



Top 5 Tips in Keeping Youth Safe in Virtual Environments



As youth spend more time engaging with others in virtual environments, parents and volunteers need to consider youth safety.

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The most important goal for adults who work with children and youth, be that a parent, caregiver or volunteer, is keeping children safe. One important area to be aware of and understand

is the different virtual environments youth are engaging in on a computer, tablet or smartphone. It is important to understand all the different virtual environments because youth often interact in a variety of environments, such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime and other social media platforms.

All parents and adults working with youth should consider these five tips from Michigan State University Extension.

- Understand why youth are drawn to virtual environments. Youth are drawn to anything that allows them to hang out and share information with friends, clown around and meet other youth. These virtual environments often combine all these aspects, as youth can connect with friends without being in the same physical space.
- Create some ground rules for usage and participation in virtual environments. These can include only using electronic devices in common areas of the home and never in bedrooms, time limits with the reminder to get youth up and moving, and engaging in some non-screen time activities.
- Consider creating a schedule for youth to write in when there are engaging in virtual environments and who they will be engaging with. Then, each day take the time to ask youth what they did in each of the items on their schedule, who they engaged with, what they learned, any exciting news to share or anything concerning that came up.
- Remind youth that they shouldn't share personal information with others, especially in group settings where they may not know everyone. This includes address, phone number, social media screen names, photos, age, etc. Not sharing personal information protects youth against others who may be pretending to be someone else.
- Keep the lines of communication open with youth. Talk about their virtual environment engagement, ask questions and listen. Pay attention to anything that sounds like a red flag and dig deeper. Helping youth learn to engage responsibly is the most effective way to help them stay safe online. Continually remind youth that nothing ever goes away once it's posted to a social networking platform, and it can come back to haunt them in the future.

For more tips about creating safe environments, visit the Keep Kids Safe Series on MSU Extension's Creating Safe Environments for Youth website: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/creating-safe-environments/index>