

How to Talk to Kids About Online Strangers

A calm, practical guide for starting honest conversations about safety — without creating fear.

Short answer: use their world, stay curious, and agree simple rules you can practise together (block, report, leave). Trust is the safety net.

Why These Chats Matter

Kids meet people online through games, chats and social platforms long before they fully understand risk. Talking early and often builds confidence and means they'll come to you if something feels wrong.

Start Simple, Stay Calm

- Use their world — ask about the games or apps they like and who they chat with there.
- Keep your tone curious, not fearful or angry. You're learning together.
- Make it clear: if someone online makes them uncomfortable, it is never their fault.
- Promise they won't lose devices for being honest — your goal is to help, not punish.

Example Conversation Starter

"Sometimes people online pretend to be younger than they are. If anyone you don't know asks for personal info, pictures, or to talk privately, what would you do?"

Things to Explain Clearly

- Never share real names, school, clubs, or location in chats or profiles.
- Strangers can sound friendly — you can't always tell who's behind a screen.
- It's fine to block, report or leave a chat if anything feels off — no explanation needed.
- Real friends don't ask for secrets, photos, or personal details; pressure is a red flag.

Practical Steps Together

- Check privacy settings on their games and apps together; set accounts to private where possible.
- Show them how to block or report users safely and how to take a screenshot for evidence.
- Review friend lists regularly — encourage adding only real-life friends.
- Keep devices in shared spaces on school nights; charge outside bedrooms.

Keep the Door Open

Regular small chats beat one big lecture. Ask: "Has anyone new messaged you?" or "Seen anything odd in your games lately?" Let them lead; remind them you're always there to help.

Where to Get Help (UK & International)

- UK — CEOP Safety Centre: report grooming or exploitation directly to police (www.ceop.police.uk).
- UK — NSPCC Helpline & resources: advice for parents about online safety (www.nspcc.org.uk).
- US/Global — NCMEC CyberTipline: report child exploitation; supports international cases (report.cybertipline.org).

Family Guideline

“If you wouldn’t tell it to a stranger in the park, don’t type it to a stranger online — and if anything feels wrong, stop and tell me.”