

Conversation Starters

How to talk to young people about their online life



A Safer
Schools NI
Resource



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Concern: "My child is spending too much time online."

Instead of

"It's different for me, I'm allowed to be on my phone/laptop, that's my job!"

Try

"You are right, I do spend a lot of time online. Mostly it is for work, but sometimes I find myself endlessly scrolling.

I need to remember to stop and take a break, if you see me doing that could you remind me to stop and take a break?"

Instead of

"You're always on that phone, get in the real world!"

Try

"Can you tell me what you like and don't like about being online?"

Or

"Can you show me the type of things you like to look at?"

Instead of

"You're going to wreck your eyes by constantly being on that!"

Try

"How about scheduling some breaks for yourself from your devices, even just to give your eyes a rest."



Concern: "My child is talking to strangers online."



Instead of

"You shouldn't be talking to strangers on there!"

Try

"Sometimes online, people aren't as they seem. It's important not to tell people too many personal details and if someone makes you feel uncomfortable, it's perfectly ok to end the conversation."

Or

"If you met them in the street what information would you share with them...?"

Or

"Do you know how to block/report people in the apps you are using?"

Instead of

"I'm blocking you from talking to anyone online after what happened last time!"

Try

"Thank you for sharing that with me. Let's make sure we know what to do if this happens again"

Instead of

"You could end up kidnapped or worse with some of the people on these sites!"

Try

"You do know that just like real life, there can be some people online who aren't very nice. Do you know what to do if someone makes you feel unsafe?"



Concern: "My child is being bullied online."

Instead of

"Someone said what to you?! That's it, we're deleting your account right now!"

Try

"Let's talk about how to handle cyber bullying or inappropriate content."

Instead of

"The internet is full of bullies who will wreck your mental health."

Try

"You know you can talk to me or another trusted adult if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable online?"

Instead of

"I'll be down to that school / house / club first thing tomorrow to see them!"

Try

"Are they behaving like that towards you in real life too or is this just online?"

Or

"What would be the most comfortable way to sort this out for you?"

(If it's someone they know)



Concern: "My child is using a platform I don't know enough about."

Instead of

"All social media is bad and you shouldn't use it!"

Try

"What have you been doing online lately?"

Or

"What's your favourite thing about this app/platform?"

Instead of

"I don't understand this app/platform etc, so you can't use it!"

Try

"Can you show me what you like to do on this?"

Instead of

"We never had any of this nonsense back in my day!"

Try

"This is all new to me, so I'd really like your help in understanding it all."



Concern: "My child is displaying behaviour that concerns me."



Instead of

"You're so secretive when you're on there, what are you keeping from me?!"

Try

"I like to know that you're safe. How about talking me through some of the apps/platforms you're using?"

Instead of

"I'll check your device every day to make sure you're not doing something you shouldn't be."

Try

"It's important to be kind and respectful online, just like in real life."

Instead of

"I don't like how cheeky you are when you're online."

Try

"It's ok to be yourself, even when you're online, there's no need to become someone different. Just be you."



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