Center for Countering Digital Hate

KEEPING KIDS SAFER ONLINE

Social media, harmful algorithms, and AI are part of everyday life for many young people. The technology changes quickly, but a few practical steps can help you understand what your child is experiencing and make their digital life safer when Big Tech won't.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

ALGORITHMS

Algorithms can lead children toward harmful content.

In CCDH's latest testing, YouTube recommended harmful eating disorder content in **1 in 9** videos shown to simulated accounts registered as 13-year-old girls after they watched an eating disorder video.

That's an improvement from 1 in 3 in 2024, **but harmful recommendations remain.**

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media companies are opening children up to exploitation.

In April, we found X **recommending explicit content to 13-year-old accounts and opening a direct line** between the child accounts and strangers.

Much of this content **violates X's own policies**, yet children continue to be at risk.

AI

AI is part of young people's online lives, too.

Nearly 2 in 3 U.S. teens use AI chatbots, and about 3 in 10 use them daily.

CCDH research found that 8 in 10 popular AI chatbots tested regularly assisted accounts posing as teens with planning violent attacks – including mass shootings.

HOW ALGORITHMS SHAPE WHAT KIDS SEE

What appears on a child's screen isn't random. Recommendation systems learn from what users watch, search, click, like and share, then use those signals to decide what to show them next.

That means one video, search, or click can influence what comes next, **including recommendations a child never actively searched for.**

Help your child understand their feed by asking:

"What does it recommend after you watch something?"

"Why do you think the app showed you this?"

"Have you ever been shown something you didn't want to see?"

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YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

Parents, caregivers, and trusted adults shouldn't have to become tech experts to help their kids navigate the online world. Platforms have a responsibility to design safer products and protect young users, too.

Understanding a few key features, asking questions and knowing where to find safety tools can help you feel more confident supporting your child online.

5 WAYS TO HELP KEEP CHILDREN SAFER

01 Check their settings
Make accounts private where possible. Limit who can contact them, turn off unnecessary location sharing and review privacy, content and recommendation settings together.

02 Know what they use
Ask about the apps, games, social platforms and AI tools they use. Explore new platforms together and check their safety features.

03 Talk about algorithms
Explain that feeds are designed to keep people watching. Encourage kids to notice when they are repeatedly seeing similar content, especially content that makes them uncomfortable, anxious or upset.

04 Protect personal information
Remind children to avoid sharing their address, location, school, passwords, financial information or private images. Encourage them to think carefully about personal information they share with AI chatbots, too.

05 Give them a plan
STOP engaging with it. | **SAVE** evidence when appropriate. | **BLOCK** unwanted accounts.
REPORT harmful content or behavior. | **TELL** a parent, caregiver or trusted adult.

Make it clear that asking for help won't automatically mean losing access to their phone or favorite app.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Online safety isn't a one-time settings check. Apps, algorithms, and AI tools change quickly, and so will the way your child uses them.