



— THE — **SPECIAL NEEDS PARENT TOOLKIT**

Practical Tools for Creating Safety, Structure & Connection

WHY THIS TOOLKIT EXISTS



This toolkit was created to address a gap in child safety resources for families raising children with special needs.

In my work at Jaco Booyens Ministries, and in my own journey as a mom raising a child with special needs, I repeatedly encountered the same challenge: much of the information available to parents about child protection and digital safety did not fully reflect the day-to-day realities our children face—both online and in the world around them.

Our children are not more vulnerable because of who they are. They are vulnerable because the environments they move through—classrooms, digital platforms, therapies, transportation, and social spaces—are often not designed with their specific needs or protection in mind.

This toolkit exists to come alongside parents with faith-based, practical guidance that strengthens safety without increasing fear or overwhelm. It is meant to help families protect their children physically, emotionally, and spiritually, while preserving dignity, trust, and confidence at home.

Our hope is that this resource reminds parents that they are not alone—and that with clarity, preparation, and faith, they can create safer, more supportive spaces where their children can grow, connect, and thrive.

In His Grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Summer Elliott".

Communication Director & Special Education Advocate



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SECTION 1

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN & OUT OF THE CLASSROOM



BUILDING SAFETY ACROSS SCHOOL, HOME, AND DIGITAL SPACES

Children move through many environments each day—classrooms, therapies, activities, transportation, and online spaces. This section helps parents think clearly about safety across all of those settings, offering practical guidance to strengthen supervision, communication, and protective boundaries both in and out of school.



UNDERSTANDING RISK WITHOUT FEAR

Protecting children begins with understanding risk clearly—without panic, blame, or shame.

	Trust adults and peers quickly and deeply.
	Struggle to recognize manipulation, hidden intent, or unsafe behavior.
	Have difficulty explaining when something feels confusing or uncomfortable.
	Rely on routines, familiar people, or people-pleasing behavior.
	Spend time in settings with frequent transitions or multiple caregivers.
	Use devices, apps, or assistive technology with limited visibility.

Understanding these realities is not meant to create fear, but to help parents respond with clarity, wisdom, and confidence.

TERMS PARENTS SHOULD KNOW



Here are a few key terms every parent should understand:

GROOMING

- When someone builds trust with a child in order to manipulate, exploit, or abuse them.

SEXTORTION

- When someone pressures or threatens a child for sexual images, videos, or continued contact.

PRIVATE MESSAGING

- One-on-one or small group communication that happens outside public view.

DISAPPEARING MESSAGES

- Messages or images designed to vanish, making conversations harder to monitor or report.

LOCATION SHARING

- A device or app setting that shows where a child is in real time.

AI COMPANION OR CHATBOT

- An app or tool that simulates conversation, friendship, or emotional connection and may expose children to harmful content or unhealthy attachment.

CSE

- Child sexual exploitation—when a child is manipulated, pressured, or abused for someone else's sexual purpose or gain.

BOTTOM LINE:

- Understanding the language helps parents respond more quickly and wisely.



PROTECTING CHILDREN INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Children often interact with multiple adults throughout the school day. Protection in the classroom begins with clarity, communication, and partnership between parents and school staff.

KNOW EVERY ADULT WHO INTERACTS WITH YOUR CHILD

- Ask the school for a clear list of everyone who may work with, support, supervise, or transport your child.

CLARIFY SUPERVISION PROTOCOLS

- Ask who supervises transitions, bathroom breaks, emotional regulation, and one-on-one support.

REQUEST INCREASED TRANSPARENCY

- Ask for regular communication, clear behavior reporting, and visual supports your child can understand.

TEACH SIMPLE, REPEATABLE SAFETY PHRASES

- Help your child learn phrases like “stop,” “no,” “all done,” “help,” and “safe person.”

CONFIRM DEVICE AND INTERNET POLICIES

- Ask how technology is used, monitored, and restricted during the school day.

**Technology can support learning—but only when clear safeguards
are in place.**

CLASSROOM SAFETY CHECKLIST



PEOPLE & ACCESS

- ☐ I know the names of the adults who regularly interact with my child.
 - ☐ I know who may support, substitute for, or transport my child.
 - ☐ I know who my child can go to if they feel confused or unsafe.
-

SUPERVISION & TRANSITIONS

- ☐ I know who supervises transitions throughout the day.
 - ☐ I understand how bathroom breaks and physical prompts are handled.
 - ☐ I know how injuries, emotional changes, or behavior incidents are documented.
-

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

- ☐ The school provides clear communication about incidents and concerns.
 - ☐ I understand expectations for routines, transitions, and support.
 - ☐ My child has a designated “safe person” they can identify.
-

CHILD SAFETY LANGUAGE

- ☐ My child is learning simple safety phrases.
 - ☐ My child is being taught how to express discomfort or confusion.
-

TECHNOLOGY & DEVICES

- ☐ I understand how classroom technology is managed.
 - ☐ Browsing, messaging, and apps are appropriately restricted.
 - ☐ Devices used by my child are monitored by staff.
-

**Advocating for your child is not being difficult—it is being faithful.
Clear communication and transparency create safer environments for everyone.**



WHEN OTHER ADULTS HELP CARE FOR YOUR CHILD

Many children are supported by grandparents, sitters, aides, respite workers, family friends, or other caregivers. Clear expectations help create safer, more consistent care.

SHARE YOUR FAMILY RULES

- Make sure caregivers understand your expectations around privacy, supervision, technology, bathroom help, transportation, and discipline.

CLARIFY TECHNOLOGY BOUNDARIES

- Explain what devices are allowed, what apps are restricted, and whether messaging, video platforms, or gaming are permitted.

DEFINE SAFE ADULT EXPECTATIONS

Caregivers should know:

- not to ask for secrets
- to respect body boundaries
- to report concerns immediately
- how your child communicates discomfort or distress

REVIEW ROUTINES AND TRIGGERS

- Share information about transitions, communication supports, regulation needs, and what helps your child feel safe.

CREATE A CLEAR RESPONSE PLAN

- Tell caregivers exactly who to contact and what to do if something feels off.

BOTTOM LINE:

- Consistency across caregivers creates clarity and protection.

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM SAFETY CHECKLIST



TRANSPORTATION

- ☐ I know who is present during transport.
 - ☐ I understand seating and supervision expectations.
 - ☐ I know how concerns or incidents are reported.
-

THERAPIES

- ☐ I know who may be present during sessions.
 - ☐ I understand communication expectations with providers.
 - ☐ I know how behavior and emotional changes are documented.
-

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

- ☐ Programs provide regular updates and clear expectations.
 - ☐ My child has a designated “safe person” in each setting.
 - ☐ I know how to raise concerns quickly if needed.
-

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS, CAMPS & CHURCH ACTIVITIES

- ☐ I know who supervises my child.
 - ☐ I understand ratios, transitions, and routines.
 - ☐ I know who my child can go to if they feel uncomfortable.
-

INDEPENDENT TECHNOLOGY USE

- ☐ Messaging and private communication are restricted.
 - ☐ Gaming, video, and location settings have clear safeguards.
 - ☐ Devices are used with visibility and supervision.
-

Providing structure and visibility is not limiting—it is loving.



TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL SAFETY

Technology can support learning and connection, but digital safety depends on visibility, guidance, and consistent limits.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR STRONGER DIGITAL PROTECTION

- Disable private or direct messaging whenever possible.
- Turn off disappearing messages and secret chats.
- Restrict unfiltered browsing and video platforms.
- Monitor gaming voice and text chat.
- Turn off location sharing.
- Limit unsupervised device use, especially behind closed doors.

TEACH SIMPLE DIGITAL RULES

- I don't talk privately online.
- I don't share pictures or videos.
- If something feels confusing, I stop and tell my parent.
- I don't keep secrets from my family.

A FAITH-BASED REMINDER

Digital boundaries are not punishments. They are wise protections that help parents guide children with clarity, care, and peace.

Clear, repeatable rules help children feel safer online.

DIGITAL SAFETY CHECKLIST



DEVICES & ACCOUNTS

- ☐ Devices are used in shared spaces.
- ☐ Parental controls are turned on.
- ☐ App downloads require approval.

MESSAGING & COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Private or direct messaging is limited or disabled.
- ☐ Disappearing messages are turned off.
- ☐ Requests from strangers are blocked.

GAMING & ONLINE PLATFORMS

- ☐ Voice chat is monitored or restricted.
- ☐ Friend requests are parent-approved.
- ☐ In-game settings and servers are reviewed.

LOCATION & PRIVACY

- ☐ Location sharing is turned off.
- ☐ Camera and microphone permissions are reviewed.
- ☐ Private browsing or guest mode is disabled.

PARENT CHECK-IN

- ☐ We review settings together regularly.
- ☐ My child knows they can tell me if something feels confusing.
- ☐ Help is always okay.

Digital boundaries are not about restriction—they are about protection, clarity, and peace.

SECTION 2

YOUR VOICE AT THE TABLE



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO IEP MEETINGS, SUPPORT STAFF, AND SAFETY

Parents should never feel like they are sitting in an IEP meeting just to listen, nod, and sign paperwork. Under IDEA, parents are part of the team, and their voice matters.

For children with disabilities, the IEP conversation should include both support and safety. Many children rely on adults for communication, toileting, feeding, mobility, behavior support, transportation, therapies, or daily care. Some may not be able to clearly explain what happened or say when something felt unsafe.

That is why parents need to ask clear, practical questions about who is around their child, how support is provided, and what safeguards are in place.

Parents do not have to know every legal term. They do need to know this:

Their voice belongs at the table.



YOUR VOICE AT THE TABLE

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

Parents are not outside observers in an IEP meeting. They are part of the team and should be included in decisions about their child's evaluation, services, supports, placement, progress, and safety.

A strong IEP should be clear and specific. Parents should understand what support is being provided, who is responsible, how often it will happen, where it will happen, and how progress or concerns will be communicated.

Because some children with disabilities rely on adults for communication, toileting, mobility, behavior support, transportation, or daily care, safety should also be part of the conversation. Parents can ask how their child will be supported, who will have access to them, what safeguards are in place, and how concerns will be documented.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS PARENTS CAN ASK

- “Can you explain that in plain language?”
- “Where is that written in the IEP?”
- “What data are we using to make this decision?”
- “Who is responsible for this support?”
- “How often will this happen?”
- “How will I know if it is working?”
- “What happens if the assigned staff member is absent?”
- “Does this need to be written into the IEP or safety plan?”



BEFORE THE MEETING

A little preparation can help parents walk into the meeting with more clarity and less pressure. Parents do not need to know every answer ahead of time, but they should understand what will be discussed and what information the school is using to make decisions.

Before the meeting, parents can ask the school to send evaluations, progress reports, proposed goals, behavior data, service logs, draft recommendations, or any documents the team plans to review.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS PARENTS CAN ASK

- “What is the purpose of this meeting?”
- “Who will be attending?”
- “What decisions are being made?”
- “What data or reports will we review?”
- “Can I receive the documents ahead of time?”
- “Can I bring someone with me?”
- “Will we discuss safety, communication, transportation, behavior support, personal care, or staffing needs?”

PARENT SCRIPT:

“Before the meeting, I would like to review any documents, reports, proposed goals, or recommendations the school team plans to discuss. I want to come prepared and participate meaningfully in decisions about my child’s support and safety.”



DURING THE MEETING

The goal of an IEP meeting is not just to get through the paperwork. It is to make sure the plan clearly reflects the child’s needs and gives the school team practical direction.

Parents can ask questions, slow the conversation down, and request clarification before agreeing to anything. If something is unclear, vague, or missing, parents can ask for it to be explained or written into the plan.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS PARENTS CAN ASK

“What strengths are you seeing in my child?”	Where is my child struggling most?”
“What support will be provided?”	Who is responsible for providing that support?”
“How often will services happen?”	“Where will services happen?”
“How will progress be measured?”	“How often will I receive updates?”
“What happens if my child is not making progress?”	“Are we looking beyond grades, including behavior, communication, anxiety, sensory needs, transitions, and independence?”

PARENT SCRIPT:

“I want to make sure this plan is clear and specific. Please help me understand what support will be provided, who is responsible, how often it will happen, and how we will know if my child is making progress.”



SAFETY & ACCESS

For children who need extra support, safety should be discussed clearly and calmly. Parents should understand who has access to their child, when one-on-one support may happen, and what safeguards are in place throughout the school day.

This includes classrooms, therapy rooms, bathrooms, hallways, buses, arrival, dismissal, lunch, recess, electives, and any pull-out services.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS PARENTS CAN ASK

“Who will work directly with my child each day?”	“Will my child ever be alone one-on-one with an adult?”
If so, when, where, and why?”	“What safeguards are in place during one-on-one support?”
“Who assists with toileting, hygiene, feeding, mobility, or personal care?”	“How are substitutes informed of my child’s needs?”
How are staff trained on boundaries, dignity, privacy, and appropriate support?”	How will I be notified of injuries, incidents, behavior changes, or concerns?

PARENT SCRIPT:

“I understand my child may need individual support. I would like to clearly understand who will be working with my child, when one-on-one support may happen, and what safeguards are in place to protect my child’s dignity and safety.”



WHAT SHOULD BE WRITTEN IN THE PLAN

Verbal reassurance can be helpful, but written plans create clarity and consistency. If a support, accommodation, communication process, or safety concern matters to the child’s well-being, parents can ask for it to be documented.

This may include service minutes, staff responsibilities, communication logs, behavior supports, transportation needs, personal care procedures, safety plans, and how parents will be notified of concerns.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS PARENTS CAN ASK

“Can we write that into the IEP?”	Where will that support be documented?”
Who is responsible for carrying this out?”	“How will staff know this is required?”
“How will substitutes be informed?”	“How will this be monitored?”
“How will progress be measured?”	“How often will I receive updates?”
“What happens if this support is missed?”	“How will I be notified if there is a problem?”

PARENT SCRIPT:

“I appreciate the conversation, but I would like this support clearly documented so there is consistency, accountability, and a shared understanding of what my child needs.”



AFTER THE MEETING

A meeting does not end the process. Parents should leave with a clear understanding of what was decided, what will be put into place, and how progress or concerns will be communicated.

Parents do not have to sign something they do not understand or have not had time to review. In some places, a signature may only show attendance. In others, it may show agreement or consent, so parents should always ask what their signature means before signing.

Under IDEA, schools must provide parents with prior written notice when the school proposes or refuses to change a child's identification, evaluation, educational placement, or provision of FAPE. That notice must explain what the school is proposing or refusing, why, and what records or evaluations were used to make that decision.

RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR

- “We do not usually put that in the IEP.”
- “That is just how we do things here.”
- “We do not have enough staff for that.”
- “That happens outside the IEP.”
- “You do not need to worry about that.”
- “Just sign this today.”

SIMPLE STEPS TO TAKE

- Ask what your signature means before signing
- Take the IEP home if you need time to review it
- Review the final IEP and any attached plans
- Keep copies of reports, emails, and meeting notes
- Follow up in writing if something is unclear
- Track whether services and supports begin as agreed
- Request another meeting if concerns come up

CLOSING ENCOURAGEMENT

Parents do not have to know every legal term to advocate well. They can be calm, prepared, and clear. They can ask direct questions, request documentation, and follow up when something does not feel right.

Their questions are not a problem.

Their child's needs are not an inconvenience.

Their voice belongs at the table.

HELPFUL PARENT RESOURCE:

Many special education advocates recommend Wrightslaw as a trusted resource for understanding IDEA, IEPs, parent rights, evaluations, services, and school accountability. Parents who want to go deeper can look for Wrightslaw: Special Education Law or Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy.

<https://www.wrightslaw.com/>

IEP MEETING CHECKLIST

QUESTIONS TO HELP PARENTS PREPARE, ADVOCATE, AND PROTECT THEIR CHILD

WHAT SHOULD BE WRITTEN INTO THE PLAN

- Ask whether important supports need to be written into the IEP.
- Ask where safety concerns will be documented.
- Ask whether your child needs a communication plan, behavior plan, transportation plan, or safety plan.
- Ask how staff will know what is required.
- Ask how substitutes or temporary staff will be informed.
- Ask what happens if a service or support is missed.
- Ask how missed services will be made up.
- Ask how concerns will be documented and communicated to you.

BEFORE YOU SIGN

- Before You Sign
- Ask what your signature means.
- Ask whether your signature shows attendance, agreement, consent, or receipt of documents.
- Do not sign anything you do not understand.
- Ask for time to review the final documents if needed.
- Request a copy of the final IEP and any attached plans.
- Write down anything you disagree with or want clarified.
- Follow up in writing after the meeting if needed..

AFTER THE MEETING

- Review the final IEP carefully.
- Keep copies of reports, emails, meeting notes, and incident reports.
- Track whether services begin as written.
- Watch for changes in your child's behavior, mood, communication, or willingness to go to school.
- Follow up in writing if something is unclear or not being followed.
- Request another meeting if concerns come up.
- Keep your own notes on what is working and what is not.

PARENT REMINDER

- You do not have to know every legal term to advocate well.
- You can ask questions.
- You can slow the meeting down.
- You can request documentation.
- You can take time before signing.
- You can follow up when something does not feel right.

Your voice belongs at the table

IEP MEETING CHECKLIST

QUESTIONS TO HELP PARENTS PREPARE, ADVOCATE, AND PROTECT THEIR CHILD

BEFORE THE MEETING

- Ask what the purpose of the meeting is.
- Ask who will be attending.
- Request copies of evaluations, progress reports, proposed goals, behavior data, service logs, and any documents the team plans to review.
- Review your child's current IEP, accommodations, services, and goals.
- Write down your top concerns before the meeting.
- Note any changes you have seen at home, including behavior, anxiety, regression, fear, sleep changes, communication changes, or emotional distress.
- Ask if safety, communication, transportation, personal care, behavior support, staffing, or one-on-one support will be discussed.
- Decide whether you want to bring someone with you, such as an advocate, therapist, family member, or trusted support person.

DURING THE MEETING

- Ask the team to explain anything you do not understand in plain language.
- Ask what data is being used to make decisions.
- Ask what support will be provided.
- Ask who is responsible for each service or support.
- Ask how often services will happen.
- Ask where services will happen.
- Ask how progress will be measured.
- Ask how often you will receive updates.
- Ask what happens if your child is not making progress.
- Ask whether the plan addresses academics, communication, behavior, sensory needs, anxiety, transitions, independence, and safety.

SAFETY & ACCESS QUESTIONS

- Ask who will work directly with your child each day.
- Ask whether your child will ever be alone one-on-one with an adult.
- Ask when, where, and why one-on-one support may happen.
- Ask what safeguards are in place during one-on-one support.
- Ask who assists with toileting, hygiene, feeding, mobility, or personal care.
- Ask how personal care is documented.
- Ask how substitutes are informed of your child's needs.
- Ask how staff are trained on boundaries, dignity, privacy, and appropriate support.
- Ask how you will be notified of injuries, incidents, behavior changes, missed services, or concerns.
- Ask how transportation, arrival, dismissal, hallway transitions, lunch, recess, and specials are supervised.

SECTION 3

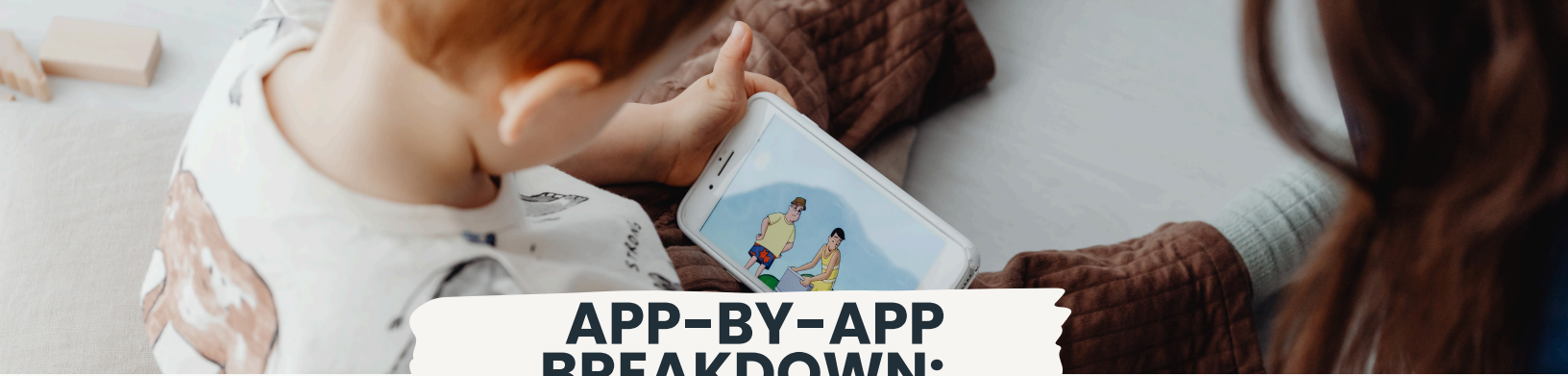
NAVIGATING ONLINE GROOMING & SEXTORTION



Grooming and sextortion often begin in places parents do not expect—not on explicit websites, but inside everyday apps children already use for gaming, social connection, school, and entertainment.

For many families, technology plays a larger role in daily life, communication, or routine. Predators are aware of this and take advantage of platform features that allow private contact, repeated interaction, and limited adult visibility.

This section focuses on where risk appears and how it escalates, helping parents understand the spaces, patterns, and warning signs that deserve closer attention.



APP-BY-APP BREAKDOWN:

WHERE GROOMING & SEXTORTION MOST OFTEN BEGIN

This page highlights common platforms and features that can create opportunities for private contact, manipulation, or escalation. Not every app is dangerous, but certain functions deserve close attention.

GAMING PLATFORMS:

- ROBLOX,
- MINECRAFT
- FORTNITE
- XBOX
- PLAYSTATION CHAT

Why risk shows up here:

- Voice chat feels casual and unmonitored.
- Older players may mix easily with younger users.
- Private servers and party chats reduce visibility.
- Gifts, help, or in-game rewards can build quick trust.

Common entry point:

“Let me help you level up” → private chat → ongoing conversation.

Parent focus:

Voice chat settings, friend requests, private servers, gaming only in shared spaces.

SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGING:

- INSTAGRAM
- SNAPCHAT
- TIKTOK
- FACEBOOK MESSENGER

Why risk shows up here:

- Direct messages bypass public oversight.
- Disappearing messages remove evidence.
- Compliments and attention feel personal.
- Secondary or “backup” accounts are common.

Common entry point:

Comment or reaction → DM → move to disappearing messages.

Parent focus:

Direct message controls, follower approvals, message review routines.

DISCORD & GROUP CHAT PLATFORMS:

- DISCORD SERVERS
- PRIVATE GROUP CHATS

Public interaction
Private messaging
Disappearing content
Increased pressure or secrecy

Understanding this movement helps parents interrupt it early.

Why This Matters

You do not need to monitor everything.

You do need to understand where private communication exists and where visibility drops.

When parents focus on features—not just apps—attention is better placed and protection is more effective.

...CONTINUED



SCHOOL-ISSUED DEVICES & LEARNING TOOLS:

- GOOGLE CLASSROOM,
- GOOGLE DOCS
- COMMENTS,
- SCHOOL EMAIL

Why risk shows up here:

- Parents often assume these spaces are fully monitored.
- Messaging features may be enabled.
- Devices travel between school and home.

Common entry point:

Document comments or messages → private communication.

Parent focus:

Messaging permissions, email access, school monitoring policies.

VIDEO & STREAMING PLATFORMS:

- YOUTUBE
- TWITCH
- LIVE STREAMS

Why risk shows up here:

- Comments create connection.
- Live chats feel interactive.
- Viewers may reach out privately later.

Common entry point:

Comment interaction → follow → private message.

Parent focus:

Comment controls, live interaction settings, viewing history review.

A PATTERN TO WATCH FOR

Risk rarely stays in one place. It often moves between apps:

- Public interaction
- Private messaging
- Disappearing content
- Increased pressure or secrecy

Understanding this movement helps parents interrupt it early.

WHY THIS MATTERS:

You do not need to monitor everything. You do need to understand where private communication exists and where visibility drops.

When parents focus on features—not just apps—attention is better placed and protection is more effective.



HOW GROOMING & SEXTORTION ESCALATE

Most exploitation does not begin with an obvious threat. It often starts with casual contact, moves into private communication, and grows through secrecy, emotional pressure, and manipulation.

PRIVATE MESSAGING

Visibility drops

- Direct messages.
- Party chats.
- Private servers.

Disappearing messages move conversations out of view.

PRESSURE OR THREATS

Crisis point:

- Demands
- Manipulation
- Fear of exposure
- Sextortion

Panic replaces clarity when secrecy has already been established.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD WATCH FOR

- Sudden privacy around devices
- New apps or accounts
- Emotional reactions tied to online activity
- Pressure to respond immediately
- Reluctance to talk about online interactions

Changes matter more than content.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Where it starts:

- Game chat.
- Comment section.
- Group message.

Shared interests make contact feel harmless and familiar.

SECRECY

Control begins

- “Don’t tell your parents.”
- “They wouldn’t understand.”
- “This is just between us.”

Pressure to keep conversations hidden becomes the goal.

REMINDER

- Early awareness interrupts escalation.
- Visibility reduces pressure.
- Connection breaks secrecy.



WHAT TO DO RIGHT AWAY

A CALM RESPONSE WHEN A CHILD OR TEEN TELLS YOU

If your child tells you something happened—or you discover something concerning online or offline—your first response matters.

STAY CALM

Your child needs safety, not panic.

REASSURE YOUR CHILD

Say:

- “I’m glad you told me.”
- “You are not in trouble.”
- “We will handle this together.”

SAVE EVIDENCE

Take screenshots, save messages, usernames, links, or anything relevant. Do not delete anything yet.

DO NOT ENGAGE

Do not reply to the person, argue, threaten, or try to handle it alone.

REPORT AND GET HELP

Follow reporting steps for the platform, school, church, program, or local authorities as needed.

STAY CLOSE

Watch for changes in mood, sleep, behavior, or routine. Keep checking in.

BOTTOM LINE:

Calm, clear action helps protect your child and preserve trust.

SECTION 4

SAFE ADULTS, SAFE SPACES, AND EXIT PLANS



Protective conversations do not need to be heavy or overwhelming to be effective. This section gives parents practical ways to talk about safety in simple, age-appropriate language that helps children build trust, recognize discomfort, and know how to get help.

The goal is not fear. The goal is preparation, clarity, and confidence.



SAFE ADULTS & EXIT PLANS

Children are safer when they know exactly who they can go to and how to leave a situation that feels wrong.

IDENTIFY A SAFE ADULT TEAM

Every child should be able to name 3–5 safe adults.

Safe adults:

- Listen calmly
- Do not ask for secrets
- Respect boundaries
- Help the child get support

Practice saying:

- “I need help.”
- “I don’t feel safe.”
- “Can you help me call my parent?”

Practice Ahead of Time:

- Role-play asking for help
 - Practice exit phrases
 - Repeat often
-

Create a Clear Exit Plan

Children should know they can leave any situation that feels uncomfortable.

For sleepovers or activities:

- Agree on a word or phrase
- Remind your child they can call or text anytime
- Normalize leaving early if needed

For school, camps, or programs:

- Identify a specific adult to go to
- Practice asking for help
- Reinforce that safety matters more than staying quiet

Key message:

Leaving is not rude. Asking for help is not wrong.



BODY SAFETY LANGUAGE FOR DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION NEEDS

Every child deserves clear, simple language for body safety. The goal is not perfect words—the goal is helping your child communicate discomfort, confusion, or danger in a way that works for them.

FOR VERBAL CHILDREN

- Practice phrases such as:
- “I don’t like that.”
- “Stop.”
- “I need help.”
- “That makes me uncomfortable.”
- “I want my parent.”

FOR LIMITED VERBAL CHILDREN

- Use short, repeatable words and phrases paired with calm practice:
- “No.”
- “Stop.”
- “Help.”
- “All done.”
- “Safe person.”

FOR AAC USERS

- Make sure safety words and body-related language are easy to access on the device.
- Practice using them regularly, not only during stressful moments.

FOR VISUAL LEARNERS

- Use visual supports for:
- private body parts
- safe adults
- asking for help
- leaving a situation
- what to do when something feels wrong

FOR ALL CHILDREN

- Repeat often. Practice calmly. Reinforce that telling is always okay.

BOTTOM LINE:

- Simple, practiced language gives children more ways to stay safe.



BEHAVIOR CHANGES TO WATCH FOR

Children do not always have the words to explain when something feels wrong. Discomfort often shows up first through changes in behavior, mood, or routine.

This page is not meant to create alarm. It is meant to help parents notice patterns early and respond with calm curiosity.

EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

- Increased anxiety or fear
- Sudden mood swings or irritability
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Regression in skills or independence
- Increased people-pleasing

DEVICE & ONLINE CHANGES

- More secrecy around devices
- Strong reactions to messages or notifications
- Pressure to stay online or respond quickly
- New apps, accounts, or contacts
- Reluctance to discuss online interactions

PHYSICAL & ROUTINE CHANGES

- Sleep disruption or nightmares
- Appetite changes
- Avoidance of certain people, places, or activities
- New fears around school, therapy, or routines

WHAT THESE CHANGES MAY MEAN

- One change alone does not always signal a problem
- Patterns, clusters, or sudden shifts deserve attention
- Respond with curiosity, not accusation

HELPFUL QUESTIONS

- “You seem different lately—how are you feeling?”
- “Is anything making you uncomfortable?”
- “Do you want help with something?”

Early noticing helps parents respond with wisdom instead of panic.



SHARED SPACES & SITUATIONAL SAFETY

Shared spaces can feel confusing when expectations and boundaries are unclear. Clear preparation helps children move through these situations with more confidence and safety.

SLEEPOVERS & OVERNIGHT STAYS

Before saying yes, ask:

- Who will be in the home overnight
- Where children will sleep
- Whether adults will be available if help is needed
- How your child can reach you at any time

LOCKER ROOMS, BATHROOMS & CHANGING AREAS

Shared changing spaces can feel confusing, especially when routines shift.

Prepare your child by:

- Explaining what to expect ahead of time
- Asking how supervision is handled
- Clarifying where adults are positioned
- Teaching phrases such as:
 - “I want privacy.”
 - “I’m uncomfortable.”
 - “I need help.”

SPORTS, CAMPS & GROUP ACTIVITIES

- Activities involving uniforms, changing, or close proximity need extra clarity.
- Ask:
 - Where and how changing takes place
 - What supervision is in place
 - Who the designated safe adult is

Clear expectations and simple plans help children know what to do in shared spaces. Boundaries are not about limiting experiences—they are about creating safety and confidence.



CAMP SAFETY TIPS FOR PARENTS

Ask the right questions, spot red flags, and prepare your child before they leave.

BEFORE YOU REGISTER

ASK:

- Is the camp licensed, if required?
- Are background checks required for all staff and volunteers?
- Are staff trained in abuse prevention, reporting, and support for children with additional needs?
- Are CPR and first-aid certified staff present at all times?

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Is my child ever alone with an adult or older child?
- How are bathroom, changing, and transition times supervised?
- How does staff support children who struggle to communicate discomfort or distress?
- Are phones, tablets, or other devices allowed, and how are they monitored?
- What is the exact process if a child feels unsafe or discloses abuse?

CHECK THE CAMP'S POLICIES

- One-on-one interactions
- Overnight sleeping arrangements
- Bathroom and shower supervision
- Reporting procedures for abuse or boundary violations

RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR

- Vague answers about supervision or safety
- No clear child-protection policy
- Mixed-age interaction without clear boundaries
- Staff who discourage parent questions
- Adults showing unusual interest in your child's needs, routines, or isolation

DID YOU KNOW?

- Many states do not require licensing for day camps
- Some states do not require background checks for overnight camp staff
- Some camps do not use FBI-level background checks

CAMP SAFETY TIPS CONTINUED...



Ask the right questions, spot red flags, and prepare your child before they leave.

TEACH THESE BASICS BEFORE THEY LEAVE:

- Use the correct names for private body parts, with visuals or AAC if needed.
- No one may touch private areas except a medical provider with a parent present.
- Secrets about bodies or behavior are never okay.
- They can say “no,” “stop,” or “I need help” at any time.
- If something happens, they should keep telling until an adult listens and acts.

HELPFUL PHRASES TO PRACTICE:

“I don’t like that.”

“I need help.”

“I want my parent.”

“That makes me uncomfortable.”

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE

Your child needs safety, not panic.

- Say: “I believe you. You did the right thing by telling me.”
- Do not interrogate. Listen and write down exactly what they say.
- Contact trained professionals or local authorities.
- Call the Childhelp National Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453 for guidance.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

Children with special needs may:

- Trust familiar adults deeply
- Struggle to explain discomfort clearly
- Comply with authority even when uncomfortable

Clear boundaries and supervision protect—they do not restrict.



PROTECTING YOUR KIDS IN YOUTH MINISTRY

Yes, even at church.

Youth groups can be powerful places for growth, connection, and truth—but they can also be vulnerable spaces if there is no accountability. Predators often target trusted communities because trust lowers suspicion.

WHY PARENTS CANNOT ASSUME SAFETY

- Youth pastors and volunteers may not be trained in grooming prevention
- Spiritual language or authority can be used to isolate or manipulate
- Teens may feel guilt or fear when speaking up about inappropriate behavior
- One-on-one prayer, private messages, and late-night conversations can cross boundaries

Vigilance is not judgment—it is protection.

ASK THE HARD QUESTIONS

- Ask the Hard Questions
- What is the church's child protection policy?
- Are youth leaders background-checked and trained to spot grooming?
- Are there clear reporting processes if something feels off?

KNOW THE RED FLAGS

- Secretive messages from leaders
- Excessive time or favoritism toward one teen
- Private meetings, car rides, or DMs outside of church

STAY INVOLVED

- Volunteer when you can
- Keep open communication with your child about everything they hear or experience
- Normalize talking about digital safety, emotional manipulation, and sexual boundaries

EQUIP YOUR TEEN

- Secretive messages from leaders are not normal
- Excessive time or favoritism deserves attention
- Private meetings, rides, or DMs should be questioned

CHURCH SHOULD BE A PLACE OF SAFETY, NOT BLIND TRUST.

SECTION 5

TEENS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:

**Independence, Safety, and
Digital Discernment
(Ages 13–18)**



The teen years bring new freedoms, stronger emotions, and increased digital access. Teens with additional needs want independence and connection just like their peers, but may experience challenges recognizing manipulation, pressure, sarcasm, or unsafe social dynamics.

This section helps parents move from close supervision to intentional coaching while keeping safety clear, consistent, and non-negotiable.



TEENS: SAFETY, BOUNDARIES, & TRUST

HOW RISK LOOKS DIFFERENT FOR TEENS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Teens with special needs are not more vulnerable because of who they are. Risk increases when others exploit:

- A desire to belong or please
- Trust in authority figures or older peers
- Literal interpretation of language or jokes
- Difficulty identifying hidden intent or manipulation
- Challenges explaining discomfort clearly or quickly

Understanding these patterns helps parents respond with clarity instead of fear.

DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT REQUIRE EXTRA STRUCTURE

Certain spaces can increase risk during the teen years:

- Gaming platforms with voice or private chat
- Group texts and disappearing messages
- Social media direct messages and comment threads
- AI chatbots or “companions” that simulate friendship or romance
- School-issued devices used outside school hours
- Apps with limited structure or adult visibility

SIGNS PARENTS MIGHT OVERLOOK

These are signals, not proof, that a teen may need support:

- Emotional attachment to online friends, influencers, or AI tools
- Increased secrecy around devices paired with confusion or anxiety
- Repeated sexualized language without understanding its meaning
- Sleep disruption tied to late-night messaging or gaming
- Difficulty explaining online interactions

WHAT TEENS NEED MOST

- Clear rules stated in concrete language
- Repetition without frustration
- Visual reminders or written expectations
- Practiced scripts for uncomfortable situations
- Assurance that safety matters more than punishment

TEENS: SAFETY, BOUNDARIES, AND TRUST — CONTINUED



NON-NEGOTIABLE SAFETY BOUNDARIES FOR TEENS

- No private chats with adults or unknown users
- No sharing photos, videos, or personal information
- No secrets about online interactions
- Devices remain accessible to parents or caregivers
- Any uncomfortable interaction is reported immediately

Boundaries create safety—and safety supports independence.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SAFETY (WHAT WORKS BEST)

- Use direct, literal language
- Avoid metaphors or assumptions
- Ask specific questions instead of general ones
- Practice scenarios together regularly
- Have teens repeat rules back in their own words

A MESSAGE TEENS NEED TO HEAR OFTEN

“You will never get in trouble for telling the truth. If something feels confusing, uncomfortable, or wrong—even if you do not have the words—I am here to help keep you safe.”

God created your teen with dignity, purpose, and worth. Protection is not about fear or control—it is about creating safe spaces where trust, wisdom, and confidence can grow.



DIGITAL SAFETY FOR TEENS

Teens deserve independence, connection, and dignity. They also need clear boundaries and ongoing guidance to navigate digital spaces safely.

CORE DIGITAL RULES

Use simple, repeatable rules:

- “No private chats.”
- “No photos or videos shared.”
- “No secrets from parents.”
- “If something feels weird, pause and tell me.”

SOCIAL MEDIA & MESSAGING

Parents can support safety by:

- Approving all friends or followers
- Keeping accounts private
- Reviewing message routines together
- Disabling secret or secondary accounts

GAMING SAFETY

Gaming is a common entry point for grooming. Consider:

- Turning off voice chat unless supervised
- Approving all servers or invites
- Disabling gifting features
- Requiring gaming in shared spaces

TEACH PHRASES TEENS CAN USE

- “I need to ask my parents first.”
- “I don’t talk privately online.”
- “I’m not comfortable with that.”

FAITH-BASED REASSURANCE FOR TEENS

Repeat often:

- “You are deeply valued.”
- “Nothing you say will get you in trouble.”
- “God is with you—and so are we.”
- “Your safety matters more than embarrassment.”

Clear, consistent rules remove confusion and help teens understand that safety does not change based on age, relationship, or familiarity.



CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR TEENS

You do not need perfect words. You need calm, simple, repeatable conversations.

EVERYDAY CHECK-INS

- “What apps or games are you using the most right now?”
- “Has anyone messaged you today?”
- “Did anything online feel weird, confusing, or uncomfortable?”
- “Did anyone ask you to keep a secret online?”
- “Did anyone ask for a picture, video, or private chat?”

ABOUT ONLINE FRIENDS

- “Do you know this person in real life?”
- “How did you meet them?”
- “What do you talk about?”
- “Have they ever asked you to move to another app or chat?”
- “Have they ever said, ‘Don’t tell your parents’?”

ABOUT PRESSURE OR DISCOMFORT

- “Has anyone online made you feel nervous or confused?”
- “Has anyone asked you for something you did not want to send?”
- “Has anyone kept messaging you when you wanted them to stop?”
- “Has anyone made you feel bad for not answering?”
- “Has anyone said something that felt too personal or too sexual?”

ABOUT SAFETY

- “What can you do if someone makes you uncomfortable online?”
- “Who can you tell if something feels wrong?”
- “What would you say if someone asked for a photo?”
- “What would you do if someone told you to keep a secret from me?”
- “Do you remember our rule about private chats?”

FAITH-BASED REASSURANCE

- “You can always tell me the truth.”
- “You will not be in trouble for asking for help.”
- “Your safety matters more than being polite.”
- “God cares about your safety, and so do I.”
- “If something feels wrong, you can come to me right away.”

Keep conversations simple, direct, and repeatable. Safety grows through calm, ongoing practice.

FAMILY

Safety Plan



Use this page to make your family's safety expectations clear, simple, and repeatable.

1. Safe Adults My Child Can Go To:

2. Our Family Code Word:

3. If Something Feels Wrong, My Child Can Say:

4. Our Device Rules:

5. Apps or Platforms That Need Approval:

OUR FAMILY REMINDER:

Telling the truth is always safe. Asking for help is always allowed.

BOTTOM LINE

Clear plans help children know what to do before a problem happens.



WITH YOU

A FINAL WORD FOR PARENTS

Grounded in faith. Guided by love.

Protecting children is not about controlling every situation or predicting every risk. It is about creating a home where truth is welcomed, help is normal, and trust stays strong. You do not have to do this perfectly. You are called to do it faithfully—with clarity, consistency, and love. Small conversations, clear plans, and steady presence matter more than having all the answers.

When children know they can speak freely, ask for help, and trust the adults around them, fear loses its grip. Safety grows through preparation, connection, and love.



Explore More Resources

Discover more resources created to help families navigate today's challenges with wisdom and confidence.



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Know a parent, grandparent, caregiver, or school leader who needs this? Send it to them.



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