

# Keeping Children Safe Online

## Help for Parents

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Parents, this article is a difficult but critical one to read. When I say our children's lives depend on it, please know I am not being overly dramatic. Our children are being contacted by predators, literally **ALL. THE. TIME.**

How do I know? Because I am a school division social worker in contact with over 5000 students. I regularly communicate with mental health professionals, law enforcement, child protection workers and Canada's national tip line for reporting online exploitation of children, [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca). Not only that, I am a mother of four, aunt of seven, and pseudo mom of countless more.

Please don't just take my word for it, here are some disturbing Canadian statistics documented by [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) and the RCMP:

- In 2020 these three statistics when compared to the previous five year average
  - **making or disturbing child exploitation material increased 89%**,
  - **luring a child online increased 37%** and
  - **non-consensual distribution of intimate images increased 80%**
- Cybertip receives **1000 reports across Canada A DAY on sextortion** (when someone threatens to send an intimate picture or video of you, real or photoshopped, to others if you do not comply with their demands of money, cryptocurrency or sexual content)
- Between 2020 and 2021, **law enforcement received a 510% increase in enticement complaints** (adults communicating with a minor with the intent to exploit them). Data from [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](https://www.nccm.ca/)

I have never met a parent who did not have their child's best interest and safety in mind. We tell our children not to talk to strangers, we buckle them up safely in vehicles and we put helmets on their beautiful heads when they take part in nearly every activity. We teach them to look both ways when they cross the street and we have fire extinguishers, smoke alarms and carbon dioxide detectors in our homes. We ensure all the toys we buy are not hazardous. Governments have all sorts of rules and laws to keep children safe in their day to day life - except when they are ONLINE. When our children are online, all the responsibility - and blame - to protect them is put on parents.

It is impossible for parents to oversee all our children's online activity because social media platforms and online video games have unsupervised access to our children 24-7. How can we possibly stay up to date on the [Best Parental Control Software](https://www.bestparentalcontrol.com/) available or to be savvy on every video game and [app that is dangerous](#)? It is daunting to think where to start in protecting the ones who are most precious to us.

## **What is the #1 way to protect your child?**

**TALK TO THEM.** Not to instill fear, but to teach them to be **WISE, PRUDENT** and **SENSIBLE**. Reassure them that no matter what, they can **ALWAYS** talk to you. What we can do is have open, honest, lighthearted and frequent conversations with our children at whatever age we first hand them a device that can connect to the internet. Two and three years old is not too young to talk about safety everywhere in your little one's life, especially about internet safety.

Please have the passwords to your children's devices and go through them regularly. It is your right and responsibility (after all, you are most likely the one who paid for the device and whose name is on the account). Coach and guide them on their conversations with their online peers, no different than when we teach them to be a good friend in their offline world. Show them how to report and block profiles that appear harmful or inappropriate. An excellent and thorough resource for families is [protectchildren.ca](http://protectchildren.ca).

Most importantly, foster relationships and activities that are not online to have a healthy balance for everyone in the family. Face to face conversations will always trump screen time.

*This article was written by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to promote wellness and success in school. Tammy has been a Registered Social Worker for more than 23 years and is a mother to 4 children; 2 in high school and 2 in university.*