

Know the Signs Before Harm Occurs

Online Safety Red Flags Guide

Online grooming and exploitation often begin subtly, through friendly conversations, attention, or shared interests. Recognizing early warning signs can help you step in before a situation becomes dangerous.

1. Digital Warning Signs

- Increased secrecy around devices (turning screens away, deleting messages)
- Quickly closing apps when approached
- Multiple or hidden accounts/apps
- Messaging with people they don't know in real life
- Moving conversations to new or private platforms
- Late-night device use or urgency to respond to messages
- Receiving gifts, money, or special attention online

2. Behavioral & Emotional Changes

- Sudden mood swings (anxiety, irritability, withdrawal)
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Spending significantly more time online
- Becoming distant from family or friends
- Seeming stressed, secretive, or unusually protective of their device

3. Social Red Flags

- Talking about a new "friend" but avoiding details
- Becoming defensive when asked about online activity
- Forming fast, intense connections with someone online
- Being encouraged to keep conversations secret
- Referring to someone as a "best friend" they've never met

These behaviors may suggest:

- Someone is building trust with your child
- Your child is being manipulated or emotionally influenced
- Conversations are moving toward secrecy or isolation

WHEN & HOW TO TAKE ACTION

1. Start with a Calm Conversation

- Approach without blame or punishment
- Ask open-ended questions
- Reassure them they're not in trouble

2. Check Devices Together

- Review apps, messages, and contacts
- Look for unknown names, accounts, or platforms
- Stay calm and focused on safety, not discipline

3. Preserve Evidence (If Needed)

- Take screenshots of conversations or profiles
- Save usernames, dates, and messages
- Do not delete anything important

4. Report & Get Support

- Report suspicious users on the platform
- Contact local authorities if there's immediate concern
- Reach out to trusted child safety organizations

Prevention Starts at Home. The most effective protection is ongoing communication.

- Talk regularly about online safety
- Teach kids not to share personal information
- Encourage them to trust their instincts
- Let them know they can come to you about anything

Not every sign means danger but multiple signs together should never be ignored.