Keep kids safe online

With schools closed and lockdowns imposed, many children and young people are spending more time online doing schoolwork, playing games, and socializing with friends. However, more time spent on the internet and social media can make children more vulnerable to cyberbullying, sexual predators and other forms of online harm. These risks can come not just from strangers but people they may already know on or offline, making monitoring online use vital. Here are some tips to keep your kids safe online.

Set and agree on screen time rules for time spent on homework, chatting with friends and playing games. A “no devices at dinner” or at certain other times can be a healthy rule to implement.

Talk to your child about how to make safe choices about who they talk to online, and not sharing passwords, suggestive pictures or other private information.

Tell them that you’re available to listen if they are worried about anything they experience online. Together, you might also identify trusted adults or peers they can talk to about a risky online encounter.

Teach respectful communication, and how their words and actions can affect others.

Use online safety tools. Use the Safe Search option on browsers, parental controls on Facebook, and tools to keep them safe on different social media accounts they may use such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat.

Ensure your child’s devices have the latest software updates and anti-virus programs, and the privacy settings are set on high. Remind your kids to cover the camera on the computer when they aren’t actively using it.

If you are concerned about your child’s health and safety online, talk to your healthcare practitioner or a licensed professional counselor for guidance.

For more information, visit: https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/protecting-kids-online

Working out safely outdoors

During the spring months, you’re likely to be more enthusiastic about going outside to do fun healthy activities. Unfortunately, many of the activities you may normally partake in may be off limits due to the pandemic, but that doesn’t mean that you still can’t enjoy some outdoor exercises. Walking, running, swimming biking and hiking (if local beaches and trails aren’t off limits) are all activities that you may still be able to enjoy. Keep these safety tips in mind while working out outdoors.

• If appropriate for your activity, wear a mask, fabric face covering or bandana to keep your respiratory droplets to yourself and avoid those of others.

• Maintain social distancing guidelines. While there is no definitive answer as to how far to stay away from others when working out outside, for your safety and the safety of others, it is best to give a wide berth, much greater than 6 feet.

• Go at off times, in places that aren’t as popular. Try to go when and where you expect the least amount of people are out. Be sure to let someone know when you’re headed out and where you are in case of emergency! This is especially important if you’re swimming.

• Stay in your own outdoor space. Walk or run around your yard or in place on your balcony. If you’re a cyclist, find a stand to turn your bike into a stationary bike.

Remember, as the days get warmer, it becomes increasingly important to stay hydrated and keep your body cool. Also, don’t forget the sunscreen!
Dealing with differences

During this uncertain time when we’re trying to navigate the “new normal” and changing social rules, people may express their discomfort in various ways or hold drastically different opinions on various matters. This can give rise to flaring tempers during discussions. No matter the situation, it’s important to remain civil and demonstrate mutual respect for everyone. Here are some general tips:

**Stay positive** by remembering that people’s strong opinions generally originate because of varying backgrounds, experiences, and what we have learned and believe.

**Avoid rushing to judgment when you feel others are over- or underreacting to the situation.** Remember that everyone deals with uncertainty differently. Recognize when your own biases and stereotypes may be influencing your interactions.

**Be polite.** If someone next to you in line is not social distancing, for example, you may politely say, “Please step back.” Try pointing them to the facts such as the CDC’s six feet safe distancing rule. It could be that the other person may be oblivious and not purposely flouting the rules.

**Breathe deep to “buy time” so you can act thoughtfully and not just react.** The old adage “count to 10” really helps you gather your thoughts before speaking.

If an argument ensues, use “I” statements to express your views and avoid blaming the other person or “side.” Try not to interrupt. Truly listen, and give the other person the attention you would like to have. Never make casual, off-color comments, slurs or jokes that are offensive or that poke fun at others.

If the discussion becomes very heated, it’s often best to quietly withdraw from the discussion and simply walk away. This may be especially important in the workplace setting.

If you find yourself struggling with acceptance of others or with having upsetting confrontations, reach out to a licensed professional counselor for guidance.

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**National Safety Month**

As the weather warms up and you head outdoors more often, in addition to heeding social distancing and other health recommendations, follow tips to stay safe, provided by the National Safety Council.

**Find out more:**

https://bit.ly/2WEw4Oq

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