



# How to Talk to Kids About Online Safety—By Age

Do you ever wonder: “*Do I even understand what my child is experiencing online?*” or “*How can I talk about tough topics without causing panic?*” It’s normal to feel out of your depth. But the best tool isn’t tech—it’s **open, age-appropriate conversation**.

Here’s how to approach online safety with kindness and confidence, tailored to each age group.

## **Ages 3–6: Build Trust with Simple, Playful Talk**

Young children may not grasp digital risks—but they feel emotions. Use gentle questions and simple games:

- **Ask open questions:** “What fun did you have on the tablet today?”
- **Use pretend play to teach:** “Let’s pretend you’re a lion—what would you do if something sad popped up?” ([turn0search1])
- **Create a “fun phone zone”** – no screens at bedtime to strengthen offline routine ([turn0search2]).

At this age, curiosity builds confidence—and prevents fear.

## **Ages 6–10: Make It a Natural Part of Everyday Life**

School-age kids benefit from structured, regular chats:

- Sit together in common areas while they play. “Show me how that game works!” fosters learning and respect.
- **Give gentle warnings:** “If you ever see something strange online, you can tell me right away—you won’t get in trouble”.
- Discuss basics: sharing too much (name, school), protecting passwords, and being kind online.

Use tools like **Internet Matters’ guides** for age-appropriate advice.



## Ages 11–13: Guide Pre-Teens with Responsibility & Respect

Pre-teens crave autonomy—but need support:

- Refer to age ratings (13+ apps, games), and include them in decisions about what's okay
- Help them learn to report/block and think critically about messages or ads
- Teach online kindness: “Would you say this in person?”
- Use parental settings as support, not surveillance—adjust together

Explore interactive quizzes and resources via **Childnet** and **CEOP** ;



## Ages 14–17: Foster Open Dialogue, Not Dictation

Teens value trust and respect:

- Be honest: “No spying, but I care”—ensure they know you're listening
- Discuss tricky issues: bullying, self-harm, or sex—use resources like **Childline**, **YoungMinds**, and **BBC Teach**
- Encourage critical thinking: fake news, scams, extremist content as per Ofcom's guidance
- Create agreements around privacy—not just rules—so they feel respected



## Family-Wide Tips

- **Start early** and talk often—it won't come as a shock later
- **Model healthy online habits** by talking about your own screen time and choices
- **Normalize mistakes**: if they slip up, respond with support, not shame
- **Know how to block/report** and understand UK legal protections, including the Online Safety Act



## Quick Conversation Reminders

- Use real-world examples: “*Just like looking both ways before crossing, we check messages before clicking.*”
- Ask follow-up questions: “*How did it make you feel?*”

- Be aware of signs: changes in mood, isolation—especially around violent or extremist content.
- Make checking online part of your routine—like chatting about their day at school.

## Glossary

Term	Definition
<b>Age-appropriate conversation</b>	Tailoring safety talks to your child’s developmental stage
<b>Parental co-learning</b>	Learning alongside your child about apps and online spaces
<b>Reporting/blocking</b>	Teaching children to take action against harmful content
<b>Critical thinking</b>	Discussing how to spot fake news or scams online
<b>Online Safety Act</b>	UK law making platforms safer and setting online duties for child protection

## UK Resources

- **NSPCC:** Tips for catching online safety conversations naturally
- **Barnardo’s:** Conversation starters for younger kids
- **Internet Matters:** Guides by age, including how pre-teens can help younger siblings
- **Parent Zone:** How to engage without judgment
- **Ofcom:** Parental advice under new safety rules

## Get Deeper Help

Feeling technophobic or short on peace-of-mind? Dive into [wififam.com/resources](https://www.wififam.com/resources) for video walkthroughs, conversation scripts, printable guides—and ongoing support to build your family’s digital confidence.

Talking often—about feelings, values and online realities—protects your child more than any filter. These gentle, age-tailored steps will help you stay grounded, respectful, and connected.

You’re doing great—keep the conversation flowing, and reach out anytime.



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