Social Media and Online Safety

The Internet is an ever-changing public space that our children have access to through email, texting, virtual reality, and social media. Children with disabilities may be more vulnerable to exploitation on the Internet, especially children who may not have a lot of friends and are looking for connections. Children with disabilities are also more likely to be bullied online. Cyberbullying can happen anytime your child is online and can be hard to stop. Children who are cyberbullied may become sad, depressed, or angry. Monitor your child's social media activity until you are certain they are mature enough to keep themselves safe online without you. Keep open lines of communication and create a safe environment.

WHAT MY CHILD NEEDS TO KNOW

1. Social media and email profiles should be kept private. Don't share passwords.

2. You should be careful about who you trust online. If it seems too good to be true (e.g., come get a free puppy or click here and win a car) it is.

3. Internet and social media posts may be reviewed by colleges or employers and could impact admission or employment decisions. Never post something you wouldn't say in person and never post lies or unkind comments no matter how mad you are. What is posted still exists on the Internet, even if you delete it.

TIPS FOR TEACHING YOUR CHILD ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE SAFETY

1. Talk to your children about the various social media platforms and show those to them on a computer or mobile device. Depending on their age, let them know you will be monitoring their activities (if you choose to do so) for their safety.

2. Find examples of negative or inappropriate comments on social media sites your child might use. Ask your child to describe the impact those comments might have on the person or people to whom they are directed.

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What my child needs to know continued...

4. The Internet is a public place with lots of people. You need to think about what you share and who you interact with. You should not accept a "friend" request from someone you don't know or have a positive relationship with.

5. Some posts are illegal, like ones that are pornographic (naked or sexual images), and can result in a referral to law enforcement.

Tips for teaching your child about social media and online safety continued...

3. Practice scenarios of someone texting, emailing, or posting on social media asking your child for their personal information or something else inappropriate. See how they react and guide them on what they should do if this happens.

4. Show them how to block people on social media who are verbally abusing them (cursing, making negative comments, etc.) and let them know they should tell you right away if this happens.

5. Be open to all of their questions and make sure they know they can come to you at any time for guidance, if they need help, or if someone is bullying them.

6. Give concrete examples of things they should not post on the internet like phone number, address (even state), or personal photos, depending on your preference.

7. You have likely taught your child to be cautious of strangers. Teach them the same rules for interacting with strangers on the Internet. Everyone on the Internet is a stranger unless your child personally knows them.