

GUARDIANS OF THE NET





ONLINE SAFETY

Guide for Parents

How to Protect Your Child from Online
Grooming, Sexting & Digital Dangers

INTRODUCTION

Why This Guide Matters

As a parent, it's hard to keep up with every new app or trend your child is exposed to online. WhatsApp, Snapchat, TikTok – the list keeps growing, and with it, the risks.

This guide is designed to help you understand the real dangers your child may face online and equip you with practical tools to keep them safe, confident, and empowered in a digital world.

UNDERSTAND THE DANGERS

Online risks aren't just about screen time. Real dangers include:

Grooming

when adults form emotional connections with children to exploit them.

Sexting

when someone asks for or shares inappropriate images.

Catfishing

fake profiles pretending to be someone else to gain trust.

Inappropriate content

from violence and explicit material to cyberbullying.

Children aged 8–13 are especially vulnerable as they begin exploring online independence.

Spot the Warning Signs

Some behaviours may indicate your child is being targeted online:

- 01** They suddenly become secretive about their device usage.
- 02** They are using apps or chat platforms not previously discussed.
- 03** They receive messages from people they haven't met in real life.
- 04** Their mood changes after being online – anxious, withdrawn, upset.
- 05** They delete chat histories or hide screens when approached.





TALK

to your child

Even if it is awkward

Approach the topic without shame or judgement. Start with:

- "Who do you talk to online? Do you know them in real life?"
- "Has anyone ever asked you to keep a secret on your phone?"
- "Do you know what's safe to share online and what's not?"

Reinforce that if someone makes them feel uncomfortable, it's never their fault, and they should always tell you.

Here's a quick breakdown of two high-risk platforms:



Snapchat:

Messages disappear after being viewed. This makes it easy to hide inappropriate content. Snap Map can also reveal your child's real-time location.



WhatsApp:

Encrypted and private, often used for one-on-one chats or group messages. Can include links, images, and videos with minimal oversight.

Understand the Apps They're Using

Tip:

Make time to go through your child's apps with them. Ask them to show you how they work. Stay curious, not accusatory.

Set Up Safety Controls

Take advantage of built-in safety tools:



Safety Controls

ON

- Enable parental controls on devices (iOS, Android, routers).
- Use Google Family Link or Apple Screen Time to monitor app usage.
- Disable location sharing and turn off chat for younger children.
- Block or limit access to adult content and unapproved downloads.



16+ in South Africa



13+

Know the Legal

AGE LIMITS

Many apps have age restrictions for a reason:

If your child is under the required age, it's best to delay their use – or closely supervise.

Build Digital Trust

Instead of banning everything, create a relationship of shared responsibility:

01

Have regular check-ins – not interrogations.

02

Share your own experiences and challenges online.

03

Let them know they're never in trouble for asking for help.



Stay calm

01

Your reaction sets the tone.

Reassure them

02

they've done the right thing by coming to you.

Report

03

the offender on the platform.



Childline SA
08000 55 555



Call
116



Website
www.childlinesa.org.za



What To Do If Something Happens

If your child has
shared something
or experienced
online abuse:

FINAL THOUGHTS

Protecting your child online isn't about knowing every app or trend. It's about being available, informed, and connected to your child's digital life. You're not alone – and neither are they.



Want to explore this topic together with your child?

Download our Digital Superhero eBook for kids (ages 8–13) at <http://guardiansofthenet.co.za/>

THE REALITY:

What the Stats Say

1 in 3 internet users worldwide

is under the age of 18, according to UNICEF – and many are unsupervised online.

1 in 5 children

are estimated to be approached by online predators at some point.

60% of South African children aged 9–17

have seen sexual content online, a 2023 study found.

WhatsApp & Snapchat

platforms with disappearing messages and private chats – are where most grooming happens.

These aren't just numbers. They represent real children who need protection, awareness, and support.

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