

PARENT GUIDE

Protecting Kids in a Digital World: 5 Essential Steps



The New Reality: Growing Up Online

Childhood has, unfortunately, gone digital. Friendships, learning, and entertainment now take place through phones, social platforms, and gaming apps. While these spaces may seem to offer connection, they also create unprecedented exposure and risk. Predators no longer need physical proximity; they reach children through direct messages, game chats, and social media platforms—building trust and manipulating emotions until a child is drawn into a dangerous exchange.

At the same time, many children and teens are being influenced by an online culture that normalizes the sharing of sexual images. Social media trends, influencer content, and peer dynamics have created an environment where sending or posting nude or semi-nude photos are often seen as normal, or even as a form of social currency.

Consider these statistics



minors say they have shared sexually explicit images or videos of themselves (Thorn, 2024). This is called self-generated child sexual abuse material (SG-CSAM).

New Reality Statistics (cont.)

51%

of image-based sexual abuse victims experienced suicidal ideations. (K. Utset, University of Miami Law Review, 2018)



minors now view sharing nudes as normal (Thorn, 2024).



children (ages 9–12) reported having an online sexual interaction with someone they believed to be an adult (Thorn, 2024).

26,718

sextortion cases were reported in 2023—most targeting boys (NCMEC). Sextortion is a form of online exploitation in which an offender threatens to share a person’s private or sexual images unless the victim provides more explicit content, money, or other favors.



youth victims reported self-harm or suicidal thoughts following sextortion (Thorn, 2025).

These numbers reveal both the scale and urgency of this crisis—but they also point to hope. Parents and caregivers can play a critical role in challenging the status quo. By having open, judgment-free conversations, they can equip children to resist pressure and make safe choices both online and offline. **Awareness, dialogue, and early intervention can prevent exploitation before it starts.**



5 Steps to Building Your Child's Defense:

Protecting kids online doesn't mean constant surveillance—it means cultivating trust, confidence, and communication.

01. **Connection before control.**
Children open up when they expect empathy, not punishment.
02. **Normalize difficult conversations.**
Short, recurring talks are more effective than one “serious” discussion. Ask, “Has anyone online made you uncomfortable?” Educate in age-appropriate ways. Explain that once a nude image or video is shared, it can live online forever and be used exploitatively.

5 Steps (cont.)

03. **Create a shame-free zone at home.**
Make home a safe place to admit mistakes or scary encounters.
04. **Teach the defensive reflex.**
STOP the conversation with the abuser → REPORT in the app → BLOCK the user → TELL a trusted adult.
05. **Never save or forward explicit content.**
Possessing or sharing any sexual image of a minor is illegal. In the U.S., a child or parent can safely report the child's own image to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (CyberTipline.org) under the 2024 REPORT Act, which protects them from liability when reporting. Laws differ elsewhere—never download or share the image. Save usernames, messages, and links instead.



If you discover exploitation or abuse:

If you discover that your child has been approached, groomed, or exploited online, you are not alone. There are concrete steps you can take right now to ensure their safety and hold offenders accountable. The below resources are a great place to start:

01. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
 - Cyber Tipline - Report child sexual exploitation: www.report.cybertipline.org
 - Remove explicit content of minors: www.takeitdown.ncmec.org
02. Justice Defense Fund - Survivor advocacy, legal action, and image takedown support: www.justicedefensefund.org/resources
03. RAINN - 24/7 support for survivors of sexual violence: www.rainn.org

About the Justice Defense Fund (JDF)

JDF fights online sexual exploitation on multiple fronts. We stand with survivors—helping those who have been harmed assert their rights, seek justice, and remove abusive content. At the same time, we hold corporations and platforms accountable for enabling and profiting from criminal abuse. Through strategic litigation, public advocacy, and systemic reform, JDF works to change the laws, practices, and profit structures that allow exploitation to thrive.

Together, we can create a safer digital world for our children.

Learn more at
www.justicedefensefund.org

