply

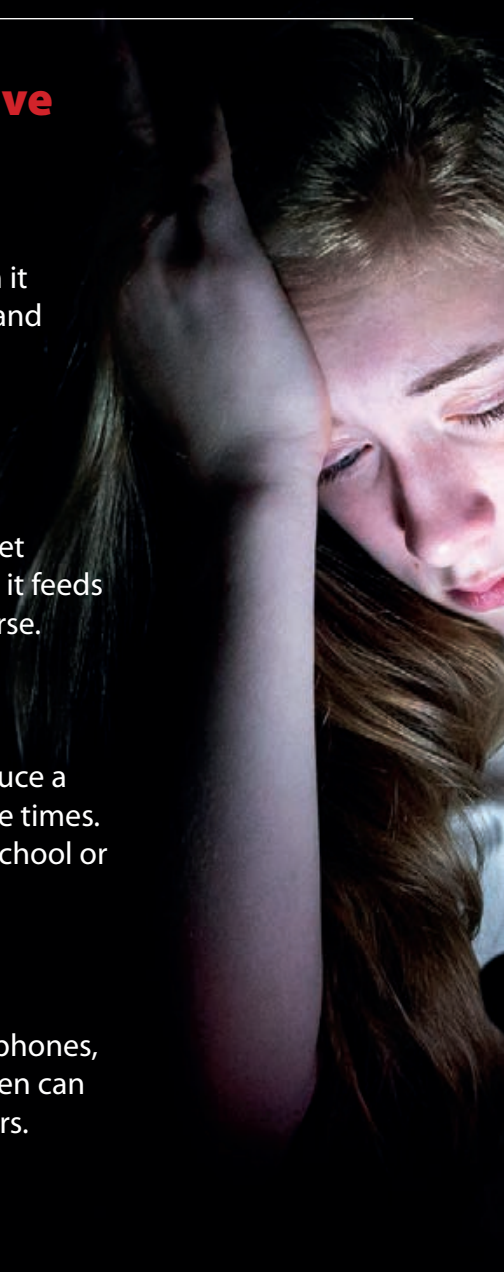
Young people should never reply to messages that harass or annoy them. The bully wants to know they have upset their target. If the bully gets a response it feeds into the problem and makes things worse.

### Keep the Messages

By keeping a list of the nasty messages received your child will be able to produce a record of the bullying, the dates and the times. This will be useful for any subsequent school or Garda investigation.

### Block the Sender

No one needs to put up with someone harassing them. Whether it's via smart phones, social networking or chat rooms, children can block contacts through service providers.



# CYBERB



### Report Problems

Report instances of cyberbullying to service providers that have reporting tools. By using this reporting mechanism, your child will be passing information on to people who may be able to prevent cyberbullying. If the harassment is severe and ongoing, contact Gardai (**Garda Confidential Line on 1800 666 111**).

**\*If cyberbullying content is of a sexually explicit nature and features images of minors it is important not to screenshot, share or delete images as this can be considered legally as distribution without consent. Secure the device in question, reassure the young person and try and ascertain how far the image/s may have been shared.**

Children need to understand the emotional damage cyberbullying can cause. **Teach** empathy skills to your child and emphasise the importance of not standing by while someone else is being bullied. **Encourage them to be an 'upstander' rather than a 'bystander'.** **Remind them that** telling a trusted adult is not 'telling tales'.

# BULLYING

# Privacy Loss

Online, privacy and identity can be protected easily by following some simple steps:

Make sure the account is set to private – this gives the user control over who follows them or sees their content

Disable location settings so that when content is posted in real time, your location will not be compromised

Use in-platform features to better protect privacy such as the 'Close Friends' feature on Instagram or 'Ghost Mode' on Snapchat

As children mature they will increasingly desire privacy but it's important to maintain an open dialogue about online activity. If this is done in a trusting and transparent way it will help mitigate potential problems they may come across.

Open dialogue encourages asking for help rather than hiding the problem, which often exacerbates it further. Ask them to share popular apps or games and what kind of content is currently trending, which in turn will make you one of the hippest parents on the block!



# Grooming

The online world can be an easy place for groomers to contact children and young people to develop inappropriate relationships with them. The ease of taking and sending images and videos means that a lot of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is generated through these kind of channels. Telling signs this may be happening include:

- Wanting or asking to spend more time on the internet
- Being secretive about the sites they visit or who they are talking to online
- Switching screens when you come near them when they are on their laptop, tablet or phone
- Possessing new items you haven't given them, especially electronic devices
- Sexual language/imagery you don't expect them to know or that is not age-appropriate
- Emotions that become more volatile, unexplained distress

## If you suspect a child is being groomed:

- Stay calm, respond positively, reassure them
- Encourage them to talk openly
- Advise that they don't respond or delete
- Use privacy settings, online blocking & reporting mechanisms
- Talk to the Gardai if involving serious harassment, threat of harm or indecent images or videos
- Use expert helplines such as Childline
- Visit <https://www.hotline.ie/> for more information



*\*Ref: Martellozzo, E., Monaghan, A., Adler, J.R., Davidson, J., Leyva, R. and Horvath, M.A.H. (2016): I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it. London: NSPCC*

# Sexting & Pornography

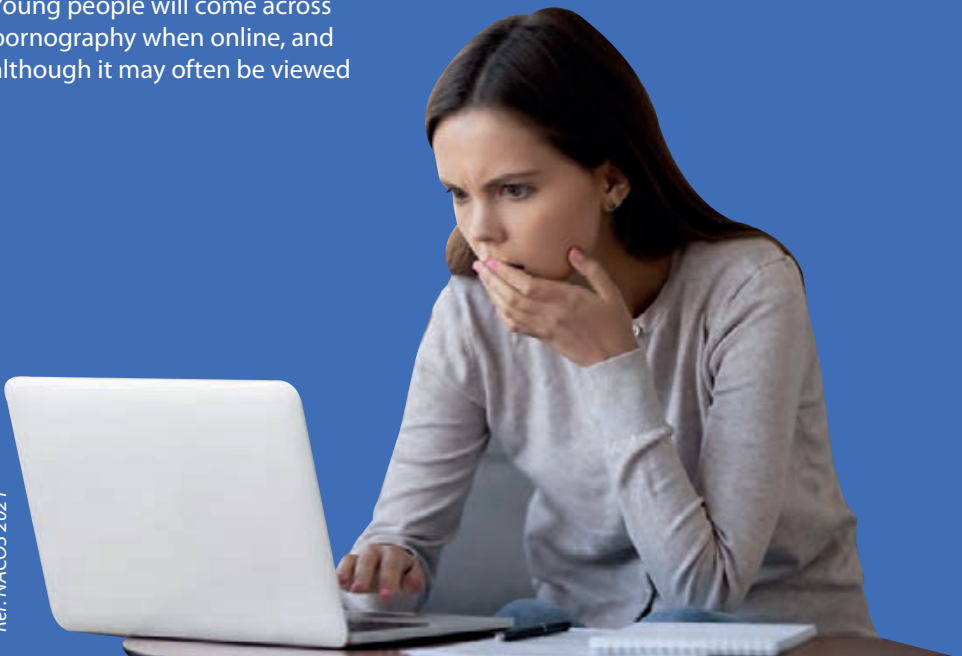
15% of 15-17 year olds have received sexual messages online ...

**The sending or receiving of any sexual image of a minor by anyone is a criminal offence** and young people can fail to recognise privacy and legal concerns. Images leak easily online, and although sexual curiosity and experimentation is a normal part of growing up, it is important to ask the question: who will see this in the future? The sending or receiving of sexual images – with or without consent – when a minor is involved, can have devastating personal, emotional and legal consequences for young people and families.

Young people will come across pornography when online, and although it may often be viewed

accidentally the first time, 48% of 11-16 year olds surveyed had seen pornography online.\* Once your child and their peers are active online, it is inevitable they will come across inappropriate content because it's all too easy to access and children are curious. So be prepared. Have the conversation about topics such as porn, consent and sexuality, even though it can be tricky. The key message to get across is that not everything they see is real! Check out the New Zealand government's 'Keep it Real' campaign for inspiration on the importance of these conversations!

\*Ref: NACOS 2021



# Gam(b)ling

With problem gambling rates among 15-16 year olds doubling in less than 5 years in Ireland\* the lines between gambling and gaming can be increasingly blurred. Many games now normalise gambling with casino imagery, betting with virtual currency and randomised purchases. It is important to put clear expectations in place by:

Researching popular games young people are playing

Agreeing spending rules and limits

Removing payment details from games

Monitoring behavioural changes such as increased secrecy or anxiety



\*Ref: ESPAD, 2019



# Digital Media Literacy

TAKING A STEP BACK

Digital Media Literacy is vital in a visual world where the lines between the offline and online worlds are increasingly blurred. These literacy skills enable young people to critically think, assess and 'read between the lines' when it comes to being online.

**Information:** The online world is awash with information, much of it inaccurate. It spreads very quickly online so it's imperative that young people develop a healthy scepticism about the information they consume and understand the difference between information which is inaccurate and information which is deliberately designed to mislead.

False images and videos (deep fakes) can be created through technological advances to manipulate audiences and it's important to be able to spot these also.





## Targeting:

Most online platforms work through algorithms and the analysis of user behaviour. The more information you put online, the more you will be targeted with specific advertising and content, which can lead to existing in an online 'echo chamber'. Can also include unsafe links and websites designed to get more personal or financial information.

## Healthy Self-image & Wellbeing:

Young people already spend a lot of time online, further exacerbated by the pandemic, as we turned to online platforms for communication, collaboration, and socialising. It's crucial to be aware of how much time we spend online. Setting personal limits and knowing when to switch off is important to establish a healthy balance between the offline and online worlds.

## Digital Footprint:

Young people nowadays have a much deeper digital footprint than their parents, and it's essential they understand that whatever goes online stays online, even if you think it may have been deleted. A permanent digital footprint means that posting harmful, inappropriate or explicit messages and material online can have potential repercussions long into a young person's life.

# Top Parental Tips!

**Bear in mind that children with less parental supervision and more online access are more vulnerable to risks online, especially when they are young so...**

- Normalise discussing online activity on an ongoing basis, without judgement
- Do your research, set rules, time-limits, clear boundaries, and stick to them! For example, no phone usage allowed between 8pm - 8am. Keep devices downstairs overnight.
- Use devices in open spaces, not behind shut doors, unsupervised
- Encourage phone-free rooms
- Use the 'one screen at one time' rule, rather than watching TV while also on another device
- Use technical restrictions but don't rely on them alone, especially when expectations of privacy increase
- Model good behaviour and encourage healthy habits
- Build a shared community of parents, teacher and experts



# Developing an Online Agreement

Developing an online agreement with each of your children is a great way to normalise discussing online life. Each child should own agreement to reflect their individual online activities, interests and age. Discussing and negotiating the agreement with your child can help increase “buy-in” from them and helps hold them responsible for their on-line behaviours and habits.



## So how do I get started?

- Create time to have a conversation with your child about how they use the internet. Give plenty of notice that you want to sit down and make an agreement – don't just spring it on them!
- Your child should know in advance that an agreement is going to be put in place. It is important that everybody involved knows what is going to be discussed so they can come prepared! This will help develop a sense of respect and trust, which is needed if the agreement is going to work.
- Try to keep the conversation positive: online life can have very positive results and comes with many benefits.

## Defining Screen Time

Using devices and accessing the internet has become an integral part of all of our lives. There are many different reasons and motivations for using devices so you will need to define exactly what you mean by 'screen time' before making rules. By discussing and defining the different types of screen time, it will be easier to reach an agreement about rules later on.

Discuss what you all like doing online. What sites or activities do you like and why? Do you use the internet for school work or projects, information and news? Or is it more for passively consuming content, like watching YouTube or TikTok videos? Is screen time spent on more interactive activities such as playing games, either alone, or with others?

# Develop an Online Agreement



# oping nline ement

## Looking at Safety and Online Content

Other things to consider when setting up your online agreement . . .

- What types of information are ok to share, and how to keep information safe
- What games are ok to download: are they age appropriate and will restrictions be needed for 'in app' purchases?
- Are there ways we can check if the information we see is accurate?
- Who can we chat with or play with online?
- How should we treat people and what to do if we see someone else being treated badly online?

It should also include a plan of action if your children are bothered by something they've seen online. Reassure them that it's not about punishing them or withdrawing their device. It's always about protecting them and making their experiences positive: that's why it's vital they tell you.

When you have had these conversations with your child, draw up the agreement with clear statements and make sure everyone signs it.

To learn more about Online Safety for your children including a guide document to help you develop an Online Agreement around using devices, please visit [www.npc.ie/training-and-resources](http://www.npc.ie/training-and-resources)





# Useful R

## **Alva's World**

[www.irishexaminer.com/news/ireland/arid-40694744.html](http://www.irishexaminer.com/news/ireland/arid-40694744.html)

## **Bad News Digital Literacy Game**

[www.getbadnews.com](http://www.getbadnews.com)

## **Common Sense Media**

[www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)

## **CyberSafeKids**

[www.cybersafekids.ie](http://www.cybersafekids.ie)

## **Childline**

[www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie) (Free Phone 1800 66 66 66/Free text 501 101)  
(\*NI Freephone 0800 1111)

## **esafety Commissioner (AUS)**

[www.esafety.gov.au/educators](http://www.esafety.gov.au/educators)

## **Family Sharing (Apple)**

[www.support.apple.com/en-gb/guide/personal-safety/welcome](http://www.support.apple.com/en-gb/guide/personal-safety/welcome)

## **Google Families**

[www.families.google/families](http://www.families.google/families)

## **Hotline**

[www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie)

## **Keep It Real Online Campaign (NZ)**

[www.keepitreallonline.govt.nz](http://www.keepitreallonline.govt.nz)



# resources

**Media Literacy Ireland**  
[www.medialiteracyireland.ie](http://www.medialiteracyireland.ie)

**National Parents Council**  
[www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie) (Call the NPC Helpline: 01 887 4477)

**NSPCC**  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety)

**Parentline [www.parentline.ie](http://www.parentline.ie)**  
(Phone (01) 8733500) (\*Northern Ireland 0808 802 0400)

**PEGI**  
[pegi.info](http://pegi.info)

**Qwant Junior child-friendly browser**  
[www.qwantjunior.com](http://www.qwantjunior.com)

**Spunout**  
[www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

**Trend Micro Cyber Academy**  
[www.trendmicro.com/internet-safety/for-kids/cyber-academy](http://www.trendmicro.com/internet-safety/for-kids/cyber-academy)

**Webwise**  
[www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie)



Irish Examiner

accenture

# Digital Parenting

Keeping  
your kids  
safe online



CYBERSAFE  
KIDS



Supporting Parents  
Supporting Children

---

Part of the SAME RULES APPLY campaign  
#samerulesapply

---