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10 Online Safety Rules ⚠️

The Internet is an incredibly powerful tool — and one that most people can't live without. Whether connecting with friends and family, tracking class assignments, researching and learning, or keeping up with the news, the online universe has been a game-changer for teens. Still, despite the abundance of good, the Internet can get you in serious trouble if you're not careful. Here are 10 safety tips that every teen should follow to help ensure a safe, rewarding online experience.

1. **Keep private information private.** Never, ever post your full name, location, home or school address, phone number, social security number, passwords or credit card numbers online. Your identity, credit, and reputation are at stake.

2. **People may not be who them seem online.** The Internet can help you make invaluable connections, but it is also a breeding ground for deception. Don't assume you know someone just because you've exchanged messages, and never share private information or disclose something you can't take back. If you plan to meet an online acquaintance in person, choose a coffee shop or other public location, and bring a friend or parent.

3. **Remain anonymous.** Many people are careful about keeping their personal information private but then make the mistake of including their full name, age and/or birthday in a username. Keep your identity protected by choosing usernames that are clever and inconspicuous.

4. **Take password protections to heart.** Strong passwords exist to protect everything that's behind them. Sharing passwords can give others access to—and the ability to control—everything from your Instagram account to your bank account. Remember, friends can become ex-friends in a heartbeat, and even the most well-intentioned teens can make dangerous mistakes online, so keep passwords to yourself (and your parents).

5. **Practice good Internet hygiene.** Be honest, polite, and discreet online. Never lie about your age, don't post pictures that you may regret, and never bully or intimidate others. Also keep in mind that you can be recorded on a webcam, so be cautious about how you act on camera.

6. **Make sure your devices are locked and out of reach.** Don't let others use your phone when you're not around; use an easy-to-remember, hard-to-guess password to protect your phone if it falls into the wrong hands; and always log off your laptop or tablet when you're not using it. It only takes a minute to sabotage your Snapchat streak, or something more serious.

7. **Use geolocation sparingly.** Geolocation turns your phone into a mobile tracking device, so beware of tapping "allow" to enable an app to access your whereabouts. Yes, some apps require geolocation, but there are plenty of others that attempt to monitor users, and this can be dangerous. Turn off location services when you can, and for apps that require it, consider enabling location mapping only when you need it.

8. **Be wary of public Wi-Fi.** Public Wi-Fi is less secure than a locked and password protected home network, so err on the side of caution and handle your confidential transactions (e.g., online shopping and banking) on your own protected network.

9. **Make sure you have up-to-date security software.** Set up safety features like filters, popup blocks, and chat room monitors. Sometimes software companies fix security or operating flaws with system updates, so don't ignore reminders to protect yourself from the latest threats.

10. **Call in the reinforcements.** The Internet is not always as it seems, and careless use can have harmful consequences. If something seems fishy or makes you feel uncomfortable, stop and ask your parents or an adult you trust for help.