

A man with a beard, wearing a blue hooded garment, is peering through a hole in a wall. A bird is perched on a branch to the left. The background is a textured, brownish wall.

**HOW TO
DISAPPEAR FROM
SURVEILLANCE
& KEEP YOUR
CHILDREN SAFE**

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Keeping Children Safe in a Tech Savvy World

Every morning, thousands of children wake up prepared for a new adventure. They turn on and plug in, ready for whatever the world may bring, ready for an around-the-world-adventure. Without leaving their rooms, these children travel all over the world and experience things unimaginable. They do this through their online universe.

Children understand technology in a way most adults never will. They have been born into this technological world, exposed to it from the time they are infants and are regular consumers from their early years. In many ways, it is impossible to separate children from technology. By the time the average child enrolls in school, they are surrounded by it. Between iPad initiatives and Bring Your Own Device to School Days (BYOD) and their regular technology courses at school, along with time outside of school children not only use technology on a regular basis, they have come to rely on it.

But along with that technology comes a responsibility for us as adults that our parents, grandparents, and even teachers never faced. Not only do we have to ensure our children know how to use computers and other devices safely, we have ensure that online world does not destroy their real world.

Devices Beyond Computers

Most children's first encounters with technology begin with devices. They learn that pressing certain buttons will make lights or music begin. Then they realize working those same buttons in a specific pattern might even make something more exciting happen. Eventually, many progress to using Mom's smart phone while waiting to see the doctor or sitting in a carpool line or a playing on a tablet to entertain themselves while a sibling is in dance class.

In fact, it is not uncommon for many 7 or 8 year olds to have a reading device or tablet that belongs to them. While these are all safe devices and provide great academic and entertainment options, they also possess a danger for children. Many parents may not be aware their children have the same access to the internet on those devices that they do when sitting in front of a computer. Because of this, parents should always monitor what their children are doing on that particular device. You must ensure you are teaching your child how to use it safely.

If something pops up on the screen while they are on it, teach them to come to you. Children should also be taught to approach you before moving from one task to another on the device. Finally, parents should also take advantage of any safety features or filtering software the device may have.

Computer Data and Software

Imagine for a moment it's a nice quiet Saturday at your house. While you are enjoying the first few hours of your weekend, your child is contentedly playing a game on your computer. You are watching her, smiling as she wins one round after another.

Suddenly you hear her cry out, frustration lacing her voice. The screen has gone black and she demands to have her game turned back on. Meanwhile, your mind is scanning everything you can think of that would make this occur and you may not like what you come up with. Unfortunately, children are children and while they may be extremely technologically advanced, they do not know everything and accidents can happen.

By allowing your child access to your devices or computers, which is beneficial for them, you are also giving them access to potentially important information.

Tax records, contact lists, and family photographs can be wiped away in seconds and if you are upset, imagine the devastation your child will feel! Although every accident cannot be avoided, there are some simple steps you can follow to keep your child (and your documents) safe.

- Utilize administrator privileges on your computer or device. By enabling this feature, children can be prevented from downloading anything or making changes to your system.
- Consider using separate accounts on your computer. Most modern systems will allow you to create log ins for various users. Through this, you can limit the programs your child has access to as well as limit what they can do online.
- Ensure the proper settings are established on your computer. While it may be convenient, your internet browser should never store usernames or passwords. Additionally, parental controls may further protect your child and the information they may be able to access.

Online Safety

Your child is not only potentially unsafe in their casual use of just the computer of your device. The moment they turn to the online world, that safety can also be threatened. The internet is easily considered one of those inventions that has had a tremendous impact on the world. It is woven through every aspect of modern life. But with every great product comes even greater potential problems. The online world is certainly no exception and there are a variety of harmful elements your children can face.

- **Identity Theft** ○ Children are trusting by nature. Most of them do not think anything of sharing information. In fact, to the chagrin of many parents, children are often the members of the family to over share information. This may be cute when you overhear your child telling the woman in the grocery store all about how Mommy tried to fry chicken with powdered sugar instead of flour, but it can be extremely scary when you walk in and find them sharing information online. Personal names, addresses, school names and family routines can be collected. It is not unusual for predators or those wanting to steal information to monitor a child who likes to share for a long period of time, slowly taking in all the information. In the best of cases, these people simply want to borrow the information; in the worst of cases, your child's life could be in jeopardy.
- **Predators**
 - Unfortunately, not every person uses the internet for positive, uplifting, and supportive purposes. There are many who will use the online world to prey on your children. Because of the nature of the internet, it is extremely easy to pretend to be someone you are not. It takes little to no time at all to create an online persona. A male can pretend to be a female; an adult can pretend to be a teen. Children must be prepared to handle situations where someone they have been chatting with or emailing tries to entice them to leave their home or school and meet somewhere.
Each year, there are hundreds of thousands of accounts of boys and girls victimized in similar situations.
- **Imagery**
 - Either accidentally, or intentionally, children's worldview can significantly change the more they are introduced to the internet. Images and videos abound online and unfortunately, they are not all wonderful. Access to disturbing photos, images, or videos can alter your children before they even realize what they have been exposed to. And unfortunately, once you have seen something, you cannot 'unsee' it.
- **Scams**
 - In addition to stealing information from the internet, there are individuals who will also work diligently to steal information from emails. Sending these messages that appear to be legitimate can easily draw children into replying thinking they are helping when they are actually revealing personal information. Although adults may recognize many of these scams a mile away, children do not. They must be taught the hallmark signs of typical scams so they can learn what to avoid.
- **Cyber Bullying** ○ One of the most unfortunate things children will come into contact with during their formative years is bullying, and it has spread to the online world. Cyber bullying is has all the characteristics of traditional bullying, it simply

takes place through electronic media. Mean comments, threats, humiliation, and embarrassment remain the focus of cyber bullying, just as in traditional bullying. The primary difference is that electronic devices make it possible to send a simple threat or mean comment to literally hundreds of people in one moment. It is one of the biggest problems faced by teens today.

- **Possession of Child Pornography** ○ One of the most little known problems faced by teens today is possession of child pornography. If you entered a middle or high school today and asked the students there if any of them would ever possess child pornography, the majority (if not all) would adamantly say no. Ask that same group of students how many of them have participated in any form of sexting and that answer would probably be completely different. This method of sharing risqué or sexual images over electronic devices is common practice among many teens today. Your son's girlfriend may not think anything of taking a picture of herself in a teeny bikini and texting it to him. She may even be tempted to drop the top of that bikini because she loves and trusts him. Fast-forward several months to the moment they break up or have a fight. In a fury, several of his friends convince him to share her pictures. In turn, they send it to other friends. Add to the mix she is seventeen, and your son, as well as his friends, is now in possession of child pornography and he has delivered it. Although not always filed, criminal charges are a real possibility and this quick, rash decision could potentially impact the rest of your child's life.

Internet Guidelines by Age

Knowing all the dangers your children face and knowing they need to be safe while using the internet is one thing; helping them be safe is another. At almost any age, your child may need online access and it is important to establish guidelines in your home from an early age.

Ages 1 – 10

Children in this age group are beginning to take notice of the world around them. Over time, they develop friendships, build relationships, and somewhere along the way, may even begin to listen to those people more than you. This is why it is so important to talk with them and have guidelines established from the moment they first begin using media based devices. Although they may not be on those devices that often, children in this age group will have access to the internet. It is important for them to know your expectations so they learn how to safely use these devices and how to filter advice from their friends.

- Keep communication lines open in your house. Have regular conversations about computers, tablets, smart phones, and any other devices and be open their curiosity as well as their questions.

- Define clear and consistent rules for device usage and be prepared to enforce those rules.
- Decide on a password together if they need to have an account for any reason. Let them know their account usage is dependent upon you being able to access it as well.
- Have conversations about the importance of never, ever giving personal information to people or groups online.
- Be accessible! If your children have a question, take the time to answer it. Encourage your children to come to you if something unusual happens while they are online.
- Have your computer or device in a central location and keep your child in your line of sight any time they are online. Preferably, sit next to them. Not only does this allow you to be available if your child needs anything, it also offers you the opportunity to see what they may be doing and seeing.

Ages 11 - 14

At this age, tweens and early teens are extremely tech savvy. Do not be inclined to take this knowledge for granted though. Just because they have an extensive understanding of the devices they are using does not mean they are safe; in fact, it is almost the exact opposite. Their knowledge of both the internet and their devices can almost leave them in more dangerous ground, especially if you do not have guidelines and expectations.

- Keep communications open to encourage your children to come to you with any questions they may have.
- Establish clear limitations for device and internet usage, along with clearly defined consequences for the moments those limits are not followed as expected. Follow through the first time a rule is broken so they learn how seriously you take their time online as well as their devices.
- Work together to create online usernames and passwords. Remind your children they should never share their password with anyone and it should be changed at least twice a year.
- Discuss with your child appropriate ways to personalize information. Address, phone number, full name, and regular schedule should never be posted.
- Begin having discussions about the types of pictures appropriate for online settings.
- Remind your child that once something is posted online, it can never fully be removed, even if they delete the image or text.
- Keep your computer in a centrally located place. If children have access to other devices that connect to the internet, limit the amount of time they can use them and ensure you are around when they are doing so.

Ages 15 – 18

Once your children reach this age, they will typically have almost limitless access to technology. Between school assignments and their own social lives they can actually be online the majority of their day. This access is important and should not be halted; however, it should continue to be guided.

- Through the continued communication in your family, encourage your teens to come to you if they encounter anything that strikes them as off or makes them feel uncomfortable.
Remind them there is not anything they can share that will shock you or disappoint you. Their safety comes first!
- Adjust your house expectations and guidelines for computer, internet, and other device usage to meet the needs of your teens and young adults.
- Limit the amount of devices connected to the internet your child can have in their room. A family computer and/or tablet should still be accessible in a main living area, never in your child's bedroom.
- Investigate and use internet filtering software and pop up blockers to limit accidental access to images or sites.
- Do not shy away from discussions of pornography. Now, more than ever, your children will be exposed to the world's views of sexuality and body image. Your candid conversation with them can also have a huge impact.
- Know which websites your teen regularly visits.
- Teach your children how to avoid spam by not giving out their email address to websites or when they sign up for things.
- Have additional guidelines and discussions of expected online behavior. Proper photos and responsible conversations should be the focus. Cyber bullying, gossiping, and threats should never take place.
- Teach your teen how to manage financial accounts online. This can extend to discussions of safe ways to order online.

Smart Phone Safety

By the time they are in high school, most children have access to a cell phone. It is their lifeline – the way they catch up with friends, check in with social media sites, share photographs, and in many cases work on assignments. Cell phones have moved beyond basic communication devices and children and teens are often more comfortable using them than adults. Parents must take the time to regularly visit with their children about these devices.

The same rules that apply to home computers, tablets, or reading devices should also apply to the smart phones; in fact, more restrictions may even be necessary. It is phenomenally easy for teens to take a picture and share it instantly, or to update their status to immediately notify friends of their mood or location. This ease is one aspect that teens love but it can also be dangerous. There is nothing forcing them to stop and think before they hit send or post. Only regular conversations with your child, and their knowledge of your expectations, can educate them to be cautious.

Communication is Key

Talking to your children is one of the most important things you can do as a parent. It is crucial to their development and it is the best way to help them understand the world. Unfortunately, many parents take conversations about technology for granted.

They know to talk about drugs, about alcohol, even about sex, but assume technology is one of those things their children will learn about in school so there is little need to talk about it. In reality, children are just as much at risk for harm from technology and computers as they are from drugs or other illicit behaviors. You cannot be afraid to broach these subjects with your children. They will learn the information, whether from you or from someone else. In order to best guide and shape their path, it is better for them to have an open line of communication to you instead of relying solely on others.

The online world is a beautiful and scary place. It is an exceptional way for children to explore places they may never visit or study people they may never meet. It is also a wonderful way for them to connect with friends and family to share life's success and sorrows. But the online world can also be fiercely dangerous and completely unexpected.

As a parent, you would probably never allow your children to leave for an around-the-world trip unprepared. No; you would counsel them on things to pack, help them research where they are headed, and teach them to avoid any major pitfalls. Yet every day, children are doing just that; they are leaving their homes and traveling around the world completely unprepared and unprotected. Simply taking the time to understand the potential problems of the online world and teaching your child how to maneuver around those problems (or avoid them altogether) is not only a smart idea for a parent, it is critically necessary to their safety.