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Family Online Safety Institute

Starting the Conversation: Digital Safety in Young People's Relationships

This resource provides caring adults with tips for starting conversations about online dating safety, digital consent and boundaries, and ways young people can stay safe online.

Introduction

Young people are forming relationships online, often through phones, apps, video games, and social media. While these spaces can support connection, they can also introduce risks when unhealthy behaviors go unnoticed.

Talking openly about digital safety helps young people build healthy relationships and feel confident speaking up. Leading with curiosity and empathy creates space for trust and open communication.

How You Can Support Young People:

➡️ **Understand how digital abuse can show up**

Digital abuse is often subtle and easily overlooked. Some behaviors may even feel "normal" to young people, even when they involve power or control.

Examples can include:

- ☐ Extreme jealousy or constant check-ins
- ☐ Pressure to share passwords, photos, or location
- ☐ Monitoring who someone talks to, follows, or interacts with
- ☐ Threats to damage a device or share private content

➡️ **Teach young people about safety features on their devices, apps, and games**

- ☐ Review privacy, blocking, muting, and reporting tools together
- ☐ Check which apps allow location sharing or activity tracking
- ☐ Reinforce that they can always change settings if something feels uncomfortable

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➡️ **Encourage healthy digital habits**

- ☐ Understand how much time young people spend on devices and how it can impact their well-being.
- ☐ Notices patterns of overuse, such as mood changes, lack of sleep, or detachment.
- ☐ Encourage balance by supporting regular breaks from screens and time for offline connection.

➡️ **Talk about digital consent and boundaries**

Remind young people that being in a relationship doesn't mean they have to share everything. They always have the right to:

- ☐ Say no to messages or requests that make them uncomfortable
- ☐ Choose who they interact with online
- ☐ Keep personal information private, including passwords, photos, and videos

Healthy relationships—online and offline—are built on trust, respect, and independence. It's never okay to monitor someone, demand constant access, or pressure them to respond

➡️ **If a young person in your life is experiencing digital abuse, provide support without judging**

- ☐ Experiencing abuse, at any level, is scary and uncomfortable. It's important not to shame or blame young people when they disclose.
- ☐ Recognize the courage it takes to share when you've experienced harm, and provide them with affirming support.
- ☐ Give space for them to lead the conversation, ask open ended questions, and remind them that you are there for them and want them to be safe.
- ☐ If additional support is needed, consider reaching out to trusted professionals or local resources.

➡️ Your presence, patience, and willingness to listen can make a powerful difference in helping young people feel safe, respected, and supported—both online and off.

To learn more and access additional resources

➡️ Check out https://eleven-24.org/

➡️ Visit https://fosi.org/