Australian Council on Children and the Media

Steps parents can take to protect their children's digital privacy

Here is a **three-step approach** that parents can use to establish a good framework to both safeguard their children's privacy and guide them to making safe independent choices. These steps can be implemented at any point, but starting early will help them become a normal part of a child's life.

TEACH YOURSELF

- Spend a little time getting to know how the privacy settings on your (and your children's) devices work.

- Take a look at some of the apps you or your children have downloaded and read their privacy policies.

- Familiarise yourself with some of the common terms used. Learning about *Traps with Apps* and the associated risks will help you to feel more confident to guide your children.

- Take a look at our recommended resources
  (*https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/your-privacy-rights/children-and-young-people/privacy-tips-for-parents-and-carers/* and
  https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/skills-advice/privacy-child).

Even a little knowledge goes a long way.

BOUNDARIES, GUIDELINES AND LIMITS

- Set up age appropriate and realistic expectations about how online devices are used in your household to help to establish healthy digital habits for both parents and children (modelling healthy device use is a great first step).
  In dual parent households, agree on a unified approach to the management and enforcement of rules around media use, as being on the same page is important.

- Set clear boundaries so you can keep an eye on your child's online activity – letting you step in and help if anything is looking tricky or unsafe.

DO IT TOGETHER

- Join in and share digital activities with your child as one of the most effective ways of protecting them against privacy risks.

- Let them watch how you respond to requests for information, how you recognise any traps with apps, and how you adjust privacy settings.

- At every stage, talk them through why and how you are making those decisions and show them how to manage privacy.

With your guidance, they will gradually transition to making their own decisions and managing their privacy settings independently.

What are the Privacy Basics?

How you manage your privacy will be down to the device you use and the apps, platforms and programs that you use. If you're not sure about any of these things, it is worth putting in some time to learn how it works.

These are the most basic things you can do to protect your children's privacy:

- Check the privacy settings on the device that your child uses. There are tutorials on YouTube to show you how, or ask someone to help you. Make them as restrictive as you can without compromising how the device works.

- Delete apps that you don't use very much or your children rarely open or enjoy.

- Limit the number of apps that your child is allowed to have on their device. The more apps you have, the more third parties can access the information on your device.

- For every app, check what information it requests from your device. If it requests permission to use something that it really doesn't need to function, deny access.

- If your device is on the Android platform, a program called *AppCensus AppSearch* can tell you what private and personally identifying information that an app is accessing and sharing with third parties. It is very simple to use and will help you decide whether an app is safe for your child. (Please note: the analyses on this site are carried out under US conditions). You can find it here: https://search.appcensus.io/

- Read the privacy policies of the apps you decide to keep on your child's device. Check to see if they contain third party trackers. Privacy policies are often deliberately difficult to understand and very time consuming to read, so don't be put off – the more you read the easier it gets to pick out the important details. Have a look at our *Apps can track: privacy tips and checks* webpage for information and guides to help you understand a little more: (https://childrenandmedia.org.au/app-reviews/apps-can-trap-tracking).

- If your child uses a web browser such as google chrome, safari etc, find out how to change the settings to opt out of ad personalisation. Regularly clear the saved information and any cookies.

- Regularly clear your saved data, anywhere and everywhere that it is possible. Learn how to do this on the platforms that your child uses regularly.

- If a child's app requires them to sign in, decide whether it is worthwhile. The fewer apps that have your personal details (names, emails, children's names etc) the better. If you think it is worth creating an account, make sure that it is protected by a strong password that you change regularly. Another strategy is to create a false identity to use for creating accounts like this. This is not difficult to do and can help to protect you and your children's real-life identities.

Privacy Basics for Children

As well as talking to your children about privacy; doing it *with* them; and setting clear boundaries, ask your children to follow these basic safety precautions at all times:

- Don't give out any personal details to people online.

- Don't click on pop-ups or ads – they can take you to websites which have either inappropriate content or sites asking for financial information.

- Don't put your personal details alongside your photographs online.

- If something comes up that makes you curious or uncomfortable or scared – take a screenshot. You can then show a trusted adult and ask their advice.

How do I talk to my children about digital privacy?

It can seem difficult to know how to speak to your children effectively about digital privacy and the value of their information, especially if you feel unsure about it. However, even from a very young age conversations and activities can be introduced to establish a framework for building knowledge, independence and confidence about digital privacy. You can read our guide *Talking to children about digital privacy* for useful explanations about what kind of concepts and conversations are developmentally appropriate and examples of how to approach them.

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