



Grade 6

CAREGIVER CONNECTION

Dear Caregiver, Parent, or Guardian,

Building on previous lessons, this Caregiver Connection shares what students are learning in Lesson 4 of the *Safer, Smarter Teens* curriculum and provides simple ways for caregivers to support and reinforce these skills at home.

Lesson 4: Digital Safety

In today's lesson, students will learn about **digital safety**. **Digital grooming** starts when abusers contact kids online — often pretending to be someone else, acting like they are a friend of a friend, or like they share a common interest. Those who wish to abuse or exploit children can find personal information online in pictures, profile names, and other seemingly harmless posts that can be used to form relationships or trick kids. That's why profile pictures and user names for social media, online gaming, or other such activities should be generic and provide no identifiable information. Predators may determine the name, age, school, friends, and activities of your child based on what is posted. Pictures with friends should never be posted without permission, out of respect for every family's differing comfort levels and rules when it comes to online behavior. Students are taught never to communicate, play games, or share information online with anyone they do not know in person. They are also taught not to share personal or private information — or private photos — online or by text, even with people they know in real life. Students are reminded to tell a trusted adult if someone they do not know in person attempts to make contact with them, or if someone displays unsafe behavior on digital devices.

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States across the country are enacting laws to govern when, if, and how children and teens can use social media. Please be aware of the regulations and rules of your state, county, community, and schools. If permitted, take time to check in with your child about their current activities to ensure they are maintaining safe digital activities. In this lesson, students are introduced to the acronym **S.O.C.I.A.L.** — a safety tool to remind students what should **NOT** be shared in the digital world:

S	Specific information
O	Occasions
C	Communication (about your feelings, thoughts, or struggles)
I	Institutions (such as school name)
A	Activities

Tips to Further Today's Lesson:

Discuss with your child the importance of digital safety and setting **personal digital boundaries**. If you do not know someone in person, you should **NEVER** communicate or interact with them online. Remind your child of the importance of telling a trusted adult if someone they do not know is trying to contact them online.

Have the Difficult Discussions

As children grow and gain more independence, they naturally begin forming new connections and relationships. More and more, children and teens are living their lives in the digital world. While kids have received repeated warnings about not sharing personal information online, they may still take risks and make mistakes. They may want to fit in and feel accepted, so they give in to the social pressure to share online.

Developmentally, they may also struggle with impulse control or fully understanding long-term consequences. In addition, they have a genuine need to connect with others as they explore their interests, personal identity, and sense of belonging. This is why open, ongoing communication with your child is so important. Parents must talk regularly with their kids about who they are communicating with on their digital devices and what kinds of information they are sharing. Kids need to be reminded that it is never okay to send intimate pictures. Pictures will remain in the digital world forever.

It's also important for parents to be aware that online predators often build trust slowly using grooming tactics to build trust. They may start by asking for harmless information and gradually push boundaries, sometimes requesting images. Over time, this can turn into pressure for more intimate pictures. This can lead to threats of posting the photos unless more pictures are sent. This can leave kids feeling scared, ashamed, or trapped.

Talk with your children about **exploitation**. We have defined exploitation as when someone takes advantage of and uses another person for their own personal gain.

– **While a type of exploitation called "sextortion" is not discussed in the curriculum, consider discussing the topic with your child.** Sextortion is when an intimate image or text is used as leverage to force a victim to provide more images, money, or to perform sexual acts against their will. The sextortion of children is on the rise, with predators using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create intimate images of children which they then use as blackmail. In other instances, a predatory adult will groom a child and trick them into sharing a private image. Once the predator has an image, they blackmail the victim into sending more images, sending money, or committing a sex act. While it is difficult to consider these scenarios and easy to believe they

could never affect your family, the reality is that these risks are very real and deserve thoughtful, proactive conversations with children.

Parents play a critical role by talking about these risks ahead of time. Reassure your child that if something uncomfortable or frightening happens online, they can always come to you. Let your child know they will be supported, not blamed, no matter what — even if they have made a mistake. Be the trusted adult that your child feels safe enough to ask for help.

Human Trafficking

This lesson integrates critical human trafficking prevention by helping students understand how traffickers and predators exploit digital spaces to identify, groom, and manipulate young people. Students learn how online oversharing, such as posting personal details, routines, or locations, or interacting with unknown individuals, can increase vulnerability to exploitation. The lesson explicitly addresses **digital grooming tactics** commonly used in trafficking, including pretending to share interests, offering favors or attention, encouraging secrecy, and gradually building trust to create unsafe relationships. The lesson empowers learners to say no, seek help from trusted adults, and take proactive steps to reduce their risk of online exploitation and human trafficking.

How to Respond to Disclosure of Abuse or Exploitation

An adult's reaction to disclosure plays an important role in the beginning of the healing process for the child. Resist the urge to react strongly to the news or display anger toward the abuser. Instead, consider the following:

What to Say:

“I believe you.”

“I’m really glad that you told me. It took a lot of courage to tell me.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“We will work together to get you help. I will need to tell some other people who help protect children.”

Be cautious with telling a child who has disclosed that “everything will be all right.” There are many uncertainties that surround disclosure, emotions, and steps to recovery. Consider, instead, telling a child that they are important, people care about them and their safety, and that people will work to be with and support them moving forward.

Action Steps:

- If you know or suspect a child has become the victim of sexual abuse, you must make a report immediately. Find your local [reporting agency](#) or call **1-800-4-A-CHILD** (224453).

- Please make sure you are following your state/county/district/LEA policies regarding reporting digital safety and physical abuse.
- In many states, all citizens are considered mandatory reporters, and it is your responsibility to follow the proper protocols within 24 hours to report abuse.
- Access and share [The Guide to Hope and Healing](#) for guidance to recognize, report, and respond to a child who discloses.
- [Take It Down](#): This service is one step you can take to help remove online nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit photos and videos taken before the age of 18.

For more ways to talk to your child about staying safe, visit [safersmarterfamilies.org](#) and [safersmarterteens.org](#). For additional resources, visit [laurenskids.org](#).

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