

# Tips on How to Talk to Your Kids About Online Interactions

- **Let's face it, there are some conversations that are just going to be uncomfortable to have with your child. When you open the door to talk with your child or teen about online interactions, start with, "I remember being a kid. But I've never been a mom/dad of a kid your age before. So please recognize that I just want to keep you safe in every way possible. That's why I wanted to talk about \_\_\_\_\_ for a minute. Are you OK with that?"**
- **Use everyday experiences as prompts for conversations. Let's say your child tells you about a decision another kid made online that got him/her into trouble. You can respond with "Remember when we talked about choosing how we react to situations? This is a good example of how you can decide what *you'll* do when that kind of thing happens to you. What do you think he/she could have done to make this turn out better?"**
- **Stay calm and check your emotions at the door. It's best to approach your child with a calm demeanor and maintain it throughout the interaction. Overreaction on your part will impact them; they may react with a guarded response, or shut down completely.**
- **Body language is important. Position yourself in a comfortable, friendly posture with the child, rather than a confrontive or antagonistic stance.**
  - ➔ Ask for their permission to talk.
  - ➔ Ask for their attention: "Can we turn this game/television off for a minute?"
  - ➔ Sit side by side instead of standing over them.
- **Recognize that this will be an ongoing series of conversations. Once is not enough. If their attention wanders, ask "Can we talk about this again sometime?"**
- **Be aware of what they aren't saying. They may test the waters and only tell you a part of the story to see how you respond. If you remain calm and interested, they may choose to tell you the rest.**

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- It may take a few days for everything to come out. Be patient. Don't say "Why didn't you tell me this the other day?" Let them unfold the incident as they are comfortable talking about it with you.<sup>1</sup> Over a period of time and with repeated interactions, they'll learn that they can tell you anything at all and you'll react in a calm and rational way. Refrain from rushing to judgment or becoming alarmist;

### **avoid statements like:**

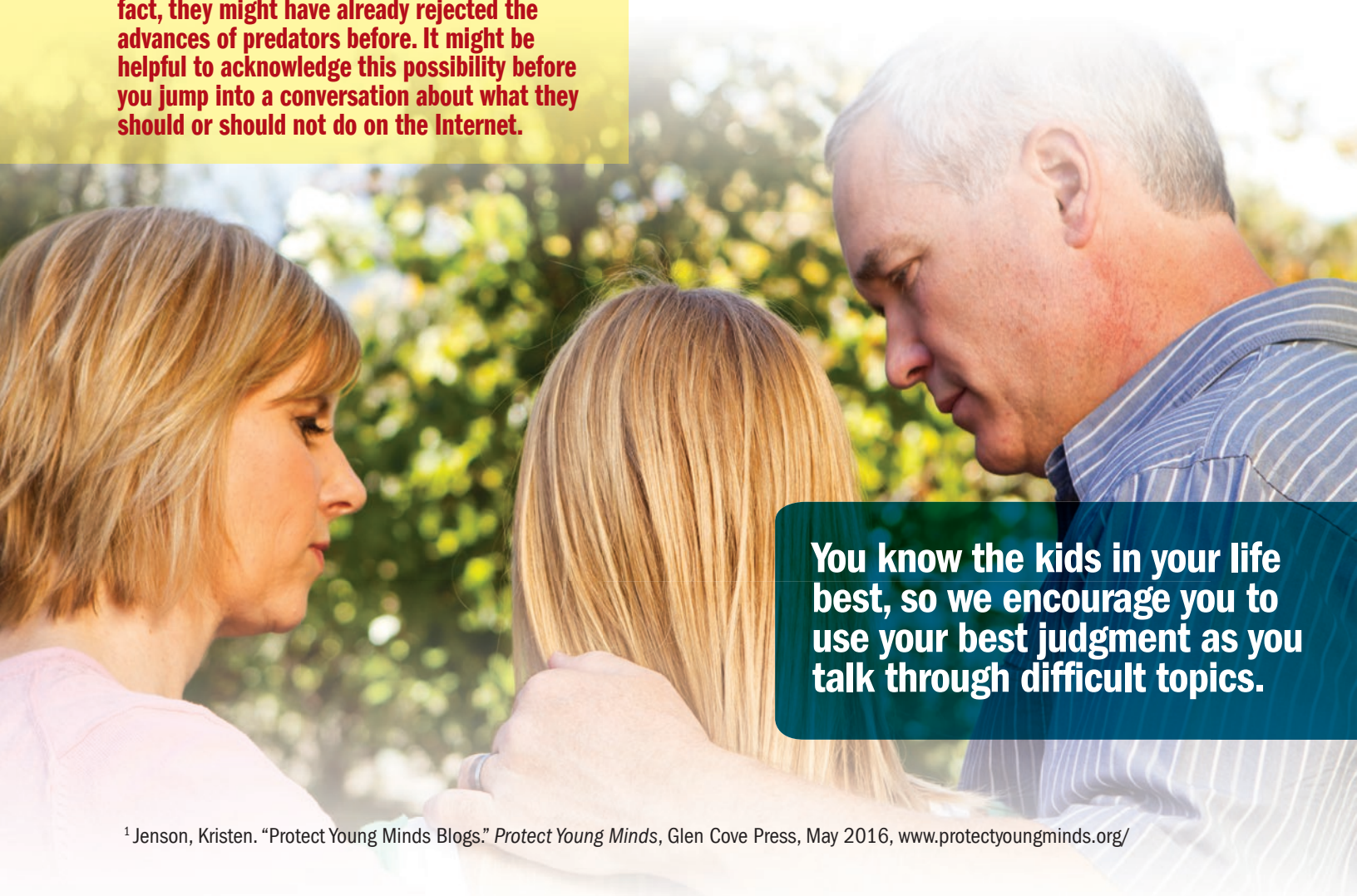
- That was crazy! Why did you/they do that?
- Are you kidding? Where was your teacher/coach when this happened?
- That's so dangerous! I can't believe anyone would do that!
- You should never have done that! Can't you see how bad that was? What's wrong with you?
- Next time you need to...

**Tips from a Teen:** Since kids today are growing up in the digital age, they may be better at identifying fake profiles and predatory behavior than you might think. In fact, they might have already rejected the advances of predators before. It might be helpful to acknowledge this possibility before you jump into a conversation about what they should or should not do on the Internet.

### **Instead, listen and respond with open-ended comments:**

- That must have been scary. How did you feel?
- How did you handle it when they...?
- What happened when you did/said that?
- Did anyone else try to help/get involved/stop it?
- What could you have done differently to maybe get a different outcome?

- Use every opportunity to affirm their decisions and choices. When they tell you about how they successfully handled a difficulty, respond with "That was really good thinking on your part! I can see that you're smart about how you act when things like this happen!"
- But do not go over-the-top with unfounded or indistinct praise, such as, "Wow, you're so incredible! Do you realize how wonderful you are?" A child needs sincere affirmation and specific feedback. Give them the truthful input they deserve, and want to hear, as a response to their actions.



**You know the kids in your life best, so we encourage you to use your best judgment as you talk through difficult topics.**

<sup>1</sup> Jenson, Kristen. "Protect Young Minds Blogs." *Protect Young Minds*, Glen Cove Press, May 2016, [www.protectyoungminds.org/](http://www.protectyoungminds.org/)