

PARENT GUIDE

S5 EP1: Parenting in the Digital Age: Spotting Online Red Flags

(For Parents & Caregivers)

This guide is designed to help you extend the conversation after Episode 1 of *Awkward Conversations* and to support age-appropriate discussions about digital life, safety, decision-making, and prevention.

WHAT THIS EPISODE COVERS (Key Takeaways)

From the expert conversation, parents learn:

- Kids don't separate "online life" and "real life" — it's one connected world to them
- Digital spaces shape behavior, identity, and risk-taking just like in-person spaces
- The goal is **mentoring, not spying**
- Curiosity, calm conversations, and modeling matter more than control
- Regular check-ins reduce risk more than one-time "big talks"
- Strong parent-child communication is a **protective factor** against substance use

AGES 6–9 (WITH THE EXPLAINER VIDEO)

Before Watching – Set the Tone

You might say:

"This video is about learning how to make smart choices online and how to ask for help."

Or:

"We're watching this together — it's not a test."

Ask one simple question:

- "What do you like to do on a phone or tablet?"
- "What would you do if something online made you feel confused or uncomfortable?"

Keep it light and calm.

During Watching – Gentle Prompts

You don't need to pause often. If helpful, you can quietly ask:

- "What do you think the safe choice is here?"
- "Who could help if that happened?"

Let the video do most of the teaching.

After Watching – Make It Stick

Ask:

- "What part stood out to you?"
- "What should kids do if something feels weird online?"

Reinforce one key rule:

"If something feels confusing, scary, or secret — you can always come to me."

Optional activity:

- Create a **Family Online Rule** together (1 sentence)
 - Example: "We don't click or reply before checking with a grown-up."



AGES 10–13 (USING THE IDEAS WITHOUT THE VIDEO)

Frame the conversation:

“Phones are powerful tools. Like any tool, we learn how to use them safely.”

Before the Conversation

Ask:

- “What apps do kids your age use the most?”
- “What feels fun online? What feels stressful?”

During the Conversation

Discuss:

- Why people post things online (attention, money, reactions)
- That not everything online is honest, safe, or meant to help them
- How pressure can show up digitally (chats, emojis, disappearing messages)

Introduce a Pause Habit:

“Before clicking, posting, or replying — pause and check in.”

After the Conversation

Agree on:

- Regular phone check-ins (predictable, not punitive)
- One “out” line they can use with friends:
 - *“My parents check my phone.”*
 - *“I’m not allowed to respond to that.”*

Emphasize:

“This isn’t about catching you. It’s about keeping you safe.”

AGES 13+ (TEENS)

Acknowledge their independence:

“We know you need privacy — and you still need protection.”

Conversation Focus

Talk about:

- How algorithms push edgy or risky content
- How online spaces can normalize dangerous behavior
- Why substances sold online are especially risky

Key message:

“If it’s not prescribed by a doctor and filled by a pharmacy — don’t take it.”

Mentorship Over Monitoring

Explain:

- Phone check-ins are like checking backpacks or cars
- Monitoring decreases risk even when parents aren’t watching
- Calm conversations keep kids from hiding problems

Invite honesty:



“If you see something that freaks you out, I want to know — you won’t be in trouble for telling me.”

PARENT-ONLY: WHY THIS MATTERS FOR PREVENTION

From the episode discussion:

- Online drug sales and risky behaviors are increasing
- Kids who feel supported (not policed) are more likely to ask for help
- Emotional regulation, critical thinking, and open dialogue reduce risk
- Consistent parent presence — even digitally — saves lives

You don’t need to say “this prevents substance use” to your child.

You are quietly building the skills that do.

EXTRA TOOLS YOU CAN USE

1. Weekly Digital Check-In

- Same day each week (predictable)
- Calm tone
- Ask:
 - “Anything confusing this week?”
 - “Anything you want help with?”

2. Model What You Want to See

Say out loud:

- “I’m putting my phone down.”
- “That post made me uncomfortable — I’m scrolling past.”

Kids learn more from what we do than what we say.

3. Normalize Learning Together

Let them teach you:

“You know this app better than I do — show me how it works.”

This builds trust and keeps the door open.

ONE SENTENCE TO HOLD ONTO

“We don’t have to know everything — we just have to stay connected.”

That connection is one of the strongest protective factors your child has.

Important Note for Parents and Caregivers

This parent guide is provided for **educational and informational purposes only**. It is not intended to replace medical, psychological, legal, or substance use treatment advice. Every child and family situation is different. The strategies and suggestions shared here are meant to support thoughtful conversation and prevention-focused parenting, but they may not apply to all circumstances. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to use their own judgment and to consult qualified professionals when appropriate.

Neither the producers of *Awkward Conversations*, nor the participating organizations, hosts, or guests assume responsibility for decisions made based on this material.

If you believe a child or family member may be at risk of harm, please seek immediate professional support or contact local emergency services

