



# Online Safety for Parents: What to Know in 2025

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*A practical overview to help parents protect kids in a rapidly changing digital world*

## Who This Guide Is For

This guide is written for parents and caregivers who want to understand the most common online risks facing children and teens today — and how to respond with clarity, confidence, and connection.

You do not need to be a tech expert to keep your child safe. What matters most is awareness, communication, and trust.

## Why Online Safety Looks Different in 2025

The internet children are growing up with today is very different from the one most parents knew.

Online risk no longer looks like a single stranger in a chat room. It now includes:

- Gaming platforms
- Social media
- Group chats
- Influencer culture
- AI-generated content

Many harmful interactions begin in spaces that appear fun, social, or harmless — and escalate quietly over time.

# The New Reality of Online Predators

Today's predators and exploitative groups are often:

- Embedded in gaming communities
- Active on mainstream platforms
- Skilled at mimicking peers or trusted figures
- Patient and emotionally manipulative

They may pose as:

- Other kids
- Influencers
- Brand representatives
- Mentors or “supportive friends”

Their goal is not always immediate harm — it is often access, trust, and secrecy.

## The Rise of Group-Based Online Harm

In addition to individual predators, some online risks now involve small, secretive groups that target minors.

These groups may:

- Encourage secrecy
- Use emotional pressure or “loyalty tests”
- Push kids toward harmful or humiliating behavior
- Exploit vulnerability, loneliness, or curiosity

They often operate across:

- Discord
- Snapchat
- Instagram
- TikTok
- Gaming chats

The names and platforms change. The patterns stay the same.

## Sextortion: A Growing Risk for Boys

One of the fastest-growing online crimes against minors is sextortion, particularly affecting boys ages 8–17.

Common pattern:

- A predator poses as a peer
- Initiates a live video or image exchange
- Records the child's face or content
- Threatens to share it unless demands are met

Many cases escalate within minutes, not days.

Shame and fear often keep children silent.

## How AI Has Changed Online Risk

Artificial intelligence has made it easier to:

- Create fake profiles
- Generate realistic voices or faces
- Impersonate peers or authority figures

This makes it harder for children — and adults — to tell who is real.

Teaching kids that “online doesn’t always mean authentic” is now essential.

## Influencer & Brand-Related Scams

Some children, especially girls, are targeted through:

- Fake modeling offers
- Brand ambassador messages
- Audition or collaboration invitations

These often begin innocently and later shift to:

- Requests for private communication
- Pressure for photos or videos
- Attempts to isolate the child from trusted adults

## Why Gaming Is a Common Entry Point

Gaming is one of the most common ways children are targeted because it:

- Feels social and skill-based
- Encourages teamwork and private communication
- Normalizes voice chat and long play sessions

Predators may:

- Befriend kids during games
- Offer praise or help
- Invite them into private servers or chats

This doesn't mean gaming is bad — it means supervision and conversation matter.

## Warning Signs to Watch For

Changes that may signal online risk include:

- Increased secrecy around devices
- Sudden emotional shifts
- New online “friends” you can't identify
- Sleep disruption or staying up late online
- Strong reactions to losing device access

One sign alone doesn't mean danger — patterns matter.

## What Parents Can Do Right Now

### 1. Normalize Open Conversation

Talk about online experiences the same way you talk about school or friends.

### 2. Set Clear Boundaries

Examples:

- No secret or disappearing chats
- Devices out of bedrooms at night
- Parent access to accounts for younger kids

### 3. Teach a Simple Rule

“If anyone pressures you online — you tell me immediately.”

### 4. Reduce Shame

Kids are more likely to speak up when they believe they’ll be helped, not punished.

### 5. Stay Curious, Not Reactive

Curiosity keeps communication open. Fear shuts it down.

## If You Suspect a Problem

- Stay calm
- Do not shame or blame
- Preserve evidence if possible
- Report concerning behavior to the platform
- File a report with NCMEC if exploitation is suspected

NCMEC (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children)

The official U.S. agency for reporting online exploitation, grooming, and sextortion.

## A Final Word to Parents

Most kids who encounter online harm are not reckless.

They are curious, social, and human.

Protection starts with connection, not control.

You don’t need to know everything — you just need to stay present.

## How Mercy Seat Can Support You

Mercy Seat provides:

- Parent education and workshops
- Digital safety guidance
- Prevention-focused resources
- 24/7 live chat for girls and crisis support

You are not alone in this — and neither is your child.