



Infantia



PARENTING IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL

A Handbook for Parents on
Children's Rights, Safety, and Responsible Internet Use.





**"Your child's online safety
starts with you"**



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ON THE INTERNET

Today, the internet isn't just a tool—it's an essential environment where children learn, socialize, express themselves, and build their identities. Yet, alongside immense benefits, the digital world presents unique challenges. Children frequently encounter Problematic Internet Use (PIU), where excessive online engagement negatively impacts their mental health and social development. They may also be exposed to toxic internet subcultures, such as communities promoting eating disorders, misogyny, self-harm, radicalization, or cyberbullying. Moreover, parents themselves may unintentionally compromise children's rights and privacy through sharenting, the habitual sharing of sensitive details and images online, potentially leading to digital kidnapping, cyberbullying, or identity theft.

These issues directly threaten children's fundamental rights: the right to protection, privacy, safe access to information, freedom of expression, and meaningful online participation. As parents, educators, and civil society, it's our shared responsibility to safeguard these rights proactively and compassionately, ensuring every child's digital journey is safe, respectful, and empowering.

*"Every child deserves respect, protection, and dignity online—
just as they do offline."*



UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ONLINE

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), every child has the following rights online:

- **Protection from Harm:** The right to be safe from cyberbullying, exploitation, abuse, harassment, and harmful content.
- **Privacy and Autonomy:** The right to control their personal information, maintaining privacy from unnecessary or harmful sharing (including sharenting).
- **Access to Safe Information:** The right to safe, age-appropriate, and reliable content online that encourages learning and positive development.
- **Freedom of Expression and Participation:** The right to safely express opinions and participate actively in digital communities without fear of intimidation or harm.

Recognizing and respecting these rights is the cornerstone of responsible digital parenting. This handbook equips you with essential tools, knowledge, and strategies to protect your child's digital rights effectively.



WHAT IS PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE?

When Online Life Takes Over Real Life, it's a Problem.

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) occurs when your child's online activities negatively affect their emotions, relationships, health, or daily life. This includes radicalization through toxic sub cultures on the Internet through Instagram, Gaming Apps and other online communities. It's more than spending extra time online; it's when scrolling, chatting, or gaming becomes compulsive and harmful. Signs of PIU include:

- **Compulsive Device Checking:** Checking social media repeatedly, even late at night.
- **Emotional Dependence:** Anxiety or irritability when away from their phone or tablet.
- **Isolation:** Preferring online interactions over real-world friendships and activities.
- **Academic Struggles:** Falling grades, lack of focus, or missed homework due to excessive online use.

"What starts as fun can quickly turn into a silent addiction."





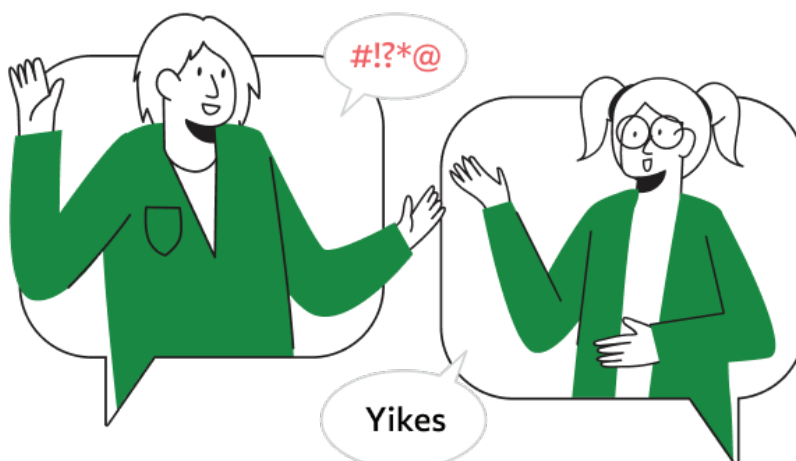
TOXIC ONLINE BEHAVIORS

Online Bullying Isn't Obvious—It's Quiet and Cruel.

Your child might never admit it, but subtle bullying tactics happen daily. Teenagers engage in covert bullying through secret behavioral codes on platforms like Instagram. These codes often manifest as part of online subcultures that are difficult for adults—especially parents and teachers—to detect, but carry serious psychological consequences for kids.

Behavior	Real-Life Example
Close Friends Exclusion	A child discovers their best friends had a party through a "Close Friends" Instagram story. They weren't included, causing deep hurt and confusion.
Soft Blocking	A teen notices their friend's Instagram stories disappearing, realizing quietly they've been "soft blocked," feeling rejected and worthless.
Spam Commenting	A child posts a selfie, only to receive multiple sarcastic "fire" emojis from peers, instantly feeling mocked and humiliated.
Group Chat Kick-Outs	A student is abruptly removed from the class group chat, leading to embarrassment, loneliness, and social isolation.
Anonymous Hate Messages	Receiving messages like, "Nobody likes you," anonymously via Q&A apps, causing anxiety and self-doubt.
Ghosting & Dry Texting	A child reaches out to friends for homework help, gets "seen," but no replies—leading to anxiety and self-blame.
Tagging Mockery Memes	A child sees they're tagged in a meme about "being annoying," masked as a joke but leaving deep emotional scars.

"The emotional wounds of silent bullying run deeper than physical ones."





HARMFUL INTERNET SLANG (Decoded)

Hurtful Words Hidden Behind Popular Slang. Children use trendy terms that can mask cruelty:






Slang Term	Example & Impact
NPC	A student overhears peers calling them an "NPC," making them feel invisible and worthless.
Pick Me Girl	A friendly girl is labeled a "Pick Me," becoming withdrawn due to embarrassment and bullying.
Simp	A boy is mocked as a "simp" for being respectful to girls, pushing him toward toxic behavior.
L + Ratio	A teen posts their artwork and sees comments like "L + Ratio," feeling publicly humiliated and discouraged.
Dry Texter	A child who is shy gets labeled a "dry texter," making social interaction more intimidating.

"Words aren't harmless—they can break spirits silently."



SECRET EMOJI CODES

Emojis Are Cute—Until They're Used to Hurt. Kids often use emojis to secretly bully peers.

Emoji	Example & Hidden Message
 Skull	Someone makes a small mistake in class, peers spam emojis, mocking them into silence.
 Clown	A teen posts a TikTok dance video and receives clown emojis, making them feel ashamed and discouraged from expressing themselves again.
 Pig	A child is teased with pig emojis on a selfie, sparking severe body-image issues and low self-esteem.
 Snake	A child tries to resolve a conflict privately but sees snake emojis posted publicly, feeling betrayed and excluded.
 Hourglass	A girl finds her photos filled with hourglass emojis, objectifying her body, causing discomfort and embarrassment.

"Emojis that once seemed innocent can carry hidden cruelty."



DANGEROUS ONLINE SUBCULTURES

Dark Internet Subcultures Kids May Get Drawn Into

1. The Blue Whale Challenge (Global, Including India)

The "Blue Whale Challenge" was an online phenomenon where participants were given 50 escalating tasks, each promoting self-harm. The final task often led to suicide.

Real-life Example:

In 2017, a 14-year-old boy from Mumbai, India, tragically jumped from a terrace after following instructions from the Blue Whale game. Police investigation revealed his extensive involvement in this dangerous online subculture.

More than 130 suicides worldwide were reportedly linked to this game, highlighting severe psychological manipulation and tragic outcomes.

2. Incel Subculture (Involuntary Celibates)

While traditionally seen in older male groups, incel ideology is trickling into younger male communities via platforms like Reddit, Discord, YouTube, and Instagram.

It often includes:

- Misogyny disguised as "male self-improvement"
- Belief in the "Chad vs. Beta" hierarchy
- Use of slangs like:
 - Chad = alpha male
 - Stacy = attractive but shallow girl
 - Femcel = female incel (less common, often parodied)
 - Blackpill = belief that one's social/romantic status is biologically fixed and hopeless

These ideologies are dangerous because they mix despair, toxic masculinity, and conspiracy thinking in a way that's attractive to lonely or bullied boys.

3. "Sigma Male" Grindset Culture

A more "acceptable" evolution of incel culture, but still rooted in toxic ideals of emotional detachment and dominance.

- Influencers post content promoting ignoring emotions, dominating women, making money above all.
- Often overlaps with crypto, gym bro, and hustle culture.

Slang: "Stay alpha, king. Don't simp."

4. Alt TikTok Or Instagram / Dark Tok

Alt TikTok is the alternative culture side of TikTok/Instagram, filled with niche memes, horror-core aesthetics, dark humor, and sometimes borderline or overtly triggering content (eating disorders, self-harm aesthetics, etc.).

5. Anorexia Subculture (“Pro-Ana” or “Thinspo”)

This includes sharing weight-loss tips disguised as “inspiration,” often through visual cues like extremely thin figures, calorie-counting rituals, and coded hashtags like #ana, #thinspo, #bonespo, #edrecovery (ironically used by toxic communities sometimes). These subcultures influence kids to commit self harm through eating disorders.

6. Zoomer Nihilism / Meme Depression Culture

Memes that treat depression, anxiety, or suicidal ideation as jokes or content fodder. It desensitizes kids to mental health issues and often leads them to normalize serious concerns.

Slang: “Just gonna disassociate for 3 hours, lol.”

Or memes like: “me: has mental breakdown // also me: makes it an aesthetic”

7. Doxing & Cancel Micro-Cultures

Children replicate cancel culture at their level by:

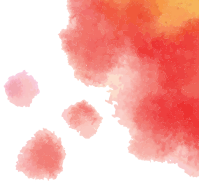
- Exposing peers' private info
- Posting screenshots of DMs
- Creating “tea pages” or “drama accounts” on Insta/Snap to gossip, cancel, or harass.

8. Aesthetic Subcultures with Hidden Hierarchies

Subcultures like:

- Clean Girl aesthetic
- Baddie Culture
- E-Girls / Soft Girls / VSCO Girls, though seemingly harmless, they often promote narrow beauty standards, consumerism, and peer pressure to conform to looks, filters, and trends.





Subculture	Real-Life Scenario
Pro-Ana / Thinspo	A teen finds a weight-loss community that glorifies starvation, quickly developing an eating disorder due to peer pressure and unrealistic standards.
Incel Culture	A boy begins spending time on Reddit threads blaming women for loneliness, gradually developing anger, misogyny, and isolation.
Sigma Male/Grindset	A teen follows "sigma male" influencers, starts rejecting emotional connections and compassion, becoming detached and aggressive.
Alt/Sad Aesthetic	A young girl engages deeply with sad-themed TikTok/Reel content, normalizing depression and self-harm, which leads her to unhealthy coping mechanisms.
Cancel Pages	A student finds their personal life shared widely on a "burn" account, causing humiliation, anxiety, and even skipping school.

"Online worlds shape real-life attitudes. Choose wisely."



WHAT PARENTS SEE VS. REALITY

Your Child's Online Persona May Hide a Painful Reality.

What You See	Hidden Reality
Smiling photos and videos	Secret accounts revealing emotional struggles or bullying experiences.
Quiet child "studying online"	In reality, they may be caught up in toxic forums promoting toxic ideas or self harm.
Frequent screen time, "just gaming"	Deepening online addiction could be a sign of online grooming, affecting friendships, studies, and mental health.

"Appearances deceive—look deeper, ask gently."





SIGNS YOUR CHILD IS STRUGGLING ONLINE

Your child might be silently screaming. Know how to listen.

Your child won't always speak up when they're hurting. Online bullying, harassment, or toxic exposure often remains hidden beneath silence. Be vigilant—recognize subtle but critical warning signs:

1. Sudden Changes in Mood or Personality

- **Heightened irritability or anxiety:** They seem on edge, nervous, or agitated, especially after spending time online.
- **Withdrawal from usual activities:** Losing interest in hobbies, sports, or activities they previously enjoyed.
- **Emotional outbursts or unexplained crying:** Emotional breakdowns after phone use can signal cyberbullying or toxic interactions.

2. Isolation and Withdrawal

- **Avoiding social gatherings or family interactions:** Suddenly wanting to be alone more often, retreating to their room frequently.
- **Cutting off real-world friendships:** Preferring online interactions exclusively or withdrawing entirely from social life.

3. Changes in Digital Behavior

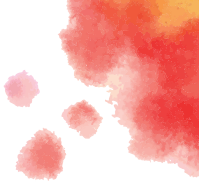
- **Obsessive phone-checking:** Constant anxiety about checking notifications may indicate pressure, harassment, or fear of exclusion.
- **Secretive or defensive about device use:** Quickly closing apps, hiding screens, or becoming hostile when questioned.

4. Physical and Mental Health Symptoms

- **Changes in sleeping or eating patterns:** Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, oversleeping, or loss of appetite linked to stress or anxiety.
- **Physical symptoms of anxiety:** Stomach aches, headaches, panic attacks without clear medical causes.

5. Academic and Behavioral Decline

- **Sudden drop in academic performance:** Declining grades or lack of concentration could indicate distress from online issues.



- **Acting out or disciplinary issues at school:** Anger, frustration, or pain manifesting through misbehavior or rebellion.

Trust your gut—if something feels off, it probably is.

Example: A child who loved sports suddenly refuses to attend practice, isolating in their room. They struggle academically and become emotionally withdrawn, revealing later that anonymous online bullying severely affected their mental health.



ACTION PLAN FOR DIGITAL PARENTING

Awareness is step one. Action is essential.

Being a digital parent isn't just about restrictions; it's about guidance, empathy, and meaningful presence. Follow this structured action plan to create a safe, supportive digital environment for your child:

1. Foster Open Communication

- **Normalize talking about online experiences:** Ask open-ended questions regularly: "What made you laugh online today?" or "Anything upsetting happen lately?"
- **Be non-judgmental and approachable:** If your child fears punishment or judgment, they'll hide rather than confide. Respond calmly and supportively, even to difficult conversations.

2. Educate Yourself Continuously

- **Stay informed:** Regularly learn about new social platforms, trends, slang, and emerging risks.
- **Attend workshops and webinars:** Be proactive in understanding evolving digital behaviors through expert-led sessions or community workshops.

3. Set Healthy Digital Boundaries

- **Device-free zones and times:** Establish daily routines like no phones during family meals, bedtime, or homework time.
- **Agree on clear rules together:** Collaborate with your child on digital agreements. They'll respect guidelines more if involved in the decision-making process.



4. Engage Proactively in Their Digital Lives

- **Be a visible presence online:** Follow your child's social media openly—not secretly. Comment positively, support their interests, and be a trusted adult presence.
- **Encourage offline activities:** Balance digital exposure with real-world engagement like sports, arts, or family outings.

5. Monitor Thoughtfully and Respectfully

- **Use parental controls with transparency:** If you choose to monitor devices, inform your child clearly and explain why—it's about safety, not spying.
- **Spot-check their digital health:** Occasionally discuss online interactions openly: "How are your online friends?" or "Do you ever feel pressured by things you see online?"

6. Act Swiftly if Something's Wrong

- **Address problems immediately but calmly:** If you discover bullying, inappropriate content, or harmful behaviors, intervene firmly yet supportively.
- **Report serious issues:** Take screenshots, document evidence, and use platform reporting tools immediately for bullying, harassment, or dangerous behavior.

7. Seek Professional Help When Needed

- **Recognize when issues require extra support:** Don't hesitate to involve school counselors, mental health professionals, or trusted community resources if your child struggles significantly.
- **Connect with trusted adults or experts:** Build relationships with teachers, pediatricians, counselors, or therapists who can guide your child—and you—through challenges.

Example: Parents notice sudden mood shifts after device use. By gently discussing it, their child reveals online bullying. The family openly addresses the issue, seeks counseling, reports the behavior, and establishes new boundaries, successfully helping the child regain confidence.





THE BUCK STOPS AT YOU

Digital parenting today means navigating not only your child's internet usage but also your own digital presence. One common but often overlooked behavior is sharenting—the habitual sharing of your child's personal information, photos, or milestones online.

What Exactly is Sharenting?

Sharenting includes seemingly innocent actions such as:

- Posting your child's birthday celebration photos, with exact birth dates and locations.
- Sharing first-day-of-school pictures, revealing uniforms, school names, and even home addresses.
- Regular updates of family vacations, disclosing exact locations and routines.

While these posts are typically intended to celebrate joyous moments, they come with serious and often invisible risks to your child's privacy and safety.



SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF SHARENTING

1. Digital Kidnapping: Strangers copy children's photos from social media and repost them, claiming the child as their own or creating fake identities.

Example: A mother found that her child's birthday photos were stolen and used by someone pretending the child was theirs on Instagram, which led to significant emotional distress and privacy concerns.

2. Identity Theft: Personal details (birthdates, full names, places of birth, school details) help cybercriminals steal identities, open fake accounts, or even commit financial fraud.

Example: In one case, a child's first-day-at-school photo (showing school uniform and school name) allowed cybercriminals to gather enough data to commit identity theft.

3. Cyberbullying and Peer Harassment: Information shared by parents online may later embarrass children or make them targets of bullying.

Example: A child's classmates discovered embarrassing toddler photos shared online years earlier, leading to severe bullying in middle school.

4. Exposure to Predators: Frequent sharenting can inadvertently provide predators detailed information about a child's location, routine, and habits.

Example: Law enforcement cases have shown predators tracking children's movements through parents' regular status updates, posing a genuine safety risk.

5. Loss of Autonomy and Privacy for Your Child: Children may later feel their privacy was violated by parents sharing personal information without consent, creating trust issues within families.

Example: Teens have reported significant distress after discovering that intimate childhood health details or sensitive moments were permanently available online.

6. Stalker Risk: Routine sharing of a child's schedule, school location, or hobbies can enable stalkers to track their movements.

Example: A mother's daily school-drop selfies helped an online stalker predict the child's route and show up at the playground multiple times.

7. Targeted Advertising and Data Profiling: Social media platforms harvest data from children's images and interactions for future advertising, even before they're old enough to understand it.

Example: A parent noticed that their child, just 7, started getting targeted YouTube ads for toys and games based on posts made about their birthday preferences.

8. Digital Footprint Misuse: Oversharing creates a permanent digital footprint that can affect a child's future reputation, college admissions, or employment.

Example: A teenager discovered that embarrassing potty-training photos shared by their parent years ago resurfaced during a school campaign, leading to bullying and humiliation.

9. Misuse in Exploitative Communities: Photos of children, even innocent ones, can be stolen and misused in child exploitative forums online.

Example: A family photo album shared on Instagram was later found circulating in a dark web forum, with altered captions and disturbing context.



HOW TO SHARE RESPONSIBLY: GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

- 1. Think Before You Post:** Ask yourself: Could this information harm my child in any way? Avoid posts that disclose sensitive details like full names, birthdates, school uniforms, or home addresses.
- 2. Privacy Settings Matter:** Regularly review and update social media privacy settings and limit who can see your posts (trusted family and close friends only).
- 3. Obtain Your Child's Consent (Age-Appropriate):** Once your child is old enough, ask their permission before posting their pictures or stories. Respect their rights if they say no.
- 4. Avoid Posting Embarrassing or Sensitive Moments:** Consider your child's future feelings about what you share—avoid sharing intimate health information, embarrassing or sensitive personal stories.
- 5. No Exact Locations or Daily Routines:** Never post precise locations, school names, or daily schedules online to prevent tracking or stalking.
- 6. Regularly Audit Your Posts:** Periodically review your social media to remove old posts that might expose your child to future harm or embarrassment.
- 7. Blur or Crop Faces When Possible:** If you're sharing a group photo or a school event, consider blurring or cropping your child's face, especially if it's not essential to the post.
- 8. Avoid Sharing in Real Time:** Wait a few hours or even a day before posting about an outing or event. This helps protect your child's real-time location and routine.
- 9. Stay Aware of Platform-Specific Risks:** Different platforms collect and expose data differently. Learn how TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, etc., use metadata, auto-tagging, or facial recognition.
- 10. Use Code Words Instead of Real Names:** Use fun nicknames or initials when referring to your child online. This makes it harder for strangers to link posts to your child's real identity.
- 11. Avoid Hashtags That Attract Strangers:** Hashtags like #bathtime or #cutebabies may seem innocent but can attract exploitative attention. Use unique, private ones if needed (#OnlyForGrandma).
- 12. Archive Instead of Posting:** Create a private digital scrapbook or cloud album instead of sharing everything online. You preserve memories without exposing your child to online risks.



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD'S INFORMATION IS MISUSED

- **Act Quickly:** Immediately report stolen photos or impersonation to social media platforms.
- **Document Everything:** Take screenshots as evidence of misuse.
- **Report to Authorities:** If you suspect criminal activity (identity theft, stalking), report immediately to law enforcement on www.cybercrime.gov.in
- **Seek Legal Support:** Consult legal advisors if necessary, especially in severe cases of digital kidnapping or identity fraud.



ADDITIONAL TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD ONLINE

- **Use Watermarks:** Add subtle watermarks or face emojis to publicly shared images to discourage theft.
- **Limit Audience:** Create private groups for family sharing rather than public posts.
- **Educate Family and Friends:** Ensure grandparents, relatives, or friends also respect your guidelines for sharing your child's images or details online.





THE BIGGER PICTURE: DIGITAL PARENTING

Responsible sharenting is just one aspect of comprehensive digital parenting. Beyond your actions online, effective digital parenting also includes:

- **Open, Honest Conversations:** Regular dialogue about online safety, experiences, and challenges builds trust and resilience.
- **Empathy and Understanding:** Approach your child's online interactions with compassion rather than fear or judgment.
- **Clear Boundaries and Guidelines:** Establish consistent rules and expectations about digital usage for both yourself and your child.
- **Proactive Intervention:** Act immediately when you identify problematic internet use or harmful digital behaviors.
- **Professional Support and Guidance:** Seek help from mental health professionals or authorities whenever necessary.
- **Model Good Digital Behavior:** Children learn by observing. Demonstrate respectful, safe, and mindful online behavior in your own digital habits—what you post, how you comment, and how much time you spend online.
- **Establish Tech-Free Zones and Times:** Create healthy digital boundaries with family rituals like device-free dinners, no screens before bed, or tech-free weekends to encourage balance and real-world bonding.
- **Stay Informed About Digital Trends & Risks:** Be proactive in understanding apps, games, trends, and emerging online risks. The more informed you are, the better you can guide your child.
- **Normalize Talking About Mistakes:** Let your child know it's safe to come to you if they make a digital mistake or encounter something upsetting online—without fear of punishment or shame.
- **Teach About Digital Privacy & Consent:** Empower your child to understand the value of privacy—teach them about permissions, passwords, and the importance of not sharing personal content or information online.
- **Involve the Whole Family in Digital Decision-Making:** Create digital usage rules and agreements together. This gives children a sense of ownership and helps them take responsibility for their actions online.
- **Encourage Positive Online Participation:** Help your child see the internet as a space to learn, create, and connect positively—through creative projects, online learning, or volunteering.
- **Teach Critical Thinking About Online Content:** Guide your child in questioning the credibility of what they see online—help them differentiate between facts, opinions, ads, and misinformation.



The **Assam Police Sishu Mitra** Program is one of India's largest Child-friendly Policing initiatives. Launched in 2019, this program is anchored by the Assam Police, in collaboration with UNICEF, and UTSAH, a local child rights organization. The program's primary objective is to implement child-rights related laws on ground, to ensure that every child who comes in contact with the Police system receives empathetic and supportive response services, as well as access to speedy justice.



PIIR Foundation is a dedicated non-profit committed to protecting children's rights in the digital world. Through impactful workshops, extensive research, and specialized capacity-building programs, PIIR Foundation equips **parents, educators, and civil society organizations** with the knowledge and tools necessary to safeguard children from online harms and ensure safe, responsible internet use.



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