

# Taking action: A short guide to cybersafety for parents



Remote Learning

The vast majority of children in New Zealand use digital devices to support their learning, placing a demand on parents to support and actively protect children in this digital environment. Ensuring children are cybersafe and cybersmart is particularly important during this period of school closure. Being cybersafe or cybersmart is about developing the knowledge and skills required to make smart decisions and behave in safe, responsible, and respectful ways online. It is about behavior rather than technology. Here are four ways you can promote cybersafety at home.

## 1. Adjust the security settings on all digital devices

This involves logging into the security settings of each device, checking that software and operating systems are fully up-to-date and ensuring that security features, including [firewalls](#), have been enabled. Tech experts suggest that firewalls are particularly important as they control the access that external networks and websites have to individual devices. It is also important to have strong passwords that are unique combinations of letters, numbers and symbols and that you change them every 30, 60 or 90 days. While some tech experts recommend installing specialised software that protects a device from external invasion such as viruses and spyware, they warn that many of these tools, or 'tech solutions,' are incomplete and should be used in combination with other approaches.

### Digital security tools

There are dozens of security-oriented software programmes and apps available for parents and teachers. Organisations and online magazines like [NetSafe New Zealand](#), [Consumer NZ](#) and [Tech Radar](#) post annual reviews of the best security software. Further, there are online tutorials that walk through the process of checking security settings and enabling features such as firewalls on devices using [Microsoft Windows](#) and [Macs](#).

## 2. Establish clear guidelines for viewing digital content

Experts argue it is critical that we establish clear guidelines for the frequency (how often), duration (how many minutes/hours), and content of the material that children view in the home, taking heed of the latest [research](#) and following the recommendations of trusted national agencies. Here in New Zealand, guidelines for screen time are published by the Ministry of Health. Current guidelines state that screen time be avoided in children under two years of age and limited to less than an hour per day for children 2 – 5 years of age. International guidelines recommend that screen time be limited to two hours per day at home and four hours per day at school for children aged 6 – 17. They also recommend that access to inappropriate content be blocked and that we talk to children about what is acceptable and unacceptable content to view online. In most cases, it will be sufficient to have conversations about screen time and appropriate online content, although there are digital tools called parental controls that can help with monitoring screen time as well as tracking, managing or controlling the access that children have to specific websites, programmes and apps. Some are free to download while others have to be purchased.

### Parental control tools

All Google and Apple (Mac) operating systems have in-built parental control restriction settings that can be adjusted to limit activity. Once these settings have been adjusted, you may wish to install additional controls. Some of the most popular tools on the market today are: [ScreenTime](#) (Free), [Our Pact](#) (Free),

[Google Family Link](#) (Free), [Norton Family Premier](#) (Free for 30 days), [McAfee Safe Family](#) (Free for 6 months). Additional information about effective, free parental control tools can be found in Tech Radar's Review of the [Top 20 Parental Control Apps for 2020](#). It is possible to have more than one parental control tool installed on a device at a time, or to operate without any parental controls.

### 3. Educate children about safe online practices for creating, posting and reporting content

Educating children about safe online practices is no small feat. It involves imparting knowledge and providing opportunities for children to learn how to create and post appropriate online content as well as helping them identify inappropriate online content and report it. There are numerous resources available to support parents with these important tasks.

#### Creating content

Many children will be experienced in creating digital content. They will be used to making videos, uploading documents, writing digital stories, and so on. It is important to talk to children about ensuring that the content they create should:

- be culturally sensitive and inclusive
- avoid bias
- not contain unsubstantiated or intentionally misleading information
- use appropriate language

It is also vital that any content that children create protects their privacy and security and that of anyone else featured. For example, children should not post pictures of anyone without their express permission nor provide personal details such as their full name, their physical address or their bank details in any of their work. Educational resources designed to support the development of [digital citizenship](#) are useful and relevant sources of information for individuals working with children to create safe online content.

#### Posting content

Children may require support identifying where and how to post their content online. From a cybersafety perspective, they must be mindful of the [digital footprint](#) they create. Digital footprints are permanent records of online activity that cannot be erased. It is important to educate children about their digital footprint and strongly encourage them to stop and think carefully about everything they post online. The following questions are useful:

- Is your work original?
- Does it contain any content that is unacceptable or unsafe to post?
- Would you be proud to show this work to others in ten years' time?

In addition to posting original content online, children may also post personal comments on educational sites or social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Reddit (although it should be stressed that access to these sites is restricted to children 13 years of age and older). It is critical that they are taught how to post appropriate comments, which should be positive, constructive, informative, educational and/or supportive. They should not be in any way negative, hurtful, aggressive, derogatory, inflammatory, insensitive or prejudicial.

Some [great educational resources](#) have been created to help students craft online posts, create positive digital footprints, and respond to others in positive, productive ways. Parents can find more information [here](#).

### Reporting content

Children should be encouraged to report inappropriate, demeaning, bullying or upsetting online content to a trusted adult, friend, peer or a regulatory body such as the police although sadly this does not always happen. In New Zealand, approximately 1 in 5 children report being the victims of cyberbullying, which includes but is not limited to actions such as [flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, and cyberstalking](#). Teachers and parents can help to reduce the negative impact of harmful online behavior by informing children of their rights and providing them with information about how and where to report inappropriate online content. The [Bullying Free NZ website](#) is a great starting point. If individuals engage in unsafe online behavior they may be prosecuted under The Harmful Digital Communications Act (2015). Criminal online behavior is termed a [‘cybercrime.’](#)

## 4. Stay Informed. Be Present.

The digital world is constantly changing and it is important to stay current and informed about the latest apps, programmes, online games and websites flooding the market. Many appear overnight and grow in popularity with staggering speed. As in so many aspects of life, parents can serve as powerful and effective role models for positive cybersmart actions and behaviours. Experts suggest that cybersafety is enhanced when trusted adults actively engage with children and their work online and serve as cybersafe role models.

### Tools for keeping up to date

[Net Aware](#), a British-based information site, is a fabulous resource for parents interested in keeping up to date with the latest apps, games and social networks. The site has articles and opinion pieces, links to relevant information, and the opportunity to ‘speak’ online with a digital tech expert. Here in New Zealand, [Net Safe](#) does much the same thing, providing accurate information on all ‘things’ tech.

There is a strong consensus that digital devices provide children and parents with incredible opportunities and genuine challenges. They are powerful tools for facilitate learning and social connection when used appropriately. Cybersafety is critical to enjoying these benefits and should be a main priority for everyone engaged in home-based learning. The single most useful site on this topic for New Zealanders is the [Netsafe New Zealand](#) website.

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