

Talking about online predators

Talking to your child about predators can be hard to navigate. Here are our top tips to help get the conversation started.

BEFORE YOU START

Regulate your own feelings

Identify and manage your own emotions when it comes to discussing this topic with your teenager (especially if there has been an incident). The fact that your children have potentially put themselves in a risky situation with a stranger is enough to cause any parent's blood pressure to rise! Take a few deep breaths, focus on facts without over-dramatising, and try not to judge them by seeking to understand their motivations for communicating with people they don't know online.

Consider your teen's perception of online friendships

Remember that your teen's interpretation of online safety when it comes to strangers may be quite different to your own. Try listening to them from a place of curiosity and inquisitiveness, but also ensure you have some facts and evidence to back up your concerns and to get them to consider alternative viewpoints.

Make sure your child feels you are a safe person to come to

Wait, you're their parent, right? Why would they not feel safe coming to you?!

Research shows that kids are reluctant to come to their parents when things go wrong online because they feel the parent will overreact or make the situation worse. Make sure your child knows they can come to you without being judged. Be clear that you will find a solution. Be clear that you are on their side.

Keep it casual

Keep the conversation casual and ask them to teach you what they know. If teens feel they are being interrogated, they tend to shut down. When you allow them to feel empowered by sharing and teaching you (even if you have to play a little dumb), the conversation will flow more easily.

TALKING TIPS

Having difficult conversations isn't easy for anyone, but there are a couple of tips that can help keep things on track:

Use questions and comments like:

- ① What would you do if someone you didn't know contacts you online?
- ① What if they seemed totally harmless? Would you speak to them then?
- ① What sort of questions would concern you if a stranger asked?
- ① What would you do if they seemed to really get you, and you had a lot in common?
- ① What if you felt sorry for them? Would that cause you to give in?
- ① I know sometimes our family life can be busy. What if a stranger showed you attention and care at a time when we had a lot on at home? Would you tell me about it?
- ① I need you to understand that you can tell me anything about your online life. I may not always agree with your choices, but I will always be here to help and support you. You are my priority.
- ① Push through awkward moments by saying "Tell me more ..."



www.interactionservices.org/online-safety-training