7 Simple Steps to Protect Your Family’s Online Privacy

There have been vast changes to the meaning and importance of a family’s online privacy. Our kids have a great number of ways and reasons to be online; simultaneously, there are an increasing number of internet-connected devices inhabiting our homes. With so much data being collected, used, and travelling to and from our homes, protecting our family’s privacy in the internet has never been more important.

Here are seven easy steps you can take to make sure that you and your family are keeping your private lives private online:

1. **Understand what you’re saying yes to.** As a first step, you need to know what it is that your kids are doing online, and set rules about how, where and when they can do it. Be involved, knowledgeable, and interested in the devices, apps, and sites they use for school and for fun. There is more information now than ever before about how these sites or apps work, what personal information is collected or tracked by these tools, and how that data is used, stored, and shared.

   For sites that your children are using for school, ask their teachers for more information. For apps they’re using at home, spend 15 minutes trying it out yourself. And ask your kids to tell you about them, too! This not only shows that you are interested, but that you are willing to learn – and most kids will be happy to teach you what they know.

2. **Use privacy settings and features in browsers and devices.** Your kids are going to access their favorite sites, apps, and online services through a browser or a mobile or gaming device. Make sure you understand what privacy protections these platforms offer for your family.

   Many browsers allow you to prevent sites from tracking what you do and where you go online (mostly to send you ads on other sites you visit later), so spend some time looking at web browser settings (Safari, Chrome, Internet Explorer, etc.) to see what privacy setting options are available to you.

   Mobile devices also have settings that will restrict apps from knowing your physical location or accessing your camera, microphone, photos or contacts. Become familiar with your options and use these privacy settings whenever possible to help keep your family’s information safe online.

3. **Use features and services available within an app or website.** Once you’ve set up privacy controls at the browser or device-level, take a look at the privacy
settings available in the specific apps, websites, or games your family uses. Instagram, Snapchat, and most major social networking sites let you have a *private* account, which means the whole world won’t be able to see what you post or who you’re connected to. It also means that people have to ask your permission before they can follow you.

There are other privacy options to further protect the things you do even behind those privacy walls. Become familiar with them. The popular sites you use also have good information outlined on their websites in the *support* or *help* sections to walk you through these settings.

4. **Go through this with your kids.** You may be learning these things for the first time, but so will your kids. Why not make it a chance to learn as a family? Review privacy settings with your kids so they understand their options for keeping what they do online as private as possible. Make sure they are using the strongest settings each service offers, while still allowing them to do what they want to do on that site, app or service.

5. **Remind your kids that being online is a public life.** Remember, nothing is truly private online. If you and your family keep this in the back of your minds, it can help you all think through what you are about to post, like, and click on, as well as who you connect with online.

6. **Talk to other families.** One of the biggest challenges regarding privacy issues online is that other kids or families may have a different definition of what is or isn’t “private.” Ever find out that someone posted a photo online that your kid is in, without you knowing until much later?

   Encourage your kids to talk to their friends about how they will respect each other’s privacy online. Good friends will understand, think, and ask before posting a photo or information about their friends.

   Talk to other parents about your feelings on privacy, too, and ask them for their opinions. The more we all know, the more we can all protect and respect each other’s privacy online.

7. **Check-in regularly.** As your children grow older, they will be out in the world more and more without your supervision. This is true both online and offline. In either case, do your best to stay connected, involved, and interested in what is going on in their lives.

   You can simply make it a topic of conversation during family dinner or car rides...or you can friend or follow your kids on Instagram or Snapchat and be part of their online world.