

Unhealthy Friendships and Internet Safety

Friendships are important for a child's emotional and social development. As kids grow, friendships will become more and more central to their lives. It is important to talk with your child about the signs of a healthy friendship and the signs of an unhealthy friendship. Unhealthy friendships are unfulfilling and typically feel unequal. These relationships can be a great source of stress, wearing kids down emotionally and physically. If you feel your child is in some unhealthy friendships, you may want to talk to her/him about how s/he deserves to be treated. The following checklist may help start conversations with your child about whether certain friendships are good for them or not.

What does friendship have to do with Internet safety?

In an effort to reduce the risk of children being sexually exploited online, it is important that they understand healthy friendships. Those looking to sexually exploit children typically groom them under the guise of friendship. In order to empower children, they need to be explicitly taught the difference between healthy friendships and unhealthy friendships.

Review the following questions with your child:

Signs of an unhealthy friendship may include:

- **Threats** — Do any of your friends use threats to get you to do things?
- **Rejection** — Do any of your friends talk behind your back, laugh at or make fun of you?
- **Being bossy** — Do any of your friends try to tell you what and what not to do? Do they get jealous or angry if you spend time with other people?
- **Put-downs** — Do any of your friends yell at you, put you down, use sarcasm or embarrass you?
- **Violence** — Do any of your friends play rough with you (e.g. hitting, pushing, pinching, kicking, scratching or slapping)?
- **Ignoring** — Do any of your friends ignore you if they haven't gotten their way? Do they ignore you when you have something important to talk about?
- **Rumours** — Do any of your friends spread rumours about you or tell lies about things? Do they share with others private information that you shared with them in confidence?
- **Guilt** — Do any of your friends try to make you feel guilty if they don't get what they want (e.g. "You had a friend over and I was crying because you didn't invite me.")?



Unhealthy Friendships and Internet Safety (cont'd)

Ask your child what they think is a sign of an unhealthy friendship

Friends do not:

- Embarrass each other.
- Pressure each other.
- Put each other down.
- Encourage each other to do something that could be harmful.
- Act nicely to each other only when they want something from their friend.
- Reveal private information shared with them in confidence.

Add your own!

You and your child can add more examples to the list:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

