Child sexual exploitation online: tips to protect children 4-7 years

Spend quality time with your children

Young children shouldn't rely on screens to play. Avoid screens and propose games, toys and activities that awake all their senses. Never give them screens to keep them quiet! If you have decided to allow screens, set ground rules and never leave your child alone with a connected device. The best way to intervene early is to play with your children online so that you can share your values and expectations. Tell your friends about your rules. It is always better when the parents of your child's friends can agree on some ground rules.

Be an example

Limit your own screen time when children are around. Value your children's privacy and ask for their permission before taking and sharing a picture of them. Ask the school and others to request permission before taking and sharing pictures of your children.

Check the privacy settings in your social media and apps to protect your pictures and remember that taking a picture of your children naked always entails a risk. Don't forget to update all your devices and apps and then check your privacy settings again. Use webcam covers to blind the cameras in your screens when not in use. And use the Internet to find more tips on digital parenting!

Talk to your children and make sure they can talk to you

Explain to children under 8 that they are too young to use screens on their own, as they can be dangerous. Set clear rules, including that they must always ask before using a screen.

Build trust with your children so that they come to you if they need help. If they tell you that they broke the rules or somebody did something to them, keep calm and reassure them. If children believe you will be very upset, embarrassed or sad, they are less likely to share their worries with you. Your children should always feel safe to blow the whistle to call you.

End Violence Against Children

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Explain the value of privacy

Tell your children that their body and image belong to them. They have the right to say no to kisses, touches and pictures. Never oblige a child to accept a picture. Tell them to never take pictures of their private parts and never let others do it. Make sure they respect others' privacy too.

Tell them that screens can steal pictures

Tell your children that when screens take pictures, they can be sent everywhere and seen by many, many people, even people that they don't know.

There are people who behave like the Manymes in the story: they steal pictures of children and can be very mean. Explain why you cover the cameras in your screens.

This is why it is better that they seek your permission before allowing someone to take a picture of them. You can help your child to make a list of the people who can take pictures of them. Use the opportunity to insist: nobody is allowed to take a picture of them naked or showing private parts.

Find more information!

A child's capacity evolves and their needs and competences change depending on their maturity and personality. Other parameters (like vulnerabilities, disabilities or upheavals in their lives) may also have an important impact on the child's resilience to possible harm and their capacity to understand and avoid risk.

At the Council of Europe, we work with governments, organisations and companies to maximise the benefits of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for children and minimise their risks and to empower children and keep them safe.

For children and adolescents

The Underwear Rule – Kiko and the Hand

Video and brochure of "Tell Someone You Trust"

Video and booklet of "So This Is Sexual Abuse?"

Leaflet "Learn about your rights in the digital environment"

For adults

"Parenting in the digital age - Positive parenting strategies for different scenarios"

Parental guidance for the online protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse - "Parenting in the Digital Age"

"Protecting children online: 6 short videos by Elizabeth Milovidov"

"Two Clicks Forward and One Click Back: report on children with disabilities in the digital environment"

"The Internet Literacy Handbook"