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# Six ways to keep teenagers safe online

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A few years ago, all I had to do to keep my kids safe online was set up the family computer in a well-trafficked room and walk by every so often. Now, my daughters are 12 and 14, and each has her own iPhone. Their online lives are lived in [WhatsApp \(http://www.whatsapp.com\)](http://www.whatsapp.com), [Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com\)](https://www.facebook.com) comments, texts, and occasional emails. They regularly interact with kids I've never met. While they're (probably) smart enough not to reveal information to strangers *they've* never met, my daughters are at risk for cyberbullying (both being bullied and being bullies), overexposure on social networks, and even sexual solicitation.

Think about it: With a phone in her pocket, a typical teen has the ability to spend hours—days!—interacting with her peers, completely unfettered by parental supervision. And how has that worked out in the past? [Heathers \(http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097493/\)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097493/)? [Lord of the Flies \(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord\\_of\\_the\\_Flies\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_of_the_Flies)? Short of banning all the

technology—a solution I have, at times, considered—what’s a concerned parent to do?

## 1. Have “the technology talk”

If you’re an employee, you probably have an employee handbook somewhere. If you ever read it, you might discover that your company gives you the right to make limited personal use of its computers, networks, and other technology, but that you waive any expectation of privacy when you do so. The same policy governs life in my home. Do my kids like this? No, of course not. But they accept it, the same way you accept every tech company’s terms of service in order to use their products. If you don’t agree, don’t use the technology.

It’s best to understand from the start that no matter what measures you take, computer-savvy teens may be able to figure out ways to bypass the built-in controls on the family computer or you may eventually forget to log out of the administrator account. No one app or setting can keep your teens safe online, which means you need to start talking to your kids about your concerns.

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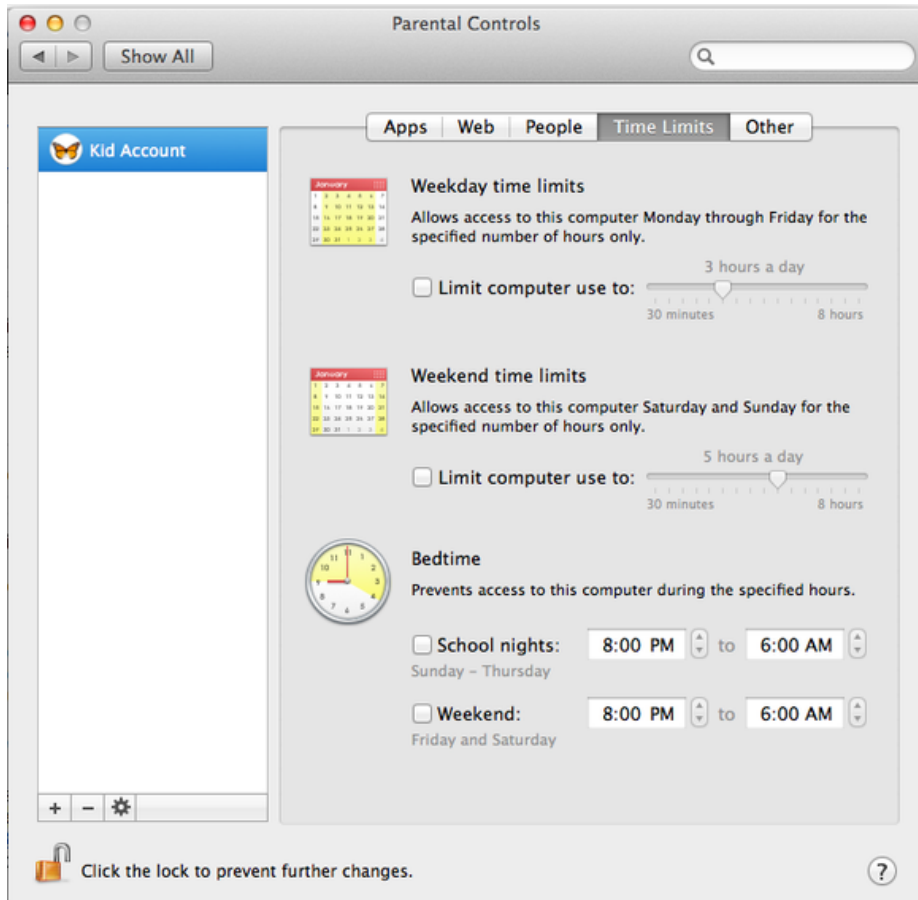
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My personal concern is the limitless reach that the Internet offers my kids. It’s just so easy to post a picture on Facebook, to send an insulting text message, or to find and download any movie ever made. Without boundaries, kids just keep exploring. So I sat my daughters down and let them know about my limits. For us, so far, the rule boils down to: “If you wouldn’t say it, do it, or watch it with me in the room, it’s not okay.” I check their phones regularly, in front of them and behind their backs, to enforce this rule. If I see something that I deem inappropriate—for example, my daughter often makes Facebook comments that I think are too mean—I make her delete them and apologize to the person in question if necessary, and we talk about the issue.

Your concerns might be different. If you have a child who doesn’t get enough physical activity, maybe your rule needs to be that for every hour of screen time, you require 30 minutes of bike riding, running, or other outdoor exercise. Grades are slipping? No phone or computer until your homework has been completed and checked by a parent. Identify the problem, and figure out how you can work to correct it. Sit down with your kids to create an “acceptable use” policy for your own home—they’re much more likely to follow the rules if they’ve had a say in writing them.

## 2. Use parental settings wisely

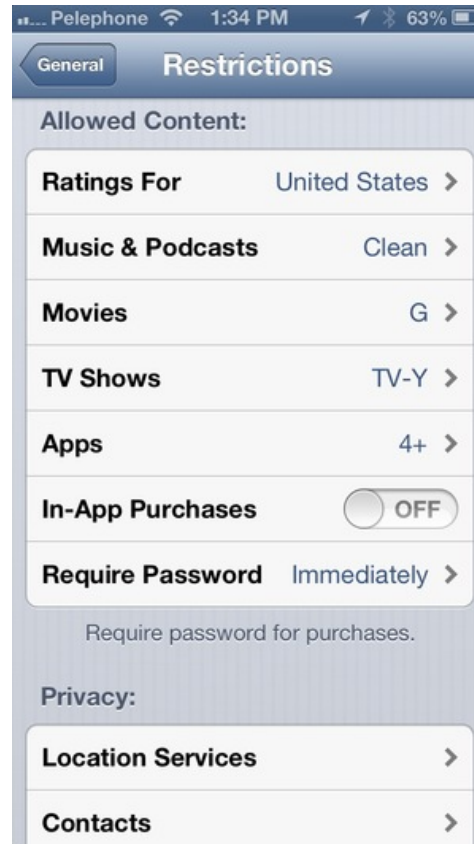
Once you set up the rules, let them be the boss, instead of you. For instance, Macs and iOS devices allow you to set usage restrictions. On a Mac, you can set [Parental Controls preferences](http://www.macworld.com/article/1166847/set_parental_controls_on_your_mac.html) ([http://www.macworld.com/article/1166847/set\\_parental\\_controls\\_on\\_your\\_mac.html](http://www.macworld.com/article/1166847/set_parental_controls_on_your_mac.html)) to control your kids' access to the computer and the Internet—and to specify times that they can and can't use the computer.



Let your Mac be the enforcer. Use OS X's parental controls to set time limits.

iPads and iPhones have fewer parental control options, but some of them can be useful. On an iOS device, launch *Settings*, choose *General*, and then choose *Restrictions* and tap the *Enable Restrictions* button. Then choose and enter a four-digit passcode—something your kids won't guess.

iOS restrictions allow you to control certain parts of the operating system—for example, to prevent your teen from installing apps or making in-app purchases. You can also set up Allowed Content for iTunes—for example, no movies rated R or NC17, or no music with explicit language. See [“Set up a kid-friendly iPad”](#)



Use iOS restrictions to limit access to iTunes content and preserve your reputation as “meanest parent ever.”

(<http://www.macworld.com/article/2041627/set-up-a-kid-friendly-ipad.html>) for details.

Even if you enable restrictions, however, this isn't a “set it and forget it” situation. Trust, but verify. Check up on your kids and their devices as often as you can. This may seem simple and obvious, but far too many parents don't bother to check on what their kids are doing online—and the results can be disastrous.

### 3. Friend your kids on social networks

At one time, I believed that parents and kids should not be friends on Facebook, but then my daughters turned into teens. Remind your kids that if they wouldn't say it at the dinner table in front of you, they shouldn't say it online. While you're at it, talk to your kids about safe social media settings.

Do they know, for example, [how to ensure that \*only\* their friends can see what they've posted on Facebook](http://www.techhive.com/article/2023761/four-facebook-privacy-settings-for-the-new-year.html) (<http://www.techhive.com/article/2023761/four-facebook-privacy-settings-for-the-new-year.html>)? Do they understand that [tweets live on](https://blog.twitter.com/2013/now-showing-older-tweets-search-results) (<https://blog.twitter.com/2013/now-showing-older-tweets-search-results>) in cyberspace forever? Make sure your kids understand that posting information on the Internet is akin to taking out an ad in *The New York Times*, playing it during halftime at the Super Bowl, and reading it over the loudspeaker

during morning announcements at their school. It's highly visible, in other words—and it can never, ever be truly erased.

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Give your kids examples of real people whose reputations have been damaged by something posted online. For example, in 2012, Indiana high school student [Austin Carroll was expelled \(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/03/students-profane-tweet-st\\_n\\_1400695.html\)](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/03/students-profane-tweet-st_n_1400695.html) for a tweet his school deemed explicit. [Rehtaeh Parsons, a teenager from Canada, killed herself \(http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-23621268\)](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-23621268) after facing months of online harassment and bullying; two men (who were minors at the time of the crime) have now been charged with making and distributing child pornography.

#### 4. Be the holder of the passwords

Remind your kids that they've waived any expectation of privacy, and make sure you know the passwords for their email, Facebook, and other social media accounts, and anything else they use. Yes, you're Facebook friends—but savvy teens can block you from seeing certain posts. You don't need to log in all the time and read everything. But your kids need to know that you *can*.

One popular idea is to change the Wi-Fi password for your home network daily, and only give it to your kids when they've earned it via whatever rules you've determined. Unfortunately, the implementation is a little tricky—and don't forget that your own devices also need to connect to the network.

**Schedule**

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**Days to Block:**

Every Day

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

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**Time of day to Block:** (use 24-hour clock)

All Day

Start Blocking  Hour  Minute

End Blocking  Hour  Minute

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**Time Zone**

(GMT+2:00) Jerusalem

Adjust for Daylight Savings Time

Use this NTP Server  192  . 43  . 244  . 18

Default NTP Servers time.nist.gov  
time-nw.nist.gov

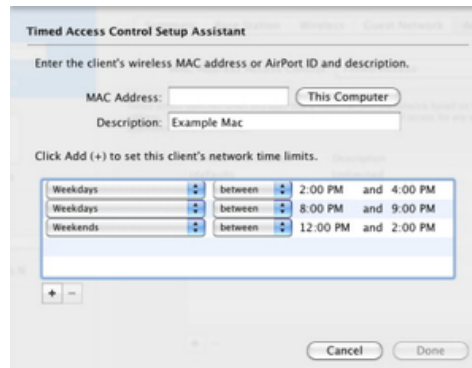
**Current Time: Wednesday, 01 Jan 2003 17:53:08**

Configure your router to allow Internet access on a schedule.

If you're determined, however, you can log in to your router every day and change the password (consult your owner's manual or do a Web search on your router's model number for instructions). You can also simply unplug the router and keep the cable with you (although if your home phone uses VoIP [Voice over IP], you'll effectively cut off that mode of communication as well).

Another solution is to change the default settings on your router to set restrictions on a per-device basis. Not all routers allow you to do this; to see what your specific model offers, log in to your router setup page and look for a tab labeled Parental Controls, Restrictions, or something similar.

Here's the process for [configuring an AirPort wireless network with time limits for each individual device your kids use](http://www.macworld.com/article/1161672/limit_internet_access.html) ([http://www.macworld.com/article/1161672/limit\\_internet\\_access.html](http://www.macworld.com/article/1161672/limit_internet_access.html)).



If you have an AirPort Extreme wireless network, you can set different time limits for every device (and person) in the house.

## 5. Don't let your teens sleep with their phones or computers

A lot of nasty stuff in the teenage world happens at night. Alone in their rooms, kids can text horribly hurtful insults, goad others into posting inappropriate

pictures of themselves, and engage in conversations with strangers. Don't let your kids be a part of it. Set up a place where phones and laptops are charged overnight, for instance a multi-charging station like [Griffin's \\$100 PowerDock 5](#)



Where do digital devices belong at night? On a charging station (like Griffin's PowerDock 5, shown here), not in your teen's bedroom.

(<http://store.griffintechology.com/powerdock-5-device-charger>), which lets you charge multiple iPads and iPhones; Kanex's \$99 [Sydnee Smart Recharge Station for iPad and iPhone](#)

(<http://www.macworld.com/article/1166442/sydnee-smart-recharge-station-charges-multiple-ipads-at-once.html>) (3.5 of 5 rating); XtremeMac's \$150 [InCharge X5 Docking Station](#) (<http://www.macworld.com/article/2023661/review-incharge-x5-charges-5-ipads-iphones-and-ipods.html>) (3.5 of 5 rating); or Kangaroom Storage's \$35 [Bamboo Multi-Charging Station](#) (<http://www.greatusefultstuff.com/Bamboo-Multi-Charging-Station-p/ofc01089brkrsd.htm>), which can also accommodate a laptop. Tell your kids to use you as the excuse: "My parents confiscate my phone at night."

The penalty for infractions? In my house it's a week without the device in question. If the iPhone is the problem, be prepared for the fact you'll need your kid to be able to call you. Stash away a cheap, pay-as-you-go voice-only phone like those available from AT&T (<http://www.amazon.com/Samsung-a157-GoPhone-AT-T/dp/B007X6FFLS>) or many other sellers ([http://www.amazon.com/no-contract-cell-phones/b/ref=amb\\_link\\_376508622\\_1?ie=UTF8&node=2407748011&pf\\_rd\\_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf\\_rd\\_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf\\_rd\\_r=0D41S2PFJKJBVC082YP&pf\\_rd\\_t=201&pf\\_rd\\_p=1592873362&pf\\_rd\\_i=B007X6FFLS](http://www.amazon.com/no-contract-cell-phones/b/ref=amb_link_376508622_1?ie=UTF8&node=2407748011&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf_rd_r=0D41S2PFJKJBVC082YP&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_p=1592873362&pf_rd_i=B007X6FFLS)).

With a plan in place, you'll be ready to swap your kid's smartphone for a dumb one if need be.

I also recommend keeping desktop computers out of bedrooms. If you already have a computer in your child's room, definitely configure access privileges to control nighttime use—or take the power cord away at night. And make a point of checking the computer regularly so that you know what your child is doing.

**6. Be a good role model**

In our family, we hold weekly family meetings. No phones or iOS devices are allowed—and that rule is enforced for Mom and Dad as well. In addition, because our family is Jewish, we don't use our phones or other electronic devices for all of

Shabbat—from sundown Friday through sundown Saturday. This is a big deal. Our Friday night dinner and Saturday lunch are pure family time. All day Saturday, no one uses a phone or computer, which means we actually talk to each other, play board games, go for walks together, and so on. Therefore, my kids—and my husband and I—know that it’s possible to survive without our phones, which makes it much easier for us to establish other device-free times during the week. We have a family charging station where phones are stored overnight. My husband and I do sometimes use an iPad to watch TV in bed, but that’s after the kids have been tucked in for the night.

We frequently gather with our kids in the family room and request that phones and other devices be put away for a set amount of time. The key to this is that Mom and Dad also have to follow the rules, because kids will always do as you do, not as you say. Try establishing a daily device-free time of just 10 or 15 minutes at the breakfast or dinner table, and see if you feel it has a positive impact on your family.

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I have five children. I desperately wish I could protect them from everything with a simple click—but I can’t, and neither can you. Keeping teens safe in the digital world means taking advantage of what technology offers, but also relying on old-fashioned involved parenting.

### WE RECOMMEND

		
<p>(<a href="http://blogs.cio.com/mobilewireless/18219/who-needs-vpn-and-why">http://blogs.cio.com/mobilewireless/18219/who-needs-vpn-and-why</a>)</p> <p>Sponsored Who needs a VPN and Why? (CIO Blogs)</p>	<p>(<a href="http://www.macworld.com/article/2044195/ten-fabulous-finder-commands-you-should-be-using.html">http://www.macworld.com/article/2044195/ten-fabulous-finder-commands-you-should-be-using.html</a>)</p> <p>Ten fabulous Finder commands you should be using</p>	<p>Why the Chromecast</p>

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