NESTLING MINDS

Tough Talks

Keeping Your Child Safe Online(Ages 8–12)

Helping Your Child Stay Safe, Smart, and Confident in a Digital World



"They may be digital natives, but they still need your help to navigate wisely and stay safe."

START HERE

This is Mini Guide 6 in an 8-part series to support parents of pre-teens in navigating important and sometimes uncomfortable conversations this one focuses on online sexual safety.

Whether your child is gaming, watching YouTube, chatting with friends, or using shared devices, they are likely exposed to a world that includes strangers, misinformation, and risky content. Let's equip them to recognize red flags and respond with confidence.

By

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WHY THIS CONVERSATION CAN'T WAIT

Even if your child isn't on social media yet, chances are their friends are. Whether it's YouTube, WhatsApp, gaming apps, or shared devices, pre-teens are constantly exposed to the online world and that world isn't always kind, safe, or age-appropriate.

Children in this age group may:

- Receive or be shown inappropriate messages or videos
- Be approached by strangers posing as kids
- Be asked to share photos or secrets online
- Accidentally stumble upon sexual content without understanding what it is

Instead of simply banning or scaring them, what works best is teaching how to be safe, alert, and in control of what they do online.

WHAT THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND

- Personal information should never be shared not even in games or “private” chats
- Strangers online are still strangers even if they seem nice or familiar
- Photos and messages can be saved or shared forever even if deleted
- If anything feels weird, confusing, or uncomfortable, they can and should tell you right away
- Sexting or sharing inappropriate content is unsafe and not okay even if others are doing it

“If anyone ever does these things, even if they say it’s a game, or ask you to keep it secret that’s not okay. Come tell me right away.”

HOW TO TALK ABOUT ONLINE SAFETY STEP BY STEP

Start With Curiosity, Not Worry

Instead of simply banning or scaring them, what works best is teaching how to be safe, alert, and in control of what they do online.

- **“What do you like doing online these days?”**
- **“Have you ever had someone message you who you didn’t know in real life?”**
- **“Do you know what to do if someone sends you something strange or uncomfortable?”**

Set the Ground Rules With Them (Not Just For Them)

Involve them in creating your family’s digital safety plan. This helps build buy-in and trust.

Rules to include:

- Don’t share full name, school name, home location, photos, or personal info online
- If you see something that feels wrong or makes you uncomfortable tell me, right away
- You’re never in trouble for asking for help even if you made a mistake
- Devices stay in common areas (especially when using chat or video)
- No deleting or hiding chats it’s okay to be private, but not secretive

For Your Daughter:

"If anyone ever asks you for a photo, even if they're someone you know say no. If you ever feel pressured or confused, come to me right away. I won't be angry.
My job is to keep you safe."

For Your Son:

"Sometimes boys feel like they have to act cool online or that it's funny to send jokes or images. But some of those things can really hurt someone, or come back later in serious ways. If you ever mess up or feel uncomfortable, we'll figure it out together."

WHAT TO DO IF SOMETHING FEELS WRONG ONLINE

Give them clear, calm instructions not fear or punishment.

You can say:

"If anyone ever sends you something that makes you feel strange even if it's just a weird photo or comment tell me. You won't be in trouble. It's my job to help you feel safe, not to scold you."

"If someone asks you to keep it a secret, that's a big sign to come to me."

PRACTICE THESE RESPONSES TOGETHER

- "I don't know you. I'm not going to talk."
- "Please don't send me that. I'm blocking you."
- "I don't share photos like that."
- "I need to go I'm telling an adult now."

BONUS TIP USE REAL LIFE STORIES TO START THE CONVERSATION

Sharing actual events (in simple language) helps your child connect the dots between what you're saying and what could happen in the real world. These stories aren't meant to scare they're meant to prepare.

Try saying:

"Hey, I read about this the other day. Can we talk about what you'd do if something like this happened to you or someone at school?"

1. The YouTuber Who Got Hacked

A popular YouTuber who shares funny gaming videos had their account hacked and the hacker started posting inappropriate content. A lot of their younger fans saw things that weren't meant for kids before it was taken down.

What to say: "This happened to a YouTuber a lot of kids follow. If something like this popped up in a video, what do you think you'd do?"

2. The Class Chat That Got Out of Control

A group of classmates created a secret WhatsApp group where they started teasing others, sharing jokes about body parts, and eventually passing around a blurry picture someone had found online. One student reported it to a teacher and several kids faced consequences.

What to say: "Some students in a school were part of a chat where things got inappropriate. It started as a joke, but someone got really upset. What would you do if a chat like that came your way?"

3. The Friend Who Sent a Selfie and Regretted It

A 12-year-old girl sent a photo of herself in a vest and shorts to a friend who promised to keep it private. The photo was later forwarded to others in their class. She was embarrassed and didn't want to go to school.

What to say: "A girl shared a photo with a friend just a normal one, but it still spread. Can you imagine how she must have felt? What do you think someone should do if that ever happened?"

4. The Stranger in the Game Chat

In an online game, a boy was messaged by someone pretending to be his age. The person started asking personal questions: "What school do you go to?", "Do you have a photo?" The boy felt weird and told his older sister, who helped him block and report the user.

What to say: "A boy was playing a game and someone started asking him personal questions. He felt strange and told someone and that helped. Would you know what to do if that happened?"

WHEN GROUP CHATS FEEL TRICKY

Sometimes, peer group chats even with friends can turn uncomfortable. It's okay to leave or speak up.

You can say:

"If a group starts teasing others, sharing things that feel off, or pressuring you to join in it's okay to leave."

Practice saying:

- "This isn't funny. I'm leaving the group."
- "Let's not share that. It's not okay."

WHAT DOES INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT LOOK LIKE

Kids might not always recognize unsafe content.

You can explain:

"If you ever see photos, videos, or messages about private body parts, kissing, or adults doing things that feel wrong that's not for kids. You can close it right away and come talk to me."

CREATE A FAMILY DIGITAL SAFETY PLAN

Let your child help build a safety routine you both agree on. You can write it out together.

Example rules:

- “Devices stay in the living room at night.”
- “We check in before downloading any new app.”
- “We don’t use private chats with strangers.”
- “If I feel weird about anything, I tell you no matter what.”

This builds trust and habits.

FOR PARENTS REFLECT ON YOUR OWN DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

Think back:

- Have you ever seen something inappropriate online and not known what to do?
- What helped or what would’ve helped you feel safe talking about it?

Your own experience helps shape how you respond calmly and supportively.

TEACH REPORTING BLOCKING TOOLS

Let your child know:

“You can block someone who says or sends something that makes you uncomfortable and you can report them too. If you don’t know how, we’ll figure it out together.”

Most apps and games have built-in safety tools show them how to use these.

WHAT TO REINFORCE

- Online safety isn’t just about rules it’s about how they feel
- If it feels wrong, weird, pressured, or too personal, they can say no
- You are their safety net always, even if they make a mistake

ALSO IN THIS SERIES

This is just one part of the Tough Talks series from Nestling Minds. Look out for the other mini-guides:

Coming up next:

- Mini Guide 1: Understanding Your Pre-Teen
- Mini Guide 2: Talking About the Body Without Awkwardness
- Mini Guide 3: Teaching Consent Early
- Mini Guide 4: Recognizing Unsafe or Confusing Touch
- Mini Guide 5: Protecting Your Child from Sexual Abuse
- Mini Guide 7: What to Say When They Ask “That Question”
- Mini Guide 8: Your Safety Net as a Parent

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Nestling Minds is an initiative dedicated to promoting emotional wellbeing, life skills, and safe conversations for children, parents, and educators. Through workshops, resources, and school partnerships, we help families navigate the real challenges of growing up together.

Stay Joyful, Stay Curious,

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