

Common Sense on Privacy

What's The Issue?

In a digital world where everyone is connecting and sharing, privacy starts to mean something different than simply guarding personal or private information. In this context, you might think about kids' privacy in three categories: privacy and security, privacy and reputation, and privacy and advertising.

Privacy and security Private information (e.g., Social Security number, first and last name) that could put kids at risk for identity theft if it got into the wrong hands.

Privacy and reputation Information that could be embarrassing or hurtful to them or others if posted publicly.

Privacy and advertising Information about their habits and behavior online that companies collect in order to target them with ads and other content.

Why It Matters

The Internet opens up incredible opportunities for connecting and sharing. But if kids aren't careful, their reputations can be harmed, or their information used in ways they never intended. For example, your child may think he or she just sent something to a friend, but that friend can send it to a friend's friend, and so on. Or kids may innocently fill out an online form without understanding what makes them vulnerable to identity theft. Additionally, their online behavior will likely be tracked without them knowing by the industry, which has little incentive to be responsible. Parents can help kids become aware their "digital footprint" – all of the information about a person that can be found online – and how they can create a positive one.

Common Sense Says

Make sure kids get your permission before filling out forms.

Let kids know that you are the gatekeeper. They should ask your permission before filling out online forms, and they should always keep their Social Security number, birth date, address, and full name private.

Help kids think long term.

Everything online leaves a digital footprint. Help them think before they post so that they will be proud of their Internet presence down the road.

Remind kids that the Golden Rule applies online.

Remind kids that they will be treated online as they treat others. Whatever negative things they say can and probably will come back to haunt them, in more ways than they can imagine.

Help kids see through advertising.

The next time an ad pops up online, or you see that you are being targeted by ads specific to your interests, point it out to your kids. Let them know that some companies advertise to you based on what kinds of things you look at online.