IF YOU SEE SOMETHING ONLINE, SAY SOMETHING

By Natalie Campbell, Director of Community Building and Advocacy, Internet Society

According to UNICEF, more than 1.5 billion children worldwide were affected by school closures. For those with access, the internet has been an incredible resource in continuing their education and ability to socialize. But with more unstructured time online, kids can be prone to taking more significant risks, like sending sexualized images or being exposed to potentially harmful content.

As parents, caregivers and educators, we have an essential responsibility to empower our children to be safe and secure in a world where the line between digital and real-life is virtually non-existent. We must all be vigilant to help kids mitigate the evolving risks of harm like sexual exploitation, harassment, online bullying and exposure to harmful content.

+ Set some boundaries: Establish ground rules about how, when, and where children can use the internet. The more you know about their activities online, the more you can stay on top of the potential threats they may encounter – and teach them how to avoid them.

+ Take a collaborative approach to online safety: Find out how your child is using the internet and walk them through how to put the security measures in place. The Internet Society has a great guide on **how to keep children safe while learning online**, with practical tips like keeping software updated and using services with strong encryption to keep your family communications private.

+ Teach them how to spot red flags: Good digital safety practices are a necessary form of PPE in keeping kids safe online, but it's only part of the solution. According to the FBI, more than 50% of online sexual exploitation victims are 12 to 15 years old. An important way to mitigate threats like these is to teach kids what are safe and healthy interactions online and always tell a trusted adult when they see something suspicious.

Some red flags are easy to spot, like any situation or communication that is hurtful or scary. But often, the risks are not as obvious, as predators can use fake identities to groom children online. Children should know never to share private photos or personal information that reveals their address, phone number, school name or location with anyone online – and to tell a trusted adult if someone asks. Likewise, they should never agree to meet someone they met online without a parent or guardian's approval and supervision.

+ If you see something, say something: Just as you would encourage children to seek help in real life, teach your children to tell a parent or another trusted adult about any hurtful, scary or offensive interactions they have online. Likewise, if they see any signs of danger – like a friend expressing suicidal ideation, even just casually – they should immediately flag this to a trusted adult.

+ Keep the line of communication open and free of judgment: There are many parental protections you can set up in browsers and devices to help children avoid harmful content online, but they aren't a catch-all. Let your child know that if they ever come across anything strange, scary, or offensive they can come to you as a source of help without fear of repercussion. **M**

educate ✚ School Safety