Exploring the Internet (Safely!)

Innovations in educational technology are changing the classroom, which means your students are spending more time online than ever. Make the web a safe, fun place for kids to learn with these tips and activities.

⭐️ BONUS: Tips for families, too!
Set Up a Safe Classroom

To establish basic digital guidelines in your class, follow these best practices.

**Review and enforce**
your school’s Acceptable Use policy.

**Spend time on websites you plan to use in your lessons.**
Click around. Are there ads that can lead places you don’t like? Let the students know they should never click on pop-up ads.

**Encourage honesty.**
Tell students that sometimes a click might lead them down a rabbit hole that can get inappropriate. Ask that they tell you right away so you can help get them back on track.

**Have students log on for screen time.**
Keep a paper sign-in sheet next to each class computer, and make sure students sign in when they go online and sign out when they finish. This helps you see who was online if any issues crop up later.

**Check browser histories frequently.**
Even the best teachers can’t be everywhere at once. Make sure the kids haven’t accessed inappropriate content.
Social Media Rules for Students

Whether your students are using social media at home or at school, they should follow these safety rules. Write the list on a whiteboard or print it out, and post prominently in your class.

Rule 1 Do not put identifiable information on Instagram, Snapchat, or any other social media channel (name, school name, home address, current location).

Rule 2 Don’t tag friends in a photo without their permission. Remember that photos stay online forever. If you don’t want everyone to see, don’t post.

Rule 3 If someone you don’t know asks to follow you or sends you a friend request, be careful! Don’t chat with them and don’t assume you can trust them.

Rule 4 If someone is making you feel bad or bullying you on social media, talk to an adult right away.
Fun Ways to Teach Digital Safety

Try these group lessons for elementary and middle school kids.

For younger students

Rules Are Everywhere! (Grades K–4)
Divide students into groups. Have them write or draw pictures of rules they already follow in the classroom and at home, then let them share their lists with the class. Talk about how the Internet is a place, just like their house or school, where they need to ask adults for permission, follow safety rules, and be kind to others.

Who’s Your Neighbor? (Grades K–4)
Discuss rules for talking to strangers—on the way home from school, on your block, and on the phone. The Internet is like a neighborhood, and the same rules apply. Role-play meeting strangers in real life and ask kids: What do you keep private? Then role-play meeting people online, where one person pretends to be the Internet stranger asking for information (for very young students, you or another teacher may need to help with the role-play).

For older students

Is It True? (Grades 5–8)
Divide students into groups and give them a “news” story that has been shown to be fake along with one that is real. Have students try to decide which one is real and which one is fake. Ask them to come up with three reasons to justify their answers. Then lead a discussion about the dangers of fake news, why sources would give misleading information, and what they have to gain if they aren’t telling the truth.

What’s in a Footprint? (Grades 5–8)
A digital footprint is what people can see about someone’s online presence. Have students draw a footprint on a sheet of paper, then fill it in with lists of the places they post information, play games, and so on. Then ask them to turn it over and write the information people could find out about them from their footprint.
Media Safety Tips for Families

Teachers, make copies of this list and send it home for parents to read.

**Keep screens visible.** If possible, set up your desktop and laptop computers in a family room or kitchen, so you can monitor what kids are viewing online.

**Set up screen-time rules.** On weeknights, put a limit on non-homework screen use. You should know how many hours your child spends watching videos, playing games online, and/or posting on social media.

**Collect passwords from younger kids.** If your child doesn’t want to share her passwords with you, discuss why. Young children don’t need Internet privacy.

**Have kids turn in their phones** to you at least an hour before bedtime. The light that screens emit can disrupt sleep.

**Establish which sites are off-limits.** Then discuss consequences for visiting those sites.

**Teach kindness.** Let your child know that he doesn’t need to be friends with everyone, but he should never type something mean about someone online. That’s the same as saying it to their face.

**Discuss stranger safety.** Make sure kids know not to share where they live, their name, where they go to school, or any other identifiable information.

**Have an open-door policy.** Make sure your kids know they can always come to you, even if they make a mistake.

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