

PD Glades

PARENT'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND
AI SAFETY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL
CHILDREN



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Purpose of this guide

This PD Glades guide is for South African parents and caregivers who want down-to-earth, practical ways to help their children use social media and artificial intelligence safely. It's not written with the idea that children must avoid technology completely. Instead, it's here to help families introduce technology at a pace that feels right, set healthy boundaries, teach good judgement, and use the tools already built into phones and tablets to reduce risk.

Around the world, countries like Australia and several in Europe are tightening rules for children's social media accounts. They're worried about things like addictive app design, harmful content, cyberbullying, privacy problems, mental-health impacts, age-verification issues, and children being exposed to systems they're simply not ready to handle on their own. Recent legal developments highlight how seriously governments are now treating the risks social media poses to children. In August 2026, Meta agreed to pay up to \$18 billion to settle U.S. lawsuits¹ alleging that Facebook and Instagram were intentionally designed in ways that contributed to child and teen addiction to their platforms. As part of the settlement, Meta will also introduce stricter safeguards for young users, including daily usage limits, overnight access blocks, and reduced push notifications during school hours. While Meta denied wrongdoing, the settlement is widely seen as a turning point in global efforts to regulate how social media companies engage with children and teens.

South Africa may choose a different approach, but the risks are still very real for our homes, schools, and communities.

This guide isn't meant to be the final word on digital parenting. Every child is different, and every family has its own routines, values, and challenges. You can adjust these suggestions to suit your child's age, maturity, and needs. In fact, because this is such an important topic, parents may even want to raise it at school or during parent meetings. When families and schools work together, children get clearer, more consistent support, and that makes digital safety much easier for everyone.



¹ Source: Reuters, "Meta agrees to pay \$18 billion to settle US lawsuits over children's social media addiction," 26 August 2026.

Guiding principles for parents

- **Delay, then guide:** delay high-risk apps where possible, but do not delay education. In practical terms, parents can say “not yet” to apps with open chat, livestreaming, disappearing messages, public posting, anonymous questions, location sharing, in-app purchases, gambling-style rewards, or algorithms that keep feeding short videos.

High-risk apps are not only obvious social media platforms; they may also include seemingly harmless games, video apps, fan communities, messaging platforms and photo-editing apps if strangers can contact the child, content is publicly visible, or the app encourages secrecy. Before allowing an app, check its age rating, privacy settings, chat functions, advertising, location access, reporting tools and whether your child can explain what the app is for.

- **Connection before control:** rules work best when children understand the reason behind them and know they can come to you without immediate punishment. Practically, explain each rule in simple language: *“I am checking this app because some apps allow adults or older children to message you,”* or *“the phone charges outside the bedroom because sleep and safety matter.”*

Ask your child to show you their favourite apps, games, group chats and online friends without turning every conversation into an interrogation. Create a family rule that if something feels scary, embarrassing, confusing or unsafe, the child may ask for help first; discipline can be discussed later once the safety issue is handled.

- **Privacy is protection:** treat your child’s name, image, school, location, voice and routine as sensitive information. Parents can check profiles and posts for full names, school uniforms or badges, sports club details, home area, street names, number plates, location tags, birthday information, timetables and regular routines such as “netball every Tuesday at 16:00”.

Also check whether apps can access the camera, microphone, contacts, photos and location. A useful rule is *do not post or share anything that would help a stranger identify where the child lives, studies, travels, plays sport or spends time after school.*

- **Age matters:** a Grade 3 child, a Grade 7 child and a Grade 11 child need different levels of access, monitoring and responsibility. Younger children should have supervised use, no independent social media accounts, no private messaging with strangers and parent approval for every download. Pre-teens may begin learning digital judgement through carefully selected apps, shared passwords or parent-managed accounts, limited contacts and regular reviews.

Teenagers can gradually earn more independence, but this should come with clear expectations about consent, respectful communication, online reputation, academic honesty, group chats, AI use and what to do when something goes wrong.

- **Devices sleep outside bedrooms:** this single habit reduces late-night scrolling, secrecy, cyberbullying exposure and sleep disruption. Parents can set a household charging station in the kitchen, passage or parent’s room and agree on a daily cut-off time, for example 19:30 for primary school children and a later but still fixed time for older teenagers. This rule should apply to phones, tablets, gaming devices and

school laptops where possible. If a child says they need a phone as an alarm, use a separate alarm clock. If they need a device for homework, agree on a visible study space and a clear finish time.

- **Use technology to support parenting, not replace it:** parental controls are useful, but conversation, supervision and modelling remain essential. Parents can use tools such as app approvals, screen-time limits, content filters, safe search, bedtime schedules and location settings, but they should still look at the child's apps, talk about online experiences, review followers and group chats, and demonstrate healthy phone habits themselves.

Controls can reduce risk, but they cannot teach judgement, empathy, consent, honesty or courage. *A child who knows how to ask for help is safer than a child who only knows how to hide activity from a control system.*

Why countries are restricting children's social media

Australia's approach focuses on preventing under-16s from keeping accounts on age-restricted social media platforms, with responsibility placed on platforms rather than children or parents. The reasoning includes concerns about algorithms, endless feeds, likes, disappearing stories², recommender systems and other design features that encourage prolonged³ use and expose children to harmful material. In Europe, countries have debated or introduced age limits, stronger age verification, school phone restrictions and privacy-preserving checks because many children can easily bypass ordinary age declarations.

For South African parents, the lesson is not simply "ban or allow". The more useful lesson is that children need age-appropriate limits, safer defaults, sleep protection, privacy protection, digital literacy, and a trusted adult who can help when something goes wrong.

² Disappearing stories are temporary photos or videos that usually vanish after a short period, often 24 hours. Children may wrongly assume this makes the content private or consequence-free, even though other users can still screenshot, record, forward or respond to it before it disappears.

³ Examples include infinite scrolling, where new posts keep loading without a clear stopping point, and autoplay, where the next video starts automatically. Streaks, badges, notifications and personalised recommendations can also encourage children to keep checking the app or return repeatedly.

South African legal and safety context

- **Children's privacy matters:** South African law treats children's personal information as especially sensitive. Parents should think carefully before sharing any information that can identify, locate, profile or expose a child, including:
 - **Names:** a child's full name can make it easier for strangers to search for them online, link different accounts together, or pretend to know the child or family.
 - **School uniforms or school badges:** photos showing a uniform, badge or school logo can reveal where a child goes to school, making it easier to identify their daily location and routine.
 - **ID numbers or official documents:** identity details can be misused for fraud, impersonation or unauthorised access to services and records.
 - **Locations:** home areas, school locations, sports venues, check-ins and location tags can reveal where a child lives, studies, travels or spends time.
 - **Medical details:** health information is deeply private and may expose the child to stigma, discrimination, embarrassment or manipulation.
 - **Achievements:** certificates, awards and competition posts can reveal the child's full name, school, age group, interests, schedule or where they may be attending events.
 - **Photos or videos:** images can be copied, shared, downloaded, edited, misused or kept long after the original post is deleted. They may also reveal background details such as home interiors, street signs, uniforms, friends or routines.
- **Consent is important:** schools, clubs and organisations should obtain appropriate consent before publishing children's personal information or images.
- **Cybercrimes and harassment are serious:** threats, impersonation, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, extortion, hacking and persistent harassment can have legal consequences.
- **AI increases risk:** deepfakes, voice cloning, fake endorsements, scams and AI-generated impersonation can affect ordinary families, not only public figures.

- **Parents should keep evidence:** screenshots, usernames, links, dates, phone numbers and messages may be important if a matter must be reported to the school, platform, police or a legal adviser.

Recommended family rules by age

Age group	Suggested approach	Parent focus
Under 10	No independent social media accounts. Use devices mainly for learning, calls with family, creative activities and <i>supervised</i> entertainment.	Set parental controls, block app installs without approval, keep devices in shared spaces.
10–12	Introduce digital citizenship. Allow carefully selected apps only when there is a clear purpose and parent supervision.	Teach privacy, kindness, reporting, scams, passwords and “ask before you post”.
13–15	If social apps are allowed, use private accounts, limited contacts, strict screen-time limits and regular check-ins.	Review settings monthly, discuss algorithms, peer pressure, group chats and AI-generated content.
16–18	Move toward independence with accountability. Encourage healthy use, online reputation management and responsible AI use for schoolwork.	Focus on judgement, consent, future consequences, misinformation, privacy and academic integrity.



Social media best practices for children

- Use a private account and approve every follower manually.
- Do not use the child's full name, school name, home area, sports club or daily routine in profiles.
- Turn off public location sharing and remove location tags from photos. Most smartphones allow you to limit which apps may access location data. Parents should:
 - Open the device's Settings.
 - Navigate to Privacy or Location Services.
 - Review the list of apps.
 - Set each app to "Off", "Deny", or "While using the app".
 - Disable Precise Location where available.

This prevents apps from attaching GPS coordinates to posts or photos.

Social media apps include their own location controls. Typically found under:

Settings → Privacy Or Settings → Permissions Or Settings → Account → Privacy

Parents should also consider:

- Switching off Location, Nearby Friends, Check-ins, or Find My Contacts.
- Disabling location tagging for posts, photos, and stories.
- Avoid enabling features such as "Show my location on the map". Parents should be concerned about all public location-sharing features on social media apps because these settings can expose their real-time whereabouts to strangers, which is unsafe. Parents who need to know their child's location can use private, parent-controlled tools such as *Microsoft Family Safety*, *Apple Find My*, or *Google Family Link* or similar apps. These tools allow parents to monitor location safely without broadcasting it publicly.

Smartphones often embed location metadata (GPS coordinates) into photos. Parents can:

1. Open Camera Settings.
2. Switch off any Location Tags, Geotagging, or Save Location features.
3. Review photo-sharing apps to ensure they do not display location metadata.

This prevents others from determining where a photo was taken.

General best practice

Children should avoid sharing their:

- Home address
- School location
- Daily travel routes
- Real-time whereabouts or
- Photos showing identifiable landmarks
- Disable direct messages from strangers where possible.
- Do not accept follow requests from people the child does not know in real life.
- Think before posting: “Would I be comfortable if my teacher, grandparent, future employer or the whole school saw this?”
- Never share passwords, one-time PINs, ID numbers, home addresses, school timetables or banking details.
- Leave group chats that involve bullying, humiliation, threats, illegal content or pressure to share private images.
- Report and block harmful accounts; do not argue with trolls or strangers.
- Use a family rule: if something online feels scary, embarrassing or confusing, the child can ask for help without losing the device automatically.

AI best practices for school children

- **Use Artificial Intelligence as a tutor, not a ghost-writer:** children may ask AI to explain concepts, generate practice questions, plan study time or improve understanding, but they should not submit AI-written work as their own otherwise the child may face school discipline for plagiarism or cheating, lose trust with teachers, miss out on learning the work properly, and struggle when they later must write tests or exams without AI help.
- **Always verify:** AI can produce confident but wrong answers. Children should check facts against textbooks, teacher notes or other sources. Otherwise, the child may learn incorrect information, hand in inaccurate work or receive poor marks because the answer sounded correct but was false or incomplete.
- **Protect personal information:** children should not paste their full name, school, address, ID number, photos, medical details, private family information or classmates' information into AI tools. If this is ignored, private details may be stored, reused, exposed, copied into later outputs, or used in ways the child and parent did not expect. It may also place classmates or family members at risk without their consent.
- **Be careful with images, voices and videos:** do not create fake images, voice clips or videos of classmates, teachers or family members without consent. If this is ignored, the child may seriously harm someone's dignity or reputation, contribute to bullying or harassment, and face school discipline, legal complaints or police involvement in serious cases.
- **Watch for manipulation:** AI chatbots can sound friendly and persuasive, but they are not friends, therapists, teachers or parents. If this is ignored, a child may become overly dependent on a chatbot for emotional support, accept unsafe advice, share private feelings or information too freely, or stop seeking help from trusted adults when they need real support.
- **Keep adults involved:** younger children should use AI only with an adult nearby; teens should discuss school rules on AI use with teachers. If this is ignored, children may unknowingly break school rules, access unsuitable content, rely on unsafe or inaccurate responses, or use AI in ways that parents and teachers only discover after harm has already occurred.
- **Label AI help honestly:** if a school allows AI, the child should state how it was used, for example: "I used AI to generate revision questions, then wrote my own answer." If this is ignored, teachers may treat the work as dishonest or plagiarised, even if AI was only used partly. The child may lose marks, be required to redo the work, face disciplinary consequences, or damage their reputation for honesty.

Practical phone, tablet and app controls

For Android phones and tablets (see Third-party parental control options)

- Use [Google Family Link](#) to manage screen time, app approvals, app limits, bedtime, location and some account settings.
- Use built-in **Android Parental Controls** where available to set daily limits, downtime, app limits, blocked apps, web filters and app store filters.
- Require parent approval for app downloads and in-app purchases.
- Turn on [SafeSearch](#) and [YouTube supervised experiences](#) where appropriate.
- Review app permissions, especially camera, microphone, contacts, location and photo access.

For iPhone and iPad (see Third-party parental control options)

- Use [Apple Screen Time](#) and [Family Sharing](#) to manage downtime, app limits, content and privacy restrictions, purchases, downloads and communication limits.
- Turn on Content & Privacy Restrictions and use a Screen Time passcode that the child does not know.
- Use Communication safety and Communication limits where available.
- Disable location sharing for apps that do not need it.
- Review photo, camera, microphone and contacts permissions regularly. Updates sometimes reset existing settings.

WhatsApp Parental controls

WhatsApp Parental control settings are not for monitoring your existing adult account. It's a way for a parent to create and supervise a WhatsApp account for a child on the child's phone. Parents can control who can contact the child (only saved contacts can message or call by default), others go to a Requests folder for you to approve. Parents can also control Groups (only you can add them to groups). You can also control Privacy settings, for instance only you can change the profile photo, Last Seen, About and so on using a parent PIN. You also get activity notifications like new contacts, blocks and profile changes. Your child cannot change or bypass these settings. So, parents get safety without compromising privacy or encryption.

Important: WhatsApp Parental controls will not allow you to read your child's chats as messages stay end-to-end encrypted.

In summary then, WhatsApp Parental controls let younger children communicate safely with family, prevent strangers from contacting them, prevent risky group exposure (school groups, neighbourhood groups, unknown adults) and give parents control without turning WhatsApp into surveillance.

However, WhatsApp relies on parent-initiated setup, not automated age detection. You as the parent creates the child's account. During setup, you:

- Open WhatsApp on their device
- Choose "Add a child account"
- Scan a QR code on the child's device
- Enters the child's date of birth

WhatsApp does not verify the age with ID, biometrics, school records, or device data. It is self-declared by the parent. The system enforces restrictions based on the declared age. If the parent enters an age under 13, WhatsApp automatically:

- Converts the child's profile into a parent-managed account.
- Disables adult features (Channels, Status, Meta AI, location sharing and so on).
- Locks privacy settings behind the parent's PIN.
- Requires parental approval for contacts and groups.

If the parent enters 13 or older, the parental-control system is not activated. This is the same model used by Google Family Link, Apple Screen Time, Microsoft Family Safety and Instagram's supervised accounts. *None of these platforms can reliably detect a child's real age, so they rely on parent declaration and technical restrictions.* WhatsApp operates this way because age verification for children is legally and technically difficult. Also, WhatsApp is end-to-end encrypted (no scanning for age signals) and WhatsApp does not collect biometrics or ID documents. *Parents are the ones legally responsible for under-13 digital use.* So, WhatsApp's reasoning is *"If a parent says the child is under 13, we enforce strict controls. If not, we treat the user as a normal WhatsApp account."* This means WhatsApp's parental controls are opt-in, not automatic.

The implication is that parents must know the feature exists, choose to activate it, enter the correct age and keep the parent-child link intact. If they don't, the child gets the full adult WhatsApp account, even at age 8. This is crucial for South African families, where children often get phones very early and WhatsApp is used heavily for school communication. Parents may not even know that these controls exist.

So, what happened when your child reaches 13, or whatever age you want to remove the restrictions? WhatsApp never monitors birthdays, neither does it re-verify age, and it does not “unlock” the account on its own once the child is older than 13. *A parent-managed account stays a parent-managed account indefinitely until the parent chooses to convert it.*

When the parent wants the child to have a normal WhatsApp account, the parent must:

- Open WhatsApp on the parent’s device
- Go to Parent Controls → Manage Child Account
- Select “Convert to standard account”
- Enter the parent PIN
- Confirm the change

After that:

- The child gets Channels, Status, Meta AI, location sharing and so on
- Privacy settings become editable by the child
- Contact approvals stop
- Group approvals stop
- If the parent does not convert the account, the child continues using the restricted version, even at 14, 15, 16.

Third-party parental control options

Parents may also consider reputable third-party tools⁴, depending on device type, budget and the level of monitoring required:

- Qustodio⁵ - <https://www.qustodio.com/en/>
- Bark - <https://www.bark.us/>
- Norton Family - <https://us.norton.com/products/norton-family>
- Kaspersky Safe Kids - <https://www.kaspersky.co.za/safe-kids>
- Net Nanny - <https://www.netnanny.com/>
- Microsoft Family Safety - <https://account.microsoft.com/family/windows/coldstart>

Note: The listed tools are generally available for both Android and Apple iOS devices, although features, setup steps and supported functions may differ by operating system and device version. Parents should confirm current compatibility on the provider's official website before subscribing or installing.

Before installing any tool, always check privacy policies, device compatibility, South African availability, subscription costs, and whether the child's school device allows such software.

Important: no parental control app is perfect. Children may find workarounds, borrow another device or access content through friends. The strongest protection is a combination of controls, supervision, trust, school partnership and clear consequences.

⁴ This list is for educational and guidance purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation by PD Glades. PD Glades accepts no responsibility or liability for the use, performance, privacy practices, costs or suitability of any third-party tool. Parents and caregivers should review each tool carefully and make their own informed decision before use.

⁵ If these web addresses are not clickable in your copy of the document, copy and paste the URL manually into a web browser.

A practical family digital safety plan

1. **Create a family device agreement:** include screen-time rules, app rules, bedtime charging, schoolwork expectations and consequences. (See the example below.)
2. **Set up child accounts:** avoid giving children unrestricted adult accounts on phones, tablets, app stores, gaming platforms and streaming services.
3. **Audit every app:** ask what the app does, who can contact the child, what content appears, what data is collected and whether the app is necessary.
4. **Review privacy settings regularly:** check profile visibility, location sharing, contacts, tags, followers, direct messages and linked accounts.
5. **Use a shared charging station:** all devices charge outside bedrooms from a set time every night.
6. **Schedule regular check-ins:** discuss online friendships, group chats, uncomfortable content, AI use and screen habits without turning every conversation into an interrogation.
7. **Model the behaviour:** children are more likely to follow rules when adults also put phones away during meals, conversations, homework and bedtime.

Family Device Agreement

Our Family Device Agreement

Hey, let's make sure we're all on the same page about how we use phones, tablets, and computers at home. This isn't about punishment, it's about keeping you safe, helping you focus when you need to, and making sure devices don't take over our day.

1. Screen-Time

We'll decide together how much screen-time makes sense on school days and weekends. You can use your device during the agreed hours, but schoolwork, meals, chores, and sleep come first. If exams are coming up, we'll adjust things so you can concentrate.

2. Apps and Social Media

Before you download a new app or game, just check with us first. Any social media accounts must stay private, and location sharing stays off. If something online makes you uncomfortable, please tell us, no judgement.

3. Bedtime and Charging

At night, all devices sleep in the same place, the charging station in the lounge/kitchen. No phones or tablets in bedrooms after the agreed time.

This helps everyone get proper rest.

4. Schoolwork

You can use your device for homework and research whenever you need to.

During homework time, entertainment apps stay off so you can focus. We'll help you set up quiet-time notifications if needed.

5. Respect and Safety

We expect kindness online, no bullying, no sharing hurtful things. Ask us before posting photos or personal details. If someone online is rude, pushy, or creepy, come talk to us straight away.

6. If Things Go Wrong

If the agreement isn't followed, we'll talk about it and decide together what's fair, maybe less screen-time for a bit or removing an app. It's not about punishment; it's about learning healthy habits.

7. Checking In

We'll look at this agreement again every few months, or when you get a new device or app, to make sure it still works for everyone!

Warning signs that a child may need help

- Sudden secrecy around the phone or panic when adults approach.
- Sleep problems, irritability, anxiety or withdrawal after online activity.
- Rapid changes in friendships, school performance or mood.
- Receiving gifts, airtime, money or attention from unknown people.
- Deleting messages, using hidden apps, duplicate accounts or unknown usernames.
- Pressure to send photos, keep secrets, join private groups or move conversations to another app.
- Fear of going to school because of online rumours, bullying or group chats.

What to do when something goes wrong

1. **Stay calm first:** if the child fears punishment, they may hide important details.
2. **Do not delete evidence:** take screenshots, save usernames, dates, links, numbers and messages.
3. **Block and report:** use the platform's reporting tools and block harmful accounts.
4. **Inform the school:** if classmates, school groups, uniforms, staff or school events are involved, contact the school promptly.
5. **Escalate serious matters:** threats, extortion, impersonation, intimate-image sharing, stalking or criminal conduct should be reported to the appropriate authorities or legal support.

6. **Support the child emotionally:** remind them that asking for help was the right thing to do and that online harm can be addressed.
7. **Consider additional support:** if the child is distressed, withdrawn, anxious, ashamed, fearful of school, or struggling to cope after an online incident, involve an appropriate trusted support person such as the school counsellor, a church, or a qualified private counsellor, psychologist or social worker. Children sometimes speak more openly to a neutral adult, and early support can help prevent the situation from becoming more serious.

Conversation starters for parents

Use these conversation starters during calm, ordinary moments such as car trips, meals, device check-ins, homework breaks or before allowing a new app. (Change the wording as required.) They are meant to help parents start open, non-threatening conversations before a serious problem occurs, so children practise thinking about privacy, pressure, AI, group chats and online safety while they still feel safe enough to speak honestly.

- *“What apps are popular at school right now?” → “Why is that?”*
- *“What would make you leave a group chat?”*
- *“If someone asked you to keep an online friendship secret, what would you do?”*
- *“How do you know whether something online is real or AI-generated?”* (See the “How children can tell” section further down)
- *“Which one of our online rules do you think is fair, and which one do you think we should discuss more?”*
- *“If you made a mistake online, how could you tell me in a way that feels safe?”*

Digital safety checklist for parents

Do this now	Why it matters
Move charging out of bedrooms.	Protects sleep and reduces late-night risky use.
Turn on Family Link or Screen Time.	Adds app approvals, limits, filters and downtime.
Make all child accounts private.	Reduces exposure to strangers and data harvesting.
Disable unnecessary location sharing.	Protects routines, home area and school movements.
Review followers and group chats monthly.	Finds bullying, strangers and harmful communities early.

Do this now	Why it matters
Teach “stop, screenshot, block, report, tell”.	Gives children a simple emergency response.
Set an AI rule: no personal data, no fake images of people, no copied homework.	Protects privacy, dignity and academic integrity.
Keep device software and parental-control apps updated.	Adds security fixes and helps parental-control tools keep their latest protection features.
Promise help before punishment when safety is at stake.	Makes it more likely the child will come to you early.

How children can tell if something online is real or AI-generated

1. Does anything look too perfect? Kids can learn that AI images often have:

- Perfect skin
- Strange hands or fingers
- Odd reflections or shadows
- Backgrounds that don’t match the foreground
- Clothing or hair that looks ‘painted on’

Parents can say:

“If a photo looks too perfect, or something feels a bit off, it might be AI-made.”

2. Does the person behave strangely? AI-generated people often:

- Don’t blink naturally
- Move stiffly
- Have unnatural facial expressions
- Speak with odd timing or mismatched lip movements

Parents can say:

“If someone in a video moves like a robot or their mouth doesn’t match their words, it could be AI.”

3. Is the message trying to make you feel scared, angry, or pressured? AI content is often used to:

- Spread rumours
- Pretend to be a friend
- Trick people into clicking links
- Create fake emergencies

Parents can say:

“If something online tries to make you panic or react quickly, slow down, it might not be real.”

4. Can you find the same information somewhere else? Children can learn to check:

- A second website
- A school-trusted source
- A parent or teacher
- A known news outlet

Parents can say:

“If only one random account says it, and nobody else does, it might be fake or AI-generated.”

5. Does the account look real? Kids can check:

- Does it have a real name?
- Does it have normal posts over time?
- Does it have friends or comments from real people?
- Is the profile picture suspiciously perfect?

Parents can say:

“If the account looks empty, new, or too perfect, it might not be a real person.”

6. Does the text sound strange? AI-generated text often:

- Repeats itself
- Uses unusual phrasing
- Sounds overly formal or overly dramatic
- Has facts that don’t match reality

Parents can say:

“If a message sounds weird or doesn’t sound like how people normally talk, it could be AI.”

A simple rule for children

If something feels ‘off’, pause and ask a parent. Kids are excellent at spotting “something weird”, they just need permission to trust that instinct.



How the conversation starters and family agreement work together: use the Conversation starters for parents first to understand your child's online world, worries, habits and level of judgement. Then use the family agreement, to turn those conversations into clear shared expectations. In other words, the conversation starters open the discussion; the family agreement records the boundaries, responsibilities and safety promises that the family agrees to follow.

Suggested family agreement introduction

If the Family Device Agreement mentioned earlier in this document, feels too formal, you can also introduce it this way:

“In our family, phones and AI tools are used for learning, creativity, connection and fun. They are not used for bullying, secrecy, cheating, humiliating others, sharing private information or speaking to unsafe strangers. If something online feels wrong, scary or embarrassing, you can tell us or another trusted adult. You may still face consequences for poor choices, but you will never be punished for asking for help when safety is involved.”

Final note for parents

Children do not become safe online because they know how to swipe, tap, search or download. They become safer when adults teach them how to pause, question, protect privacy, recognise manipulation, manage emotions, and ask for help. The goal is not fear-based parenting. The goal is confident, informed and supported children who can grow into responsible digital citizens.

Further resources

If you'd like to learn more about digital safety, social media risks, and how artificial intelligence affects children, the following resources offer reliable, practical guidance. These sites and tools are designed to help families and schools stay informed, set healthy boundaries, and respond confidently when online issues arise.

South African Police Service (SAPS)

For reporting online threats, harassment, extortion, or suspected criminal activity.

<https://www.saps.gov.za>

Childline South Africa

Support for children experiencing bullying, online harm, or emotional distress.

<https://www.childlinesa.org.za>

Department of Basic Education

Policies, guidelines, and school-related digital safety initiatives.

<https://www.education.gov.za>

International digital safety organisations

Common Sense Media

Parent-friendly reviews of apps, games, social media platforms, and online risks.

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org>

eSafety Commissioner

One of the world's leading authorities on child online safety.

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents>

UK Safer Internet Centre

Guides for families, schools, and teachers on safe digital habits.

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers>

Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI)

Research, tips, and global best practices for digital parenting.

<https://www.fosi.org>

Google's "Be Internet Awesome"

Interactive lessons on online safety, privacy, and digital citizenship.

https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us

For Schools and Teachers

Schools may wish to explore these resources when developing digital safety policies or supporting learners:

UNICEF – Child Online Protection Guidelines

<https://www.unicef.org>

Digital safety is not a once-off conversation. It's an ongoing partnership between families, schools, and communities. The resources listed above can help you stay informed, confident and connected as technology evolves at a breathtaking pace.

At PD Glades, we believe that *when parents are empowered, children are safer*, and we're honoured to support you on that journey. Ethics is at the heart of everything we do, shaping how we approach technology in education, how we evaluate digital risks, and how we explain emerging AI trends with clarity and integrity.

This free guide is intended as a practical *starting point* to help you, as a parent or teacher, to stay aware, prepared and engaged as the world shifts around us. If you'd like to explore these topics further, you're welcome to visit or follow PD Glades on [LinkedIn](#) for ongoing articles and discussions on AI, digital wellbeing, and the ethical foundations that must anchor our digital future.

Supplemental

To understand why digital safety and AI awareness matter, it helps to see where AI is already playing a role. The partial list below, shows how deeply these technologies have entered everyday work, a reminder that AI is becoming part of every child's future, *no matter which career path they choose*.

- Healthcare Professionals. It assists doctors diagnose faster and support patient care.
- Lawyers & Legal Assistants. It aids in research and case preparation.
- Tourism & Travel Consultants. AI helps with itinerary planning, booking optimisation, and customer support.
- Teachers. AI supports personalized learning and lesson planning.
- Accountants & Auditors. AI automates reconciliations, detects anomalies, and speeds up financial reporting.
- Personal Assistants / Office Clerks. It helps with scheduling, document drafting, and routine admin. MS Word can even type up complete documents based on what you prompt it with.
- Bank Cashiers / Clerks. It automates transactions and fraud detection.
- Delivery Drivers. It optimizes routes and logistics.
- Nurses / Care Workers. It supports patient monitoring, diagnostics, and scheduling.
- Hospitality Staff. It manages bookings, check-ins, and guest preferences.

- Chefs & Food Service Managers. It assists with menu planning, stock control, and kitchen workflow optimisation.
- Engineering & Technical Careers. It supports design, simulation, fault-finding, and safety analysis in fields like civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering.
- Software & IT Careers. AI assists with coding, cybersecurity monitoring, system optimisation, and data analysis.

If you have a learner in Grade 10–12, you may also find value in the PD Glades *Understanding AI* course, which gives older students a clear, ethical and future-focused introduction to the concepts shaping their world. Our prospectus is available via a link on our [website](#).

PD Glades is a specialist in on-line AI tuition. Our mission is to empower scholars, students, and working professionals on their learning journeys.

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