

## Talking about online safety with your neurodiverse child

Children with conditions such as **autism** (ASD) and **attention deficit disorder** (ADD) find communicating with others difficult. When your child struggles with social communication in off-line situations, supporting them to negotiate the online world can be daunting, especially when the best solution is to communicate with them regularly about what they do online.

Here are some ideas for talking to your neurodiverse child about being safe online:

- Find out what they like to do online and why. Keep conversations positive and frequent so that they are encouraged to come to you when they are not sure or things go wrong online.
- Ask about what they are already doing to stay safe online. You may be surprised at their awareness and skills, or not! Either way, you will learn something about how aware they are of the risks and they will appreciate you acknowledging their technical skills.
- Don't expect them to change what they do online after one conversation. That epic castle on Minecraft didn't build itself in one day! You will need to repeat key safety messages, ideally in lots of different ways, to help your young person take on board and retain the information.
- Keep what you say simple, short and direct: it's more likely to go in. You can always add a bit more in your next conversation. Sometimes just asking some questions can get them thinking.
- Use words they know and check their understanding for important vocabulary like 'cyberbullying', 'report' and 'block'. It's sometimes surprising who they think their 'trusted adult' is!



- Your child might find it easier to show rather than just tell. So if your child enjoys gaming, have a go at playing with them. It's a great way to find out about what they do online as well as learn the words they use to talk about the online activities that they love. Beating an adult is also great for their self-esteem!
- Write lists, make timetables or draw pictures with your child while you talk to them to support their understanding. They can then put them on the wall to refer back to. You don't have to be an artist - simple stick figures (see above) will help you to think through together what your child could do in a tricky situation or to discuss what people might be thinking when they're online.
- Dictating rules is not always a successful strategy, especially with teenagers, so involve your child in deciding where the boundaries should be around Internet use for everyone at home. Childnet has a great family agreement you can use to do this with your child: <https://www.childnet.com/resources/family-agreement>

Our TechSafe workshop leader, Sam Amos, is also a speech and language therapist with over 15 years of experience working with children and young people with communication disorders.

These apps are all  
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