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# MANUAL

# ONLINE

*Security*



**LISTEN TO YOUTH AND PROTECT TEENS ONLINE**

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# 1. Risks and potential coping mechanisms

The internet is a place full of opportunities and challenges. Here's a breakdown of some common online risks, their effects, and tips to help you stay safe and confident.

## Cyberbullying

### How It Affects You

Cyberbullying is one of the most harmful challenges teens face online. Unlike traditional bullying, it follows you everywhere—through your phone, computer, and social media platforms—making it feel inescapable. Its effects can be serious, both emotionally and physically.

- **Emotional Impact:**

- Depression and Anxiety: Constant harassment can make you feel helpless and overwhelmed, leading to persistent sadness, worry, or even panic attacks.
- Low Self-Esteem: Hurtful comments or public shaming online can damage how you see yourself, making you doubt your worth or abilities.
- Fear of School: Being targeted online by classmates can make attending school feel terrifying or humiliating.
- Loneliness and Isolation: Victims often withdraw from friends or family because they feel embarrassed or misunderstood.
- Symptoms of PTSD: Repeated exposure to cyberbullying can trigger flashbacks, nightmares, or intense emotional distress.

- **Physical Impact:**

- Trouble Sleeping or Eating: Stress and anxiety can disrupt your sleep schedule or appetite, leaving you feeling tired or unwell.
- Somatization: Emotional pain often manifests in physical ways, like headaches, stomachaches, or muscle tension.
- Lack of Focus: It's hard to concentrate on schoolwork or hobbies when you're preoccupied with what's happening online.



## How to cope:

While cyberbullying can feel overwhelming, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and regain control:

1. **Build a Supportive Social Circle:** Surround yourself with positive people who uplift and support you. This could include friends, family, teachers, or counselors. Feeling connected makes it easier to handle tough situations.
2. **Share Experiences with a Trusted Adult:** Talk to someone you trust—parents, teachers, or a school counselor—about what’s happening. They can offer advice, emotional support, or even help you take action.
3. **Save Proof:** Keep records of the bullying to strengthen your case if you need to report it. Screenshots can be manipulated, so forward the messages or save the direct URLs to prove their authenticity.
4. **Block and Report Bullies:** Use platform tools to block the bully and report their behavior. Most social media sites have clear policies against harassment and will act on your report.
5. **Set Accounts to Private:** Limit who can see your posts and interact with you online. This reduces exposure to potential bullies.
6. **Spend Less Time Online:** Taking breaks from social media or other platforms gives you mental space to recover and focus on real-life activities.
7. **Boost Self-Esteem and Practice Assertiveness:** Work on building your confidence through positive affirmations, hobbies, or setting personal goals. Learning to stand up for yourself (in a safe way) can help you feel more empowered.
8. **In Severe Cases, Report to Authorities:** If the bullying involves threats, defamation, or any illegal activity, report it to the proper authorities. Involve school officials or law enforcement if necessary.

**Cyberbullying can feel isolating, but you don’t have to face it alone. There are people, tools, and strategies to help you overcome it and reclaim your peace of mind.**



# Grooming & Sexual Solicitation

## How it affects you:

Grooming and sexual solicitation are serious online risks, often starting with someone pretending to care about you. These predators build trust and use emotional manipulation to exploit their victims. The impacts can be deeply personal and long-lasting, affecting both mental health and physical well-being.

### • **Emotional Impact:**

- **Anxiety and Fear:** Victims often feel trapped or scared about what might happen next, especially if explicit content has been shared.
- **Shame and Guilt:** You might blame yourself for what happened, even though it's never your fault. This shame can lead to isolation and reluctance to seek help.
- **Fear of Relationships:** Being manipulated online can create distrust in future relationships, whether romantic, sexual, or even friendships.
- **PTSD Symptoms:** Experiencing grooming or sexual solicitation can leave you with flashbacks, panic attacks, or an ongoing sense of danger.
- **Bullying:** If explicit content is leaked, victims may face public humiliation or bullying, amplifying the emotional toll.

### • **Physical Impact:**

- **Exploitation or Abuse:** Grooming often leads to higher risks of being coerced into unsafe situations, including sexual exploitation.
- **Sleep and Eating Changes:** Stress can make it hard to sleep, cause loss of appetite, or trigger emotional eating.
- **Somatization:** Emotional pain can manifest in physical symptoms like headaches, stomachaches, or muscle tension.



## How to Cope

If you suspect or experience grooming or sexual solicitation, there are immediate and long-term steps you can take to protect yourself:

- **Block and Report the User Immediately:**
  - Use platform tools to block the person and report their behavior. This not only stops their access to you but also alerts the platform to take action.
- **Share Your Experience with a Trusted Adult or Authority Figure:**
  - Don't keep it a secret. Talk to a parent, teacher, counselor, or another adult you trust. They can offer emotional support and help you take appropriate actions, including legal steps if needed.
- **Work on Self-Esteem and Emotional Healing:**
  - Grooming can make you question your self-worth. Rebuild confidence by focusing on activities you enjoy, spending time with supportive friends and family, and seeking therapy if needed. Professional counseling can help process complex feelings like guilt or shame.
- **Never Meet Someone You Only Know Online:**
  - Even if they seem trustworthy, meeting someone in person whom you only know through the internet is risky. Always prioritize your safety and share any invitations with an adult you trust.
- **Understand It's Not Your Fault:**
  - Grooming relies on manipulation, and predators are skilled at exploiting trust. Remember, the blame lies with them—not you.

## Why Taking Action Matters

Grooming can feel overwhelming, but addressing it early can prevent further harm. It's crucial to act quickly, even if you're afraid or embarrassed. By speaking up and seeking help, you take back control and protect yourself from future risks.



# Fake News & Misinformation

## How It Affects You

The internet is full of information—but not all of it is true. Fake news and misinformation can spread like wildfire, creating confusion and even leading to harmful choices. Understanding how this affects you can help you spot and avoid it.

- **Emotional Impact:**

- Confusion: False or exaggerated information can make it hard to know what to believe, leaving you feeling uncertain or misled.
- Stress and Fear: Fake news often uses sensationalist or fear-driven language to grab attention. This can cause unnecessary worry about events, trends, or personal health.
- Strained Relationships: Debates over misinformation can create tension with friends and family, especially when people have differing beliefs or access to information.

- **Physical Impact:**

- Risky Health Decisions: False information about health, such as unverified diets or remedies, can lead to poor decisions that harm your well-being.
- Neglecting Real Solutions: Self-diagnosis based on fake news can delay seeking proper medical treatment, worsening health outcomes.

## How to Cope

Fighting misinformation starts with knowing how to evaluate what you see online. These steps can help you develop strong critical thinking skills to spot and stop the spread of fake news:

- **Always Confirm Sources:**

- Check if the information comes from reputable experts, universities, government organizations, or well-known media outlets. Look for credentials or evidence that the source has expertise in the subject.

- **Avoid Sensationalist or Clickbait Headlines:**

- Headlines designed to shock or scare often exaggerate or distort the facts. If the title feels extreme, the content is likely unreliable.



- **Use Fact-Checking Websites:**

- Trusted fact-checking platforms can help verify information. Examples include Snopes, FactCheck.org, or fact-checking services specific to your country.

- **Be Cautious of Ads:**

- Fake news sites often rely on excessive advertising. If a page feels cluttered or full of pop-ups, its content may not be trustworthy.

- **Check Domain Names:**

- Look for reputable domain endings like .gov or .org. Be careful with domains that appear strange, like misspellings or extra letters in a familiar name.

- **Look for Recent and Updated Information:**

- Outdated information can be misleading. Always check the publication date to ensure the content is still relevant.

- **Examine the Language and Tone:**

- Reliable sources use neutral, factual language. If the content feels overly biased, emotional, or tries to influence your opinions forcefully, be cautious.

- **Compare Multiple Sources:**

- Don't rely on a single article. Look for the same story on different platforms to see if it's widely reported.

- **Be Skeptical of Social Media Posts:**

- Social media is one of the biggest sources of misinformation. Before believing or sharing something, verify it with a trusted source.

- **Question Images and Videos:**

- Visual content can be manipulated or taken out of context. Reverse-image search tools can help confirm where an image originated.

## Why Fighting Misinformation Matters

Fake news doesn't just confuse people—it can lead to real harm. By learning how to spot and stop it, you protect yourself and others from making dangerous decisions. Encouraging friends and family to question what they see online also helps create a safer, smarter digital world.



# Dangerous Online Trends

## How It Affects You

Online trends can look fun and exciting, especially when everyone seems to be doing them. However, some of these challenges are dangerous and can lead to harmful consequences, both emotionally and physically.

- **Emotional Impact:**

- Peer Pressure: Adolescence is a time when fitting in feels important. The fear of being left out can push you into participating in trends you wouldn't normally consider.
- Anxiety: The pressure to perform or post a challenge online can cause stress, especially if it involves risky or embarrassing tasks.
- Shame and Regret: If a challenge leads to injury, humiliation, or unintended consequences, you might feel regretful or ashamed afterward.
- Social Isolation: If a trend harms your reputation or leads to bullying, you might withdraw from friends or social media.
- Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): Watching others participate can make you feel you're missing out, even if the activity is harmful.

- **Physical Impact:**

- Serious Injuries or Harm: Many dangerous challenges involve activities that can physically hurt you, such as ingesting harmful substances, self-harm, or extreme physical tasks.
- Long-Term Health Risks: Some trends have lasting consequences, like damage to your body, accidents, or even life-threatening situations.

## How to Cope

While the appeal of online trends can be strong, understanding the risks and making smart choices can help you avoid harm:

- **Ask an Adult to Help Analyze the Trend:**

- If you're unsure about a challenge, ask a trusted adult to break it down with you. They can provide perspective on whether it's safe or risky.

- **Question Your Friends' Opinions Critically:**

- Just because your friends think a trend is fun or harmless doesn't mean it's a good idea. Think for yourself and don't be afraid to say no if something feels wrong.





- **Think About Other Fun Ways to Connect with Peers:**
  - Peer pressure often comes from a desire to belong. Instead of participating in a risky trend, suggest safer activities or online games that are just as enjoyable.
- **Imagine Possible Risks Before Trying Anything:**
  - Take a moment to visualise the consequences. Could you get hurt? Could it damage your reputation? Considering the risks helps you make a smarter decision.
- **Set Personal Boundaries:**
  - Decide in advance what you're comfortable with. If a trend crosses those lines, stick to your boundaries and opt out.
- **Talk to Others Who've Participated:**
  - If you're tempted, speak with someone who's tried the challenge to understand its risks better. Their experience might help you decide against it.
- **Focus on Long-Term Thinking:**
  - Dangerous trends often offer short-term excitement but can have lasting consequences. Think about how it might affect your future.

### **Why It's Important to Say No**

Trends come and go, but your safety and well-being are more important. You don't need to prove anything to others by taking unnecessary risks. By saying no to dangerous challenges, you protect yourself and set an example for others who might be feeling the same pressure. Remember, the coolest thing you can do is stay true to yourself.

## **Marketing Scams**

### **How It Affects You**

Marketing scams are becoming more common as we spend more time online. They often appear as enticing offers, fake messages from trusted organizations, or deals that seem too good to resist. Falling for these scams can have serious emotional and financial consequences.



- **Emotional Impact:**

- Stress and Anxiety: Discovering that your personal information or money has been compromised can leave you feeling overwhelmed and anxious.
- Guilt and Embarrassment: Victims of scams often blame themselves, feeling ashamed for believing a scammer's lies.
- Financial Pressure: Scams can lead to unexpected losses, such as drained accounts or fraudulent charges, causing significant financial stress.
- Fear of Personal Data Misuse: Scammers often steal sensitive information, like your identity or account details, which can lead to long-term worries about privacy and security.

## How to Cope

Protecting yourself from marketing scams requires a mix of caution, critical thinking, and awareness. Here's how you can stay safe:

- **Never Share Personal Information Outside of Trusted Apps:**

- Be extremely cautious with your personal details. Avoid sharing passwords, banking information, or other sensitive data unless you're absolutely certain the platform or person is legitimate.

- **Verify Websites Before Sharing Information:**

- Check the URL of any website carefully. Scammers often create fake sites that look like real ones but have slight spelling errors or unusual endings (e.g., .com.co or .net instead of .org). If in doubt, navigate directly to the official website rather than clicking on links.

- **Avoid Clicking on Suspicious Links:**

- Links sent via email, text, or social media claiming to offer exclusive deals or urgent updates should be approached with caution. Hover over the link to see where it leads before clicking, and avoid it altogether if it looks suspicious.

- **Question "Too Good to Be True" Offers:**

- Offers promising free products, large discounts, or instant prizes are often scams. As a general rule, if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.



- **Be Wary of Unsolicited Messages:**

- Messages claiming to be from banks, delivery services, or government agencies asking for immediate action or personal details are often scams. Verify the sender before responding.

- **Check for Signs of Professionalism:**

- Legitimate websites and emails are usually free from typos, poor grammar, and cluttered designs. Scammers often overlook these details, so be alert.

- **Enable Security Features:**

- Use two-factor authentication (2FA) on your accounts for added protection. This makes it harder for scammers to gain access even if they have your login details.

- **Report Suspicious Activity:**

- If you suspect a scam, report it to the platform (e.g., social media site, bank) or a relevant authority. Many organizations have teams dedicated to combating fraud.

- **Educate Yourself and Others:**

- Learn about common scams and share your knowledge with friends and family to help them avoid falling for similar tricks.

## **Why Being Cautious Matters**

Marketing scams prey on trust and curiosity, but staying vigilant can save you from stress, financial loss, and data misuse. By being cautious and thoughtful online, you can navigate the digital world safely and protect your personal information. Remember: your privacy is worth more than any “exclusive deal” or “limited-time offer.”



# Traumatizing Content

## How It Affects You

The internet hosts all kinds of content, including violent, explicit, or disturbing material that can appear unexpectedly. Exposure to traumatizing content can have significant emotional and physical impacts, particularly on teens who may not yet have the tools to process it.

- **Emotional Impact:**

- Anxiety and Fear: Seeing something distressing can leave you feeling scared, worried, or on edge, especially if it triggers a sense of danger or helplessness.
- Shame: You might feel embarrassed or guilty for having come across the content, even though it's not your fault.
- Confusion: Traumatizing content can distort your understanding of certain topics, like violence or relationships, leaving you uncertain about what's normal or acceptable.
- Desensitization: Repeated exposure to violent or inappropriate material can make it feel less shocking over time, which might affect how seriously you take such issues.
- Empathy Issues: Overexposure to disturbing content can numb your emotional response, making it harder to connect with or care about others' feelings.

- **Physical Impact:**

- Difficulty Concentrating: Distressing images or videos can replay in your mind, making it hard to focus on schoolwork, hobbies, or conversations.
- Somatization: Emotional distress may show up as headaches, stomachaches, or other physical symptoms caused by stress.

## How to Cope

Dealing with exposure to traumatizing content involves taking immediate steps to protect your mental health and seeking support to process what you've seen:

- **Block Inappropriate Content and Report It:**

- Use platform tools to block harmful content and report it to the site or app. Many platforms actively work to remove such material when flagged.



- **Seek Guidance from a Trusted Adult:**
  - Talk to a parent, teacher, school counselor, or another trusted adult about what you've seen. They can help you make sense of it, provide reassurance, and guide you toward resources for emotional support.
- **Limit Exposure:**
  - Reduce your time on platforms where such content frequently appears. If possible, avoid forums or sites with a reputation for hosting disturbing material.
- **Use Reliable Sources to Gain Accurate Information:**
  - If the content raised questions or confused you, look for answers from trusted sources like educational websites, counselors, or teachers. Understanding the truth can help counteract misinformation or misinterpretation.
- **Take Breaks from Screens:**
  - Disconnecting for a while gives your brain a chance to reset. Spend time outdoors, with friends or family, or engaging in hobbies that make you feel safe and grounded.
- **Focus on Self-Care:**
  - Practice activities that relax and calm you, such as exercising, journaling, or mindfulness. Taking care of your physical health (e.g., sleeping well and eating nutritious food) can also improve your resilience.
- **Consider Talking to a Professional:**
  - If the content continues to bother you or causes significant distress, reach out to a therapist or school psychologist. They can provide tools to process your emotions and cope more effectively.

## Why Protecting Yourself Matters

Traumatizing content can have long-term effects on how you view yourself and the world. By addressing it early and seeking help, you protect your mental and emotional well-being. Remember, it's okay to ask for support—there's strength in recognizing when you need help.



# Political Propaganda

## How It Affects You

Political propaganda online is designed to influence opinions, often by appealing to emotions or exploiting social dynamics. It can subtly shift your beliefs or lead to involvement in groups or activities you might not fully understand or agree with. Its effects can be both emotional and intellectual, shaping how you view the world and interact with others.

- **Emotional Impact:**

- Peer Pressure: Social media often amplifies groupthink, making it difficult to disagree with friends or influencers who support certain political messages.
- Guilt: If you later realize you've been misled or supported a cause that conflicts with your values, you might feel regret or shame.
- Difficulty Seeing Other Perspectives: Exposure to repetitive or one-sided propaganda can make you resistant to hearing other opinions or considering alternative viewpoints.
- Involvement in Extreme Groups: Political propaganda can funnel people into extreme or polarized communities, sometimes without realizing how far their views have shifted.

## How to Cope

Navigating political propaganda requires critical thinking, openness to dialogue, and awareness of how information is presented. These steps can help you maintain a balanced and informed perspective:

- **Look for Diverse, Credible Sources of Information:**

- Avoid relying on a single platform or influencer for your political knowledge. Seek out information from multiple reputable sources, such as established news outlets, government websites, and independent fact-checking organizations.
- Be cautious of sources that consistently promote only one side of an issue, use overly emotional language, or dismiss alternative views as invalid.



- **Have Conversations with People Holding Different Opinions:**
  - Talking to others with different perspectives can broaden your understanding of complex topics. Approach these conversations with curiosity and respect, aiming to learn rather than argue.
  - Reflect on why you or others feel strongly about certain beliefs. Understanding the underlying emotions can help you engage in meaningful discussions.
- **Question the Intent Behind the Message:**
  - Propaganda often aims to influence behavior or opinions in a specific direction. Ask yourself: Who created this message, and what do they want me to believe or do?
- **Be Aware of Algorithmic Influence:**
  - Social media algorithms often reinforce content similar to what you've engaged with before, creating an "echo chamber." Actively seek out different viewpoints to break out of these bubbles.
- **Avoid Extremist Content:**
  - Be cautious of content that encourages anger, fear, or division. Political propaganda often exaggerates or distorts facts to provoke strong emotions.
- **Take a Step Back:**
  - If you feel overwhelmed by political content, take a break from social media or online discussions. Disconnecting temporarily can help you regain perspective.

### **Why Staying Informed Matters**

Political propaganda isn't just about influencing your vote—it can shape how you think, feel, and interact with the world. By staying informed and thinking critically, you protect yourself from manipulation and make decisions that truly reflect your values. Remember, balanced perspectives lead to better understanding and healthier conversations.



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# GUIDELINES FOR ADULTS







# Guidelines for Adults: Supporting Safe and Healthy Online Habits

The role of adults—parents, teachers, and school staff—is crucial in creating a safe and supportive environment for teenagers navigating the online world. Here’s a detailed guide for each group to help them understand and address online safety effectively.

## For parents:

### 1. Communicate Openly and Without Judgment

- **Listen Actively:** When your teen shares their online experiences, prioritize listening. Avoid reacting with anger, shame, or punishment, which could discourage them from opening up in the future.
- **Validate Feelings:** Let them know their emotions are valid and that it’s okay to feel scared, confused, or upset about certain online encounters.

### 2. Teach Online Safety Practices

- **Basics of Online Security:** Explain the importance of not talking to strangers, maintaining private profiles, and using strong, unique passwords.
- **Account Protection:** Emphasize having more than one way to access accounts (like recovery emails) and warn against saving passwords on shared or public devices.
- **Personal Information:** Teach them never to share sensitive details such as their school, address, or family information online.
- **Public Wi-Fi Risks:** Highlight the dangers of using unsecured public Wi-Fi for sensitive tasks like banking or accessing personal accounts.

### 3. Set Boundaries for Internet Use

- **Screen Time Limits:** Establish consistent rules for how long they can spend online, with flexibility for educational or creative activities.
- **Designated Screen-Free Zones:** Prohibit screens at family meals or during moments of connection, like game nights or family outings.
- **No Screens Before Bedtime:** Promote better sleep hygiene by keeping phones and devices out of the bedroom.
- **TV Placement:** Remove televisions from bedrooms to discourage isolated viewing and promote family interaction.



#### **4. Use Tools and Controls to Ensure Safety**

- Parental Controls: Install apps or tools that restrict access to inappropriate content and monitor usage.
- Content Blocking: Proactively block specific words, websites, or apps that are known to contain harmful material.
- Access Transparency: Require passwords for their devices with the understanding that you'll only use them if there's a potential safety concern.

#### **5. Foster Awareness and Understanding**

- Stay Updated on Trends: Learn about the latest apps, games, and online behaviors teens are engaging with. This knowledge helps you understand their online world and spot potential risks.
- Identify Emotional Changes: Be alert for signs like decreased academic performance, social withdrawal, or emotional distress when they're using screens.
- Know Where to Seek Help: Familiarize yourself with local and national organizations or entities that can assist with online safety issues, cyberbullying, or grooming.

#### **6. Model Responsible Technology Use**

- Lead by Example: Practice healthy online habits yourself, like limiting screen time, engaging in face-to-face interactions, and maintaining a positive online presence.
- Promote Quality Time: Show them that life offline can be fulfilling and exciting by prioritizing activities that don't involve screens.

#### **7. Emphasize the Privilege of Screen Time**

- Reinforce that screen time is a privilege that comes with responsibilities, not an inherent right. Use this perspective to help them appreciate and respect their time online.



## For teachers:

### 1. Integrate Online Safety into the Curriculum

- Teach Internet Literacy: Include lessons on evaluating credible sources, identifying misinformation, and understanding privacy settings.
- Discuss Online Risks: Address cyberbullying, grooming, and dangerous trends, helping students recognise and avoid these dangers.

### 2. Create a Safe Space for Communication

- Be Approachable: Regularly remind students that they can come to you with concerns about their online experiences.
- Encourage Reporting: Teach students not to be passive bystanders and to speak up if they witness harmful online behavior, even if the victim hesitates to report it.

### 3. Partner with the School Psychologist

- Highlight the school psychologist as a resource for students who are struggling with online challenges. Reinforce the importance of seeking professional support when needed.

### 4. Promote Healthy Screen Habits

- Limit Screen Dependency: Encourage classroom activities that don't rely on screens, prioritizing interactive and hands-on learning.
- Be a Role Model: Demonstrate balanced and healthy internet use in your professional and personal behavior.

### 5. Build Trust and Relationships

- Develop strong, genuine connections with students by showing interest in their lives and listening to their concerns. A supportive teacher-student relationship can make students feel safe discussing sensitive issues.

### 6. Stay Informed

- Keep up with trends, apps, and games students use to understand their digital landscape and recognize potential risks.
- Learn about organizations and entities that can provide help or training in online safety.



## For Other School Staff (e.g., School Assistants)

### 1. Observe and Engage

- Supervise Activities: Pay attention to student interactions, including how they use screens during school hours.
- Notice Behavioral Changes: Be aware of signs like withdrawal, emotional outbursts, or unusual interactions that could indicate online issues.

### 2. Support and Inform Students

- Provide Safe Spaces: Let students know they can talk to you about online concerns without fear of judgment or punishment.
- Encourage Reporting: Teach students to report inappropriate behavior they see or experience, and assure them that their concerns will be taken seriously.

### 3. Enforce Screen-Free Moments

- Promote real-world interaction by restricting screen use in areas where it's not necessary, like playgrounds or during break times.

### 4. Build Trusting Relationships

- Show genuine interest in students' well-being, fostering an environment where they feel comfortable sharing their concerns.

### 5. Know Your Resources

- Familiarize yourself with the school's policies, local entities, and procedures for handling online safety issues. Understanding your role can help ensure that you take appropriate action when needed.

## For School as a Whole

### 1. Develop Clear Policies

- Establish rules regarding internet use at school, including consequences for misconduct such as cyberbullying or unauthorized sharing of images.
- Ensure these rules are communicated clearly to students, staff, and parents.



## **2. Emphasize Non-Screen-Based Learning**

- Prioritize teaching methods and activities that encourage face-to-face interaction and minimize reliance on screens.

## **3. Provide Training for Staff**

- Offer workshops and resources to help teachers and assistants recognize online safety issues and respond effectively.

## **4. Collaborate with Parents**

- Maintain open lines of communication with parents, providing regular updates about trends, risks, and the school's internet safety measures.

## **5. Partner with Online Safety Entities**

- Build relationships with organizations that specialize in online safety to provide training, resources, or intervention support as needed.



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# WORKSHOP IN LISBON





## Observations During the Workshop

The workshop provided rich insights into participants' perceptions of online safety, highlighting a mix of concerns, reflections, and gaps in understanding.

Below is an in-depth analysis of these observations:

### Major Concerns Identified

- **Dark Web and Violent Content:**

- Key Points: Participants expressed fear and curiosity about the dark web, with limited knowledge of its dangers or how it operates. Violent content was also a significant concern, as it can be encountered accidentally or shared widely on social media platforms.
- Impact: Exposure to such material can cause anxiety, fear, or desensitization, emphasizing the need for education on recognizing and avoiding harmful digital spaces.

- **Self-Image Issues and Social Comparison:**

- Participants frequently mentioned the pressures of social media, where curated content creates unrealistic standards of beauty, success, and lifestyle.
- This comparison often leads to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and body image concerns.

- **Loss of Time Online:**

- Many participants admitted to losing track of time online, particularly when using platforms like TikTok or Instagram reels. They recognized the struggle to differentiate between productive and non-productive use of their time.
- This raised discussions about setting boundaries, using app limits, and disabling notifications to reclaim control over time.

- **Privacy and Digital Footprint:**

- Privacy concerns were raised about personal data exposure, particularly on websites or apps that track user behavior. Specific websites, such as Omegle, were discussed as dangerous spaces where IP addresses can be tracked easily.



- **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):**
- The need to constantly stay updated online, even at the cost of personal time or well-being, was a recurring theme. Participants noted that constant notifications and the pressure to always be available exacerbated this issue.
- **Identity and Real-Life Disconnect:**
- A concern about “forgetting who we are in real life” resonated with the group. Many teens feel they need to perform or maintain an idealized version of themselves online, leading to a loss of authenticity and real-world connections.

## Discussion Highlights

- **Cyberbullying:**
  - Participants were surprised to learn how cyberbullying could be more damaging than traditional bullying due to the “public stage” of the internet, the inability to escape attacks, and the permanence of online harassment.
  - Key reflections included:
    - The impact of social exclusion: One participant highlighted how being excluded online feels more visible and isolating.
    - “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” mindset: While this perspective was shared, the group agreed it doesn’t apply to cyberbullying, which can leave long-lasting emotional scars.
  - Coping Suggestions: Discussions centered on going offline temporarily, reporting incidents to adults, and promoting socio-emotional skills like assertiveness.
- **Grooming:**
  - Participants discussed how grooming affects self-worth, trust in others, and the ability to form healthy relationships.
  - They recognized the long-term damage of accepting harmful behaviors as normal, often due to the manipulative nature of predators.
  - Some shared stories of websites like Omegle, where grooming risks are high. Adults in the room were surprised by the prevalence of such platforms and their accessibility to teens.
  - A participant mentioned the phenomenon of catching predators by pretending to be minors, which sparked debate about its risks and ethics.





- **Fake News:**

- The group expressed concern over misinformation, particularly regarding diets, self-diagnoses, and health practices. They emphasized the importance of teaching critical thinking to combat the spread of false information.
- A teacher noted the positive side of the internet as a source of concise, valuable information but acknowledged the challenge of distinguishing reliable content from fake news.

- **Political Propaganda:**

- Unlike other issues, political propaganda did not seem to resonate strongly as a pressing concern. However, its potential for influencing teens' perspectives and creating polarization was acknowledged by facilitators.

## **Participant Experiences and Reflections**

- **Unproductive Screen Time:**

- Most participants agreed that much of their time online is not productive. They discussed how disabling notifications or using screen timers could help regain control but noted that these measures feel difficult to implement.

- **Silent Moments and External Control Locus:**

- Several participants shared that they no longer experience "silent moments," as they feel compelled to engage with their phones constantly. Some questioned whether external factors, like disabling Wi-Fi, are necessary to enforce breaks from the internet.

- **Campaigns and Interventions:**

- Participants suggested the importance of targeted campaigns about cyberbullying, emphasizing the role of bystanders. They proposed creating a safe environment for bystanders to report incidents anonymously.

- **School Assistants' Role:**

- The group found it challenging to articulate the role of school assistants in online safety, reflecting a gap in training and recognition for these professionals. Participants suggested training assistants to handle first-hand reports and promote emotional well-being among students.



## Further Observations by the Psychologist

- **Group Dynamics:**
  - The participants were highly engaged and reflective, offering both personal insights and broader societal observations. Their ability to think back on their teenage years provided valuable context for understanding these issues from multiple perspectives.
- **Differences Between Online Gamers and Social Media Users:**
  - A gamer in the room highlighted the unique risks faced by gamers, such as anonymity, exposure to toxic communities, and deeper technical knowledge of online systems. This contrasted with risks common to social media users, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches to online safety.
- **Creativity and Integration of Feedback:**
  - The group was particularly creative when drafting rules for teens. They appreciated feedback and successfully adapted their ideas into more accessible, engaging language that would resonate with younger audiences.
- **Language Accessibility:**
  - The psychologist stressed the importance of using simple, clear, and fun language in online safety guidelines for teens, avoiding abstract concepts that might be hard for them to grasp.

The workshop revealed the deep complexity of online safety challenges for teens, ranging from privacy to time management, mental health, and misinformation. While participants recognized the risks, many lacked strategies for addressing them, highlighting the need for more education and structured interventions. The observations also underscored the importance of involving all stakeholders—parents, teachers, and school assistants—in promoting safe online behavior. The group’s thoughtful input and engagement demonstrated a strong foundation for future workshops and campaigns.



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**Any questions?**

Project's Website



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**Do not hesitate  
to contact us!**

