

8 Tips for Staying Safe on Social Media and the Internet

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Sexuality Education for People with Developmental Disabilities

We all have seen it. People with disabilities who post private information on Facebook, make themselves vulnerable on the Internet, or text “sexual selfies” to let someone know that they like them.

In the age of the social media and the Internet, what do people with developmental disabilities need to stay safe?

Here are eight tips to use with people with disabilities to help them stay safe.

1. Begin by helping people with disabilities explore the **positives and negatives** of technology. Ask, “What do you like about texting people and using the Internet to contact friends and family?” “What are some of the negatives things that can happen with technology?”
2. Remind people with disabilities that everything that he or she post or text is **PUBLIC**. Topics that are okay to post and text are greetings, weather, work, school, public events, and personal information that is on your mind. For example, my cousin just got married.
3. Remind people that before posting or texting words or photos, ask, “Would I want this post or text to end up in the **newspaper?**” If the answer is no, don’t send it because some people regret sharing these post, text, and photos so it is important to think before you do this.
4. Suggest that people with disabilities check their **settings** to make sure the settings are private. If they don’t know how to do this, they can ask for help from a friend, family member, or staff person.
5. Tell them that they shouldn’t give out any **personal** information like where you live or your bank account number or any passwords that belong to you.

6. Mention that sometimes people on line are **not being truthful**. For example they say they are 18 when they are actually 56.

7. If anything bad happens to you with social media and the Internet, talk to someone that you **trust** so they can help you.

8. Use this **format**, from Healthy Foundations, to think about scenarios and how to respond to certain behaviors:

1. Name the behavior that you see
2. Find out the meaning behind the behavior
3. Decide what messages you want to give
4. Give messages simply
5. Encourage the person to give you feedback

Here is a scenario:

A young man posts pictures of his topless girlfriend in very sexy poses on Facebook.

Here is a possible response to this scenario:

1. "I see that you posted pictures of your girlfriend without a shirt on."
2. "Can you tell me why you did that?"
3. Use the eight tips above to think about messages.
4. "You may think she looks great, but these pictures are private and Facebook is public."
5. "Does that make sense?"

Format in tip #8 Adapted from Healthy Foundations: The Teacher's Book, The Center for Family Life Education, Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey, 1993.