Safety Considerations for Working with Youth Online

CANADIAN CENTRE *for* CHILD PROTECTION®
Helping families. Protecting children.

To support law enforcement officers who work with children/youth, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection has developed the following considerations for platform/technology safety and professional boundaries. These online safety planning guidelines are intended to support the valuable work you do as it shifts to online interactions.

Digital Platform Safety

Choosing Digital Programs/Platforms

Consider the capabilities:

- Can you close a session urgently, if the need arises?
- Can you limit the personal information children/youth share (usernames/profiles, images/videos)?
- Can you mute attendees, control camera use, control recordings, disable chat functions?
- Can you limit access to a room and admit only those who are part of your session/presentation?
- Can you control the end of the session for all participants or can participants be in the room after you exit out?

Consider how the company uses and manages data:

- What/how much private information do the children/youth need to share to set up an account/use the platform?
- How does the company or website collect, store, and process data of its customers and visitors: where is their data stored, and does information remain confidential, or can it be shared with or sold to third parties?

Review age-appropriateness:

- What other content may be on the platform that children/youth may inadvertently be exposed to?
- If there are age verification restrictions, who can use the platform?
- Does the platform have a social component where others may have contact with a child/youth outside of the programming you are offering?

Planning Safe Sessions

Manage unauthorized access:

- Are you able to create unique and strong passwords and/or ID for access?
- Can you provide access to the session while avoiding publically posting any links or passwords?

Establish expectations with children/youth:

- Consider having youth use a screen name that is different than a name they use on their social media platforms;

- Communicate about use of webcams, limiting their use during sessions where it is unnecessary;

- Prohibit children/youth from recording/taking screenshots of sessions (within the platform or with a third party app or device);

- Remind children/youth to keep chat on topic and appropriate for the classroom.

Professional Boundaries with Children/Youth Online

Communication

- Communicating with children/youth and parents during appropriate times of day and through established and authorized platforms (as opposed to using personal accounts);

- Keeping communication goal-oriented and tied to session outcomes;

- Keeping all forms of communication transparent by including parents on all correspondence;

- Ensuring transparency during video chat discussions with children/youth: while chatting, all parties should be located in common/high traffic household areas (bedrooms/bathrooms are off limits), and proper clothing attire is worn;

- Refraining from sending or accepting friend requests from children/youth or liking content in children/youth's personal social media accounts;

- Examples of inappropriate electronic communication include personal texting with children/youth, using informal and unprofessional language, posting or forwarding content, links or comments that might be considered inappropriate, offensive or inconsistent with professional or ethical standards, or communicating with children/ youth through personal social media accounts or apps.

Privacy

- Follow your service's privacy policies if posting any children/youth's work, digital pictures, or other identifying information on social media or websites;

- Set appropriate restrictions to maximize your privacy on your personal social media accounts, ensuring that children/youth cannot view or post content;

- If requiring children/youth to send in videos/images of themselves, store content according to your service's policies and ensure parents/guardians know where the content is stored and how/when it will be deleted.

Ask yourself

- Would a reasonable observer consider my interaction with children/youth and their parents as reasonable and professional?

- Would I be comfortable if the session was inadvertently shared with others?

If you have any concerns about a child online, report to Cybertip.ca