

Evidence Brief

Five Promising Practices to Support Youth with Intellectual Disabilities in Social Media Use

How Did We Compile This Evidence?

We searched YouthREX’s Library for Youth Work and in online databases using combinations of the following key terms: “social media safety,” “children with intellectual disability,” “children with intellectual disability online,” “social media,” and “education.”

Three Key Findings:

1. There is limited research in the area of practices to support social media literacy for youth with intellectual disabilities.
2. Systematic reviews have found that youth with various types of disabilities experience a higher prevalence of bullying perpetration and victimization than their peers without disabilities (Caton & Chapman, 2016; Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, & Baker, 2012; Maïano, Aimé, Salvas, Morin, & Normand, 2016).
3. Research suggests that the gendered dynamics of certain electronic communications, such as sexting, should be understood to ensure that a program does not contribute to the disempowerment of young women, who are already disempowered, denied legitimacy, and tasked with managing risks associated with youth sexting culture (Setty, 2018a, 2018b).

Summary of Evidence: Five Promising Practices

1. Focus on empowerment and connection with youth’s trusted adults.

Hands-on and problem-solving activities have been found more effective in working with youth with intellectual disabilities (Kramer et al., 2013). The primary predictor of cybervictimization appears to be lower social skills (Christensen et al., 2012). Therefore, youth workers could introduce categories with headings to support a young person in understanding (and remembering) which topics/pictures can be posted online and which should not be posted. Alternatively, you could create a list of activities and ask young people to categorize these by the same headings. For example, the headings could be presented on a card in the following way:

PRIVATE – send to one person only or no one at all	BE CAREFUL – send just to those who need to know	PUBLIC – okay for anyone to see, post anywhere
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If using these categories to discuss content or activities in a group setting, disagreements between the youth participants can be used as an opportunity to discuss the risks associated with each content type or activity. The diversity of opinions in the group can also be linked to the importance of communication about boundaries, consent, and seeking support from a trusted adult if participants are asked to do something with which they are not comfortable.

While research in this is not conclusive, preliminary data identifies parental monitoring, communication, and involvement as a factor that decreases the vulnerability to online risks in youth with intellectual disabilities (Buijs, Boot, Shugar, Fung, & Bassett, 2017).

2. Place the onus of the victimization on the perpetrator.

Victimization does not occur in a vacuum. The gender power dynamics in our society that advantage young men shape the way we respond to online activities, such as sexting, through a gendered lens. Young women are often tasked to deal with the consequences of unauthorized sharing of sexts, while young men, who often are the ones sharing this content, are rewarded by their peers (Setty, 2018a, 2018b). Therefore, we need to be mindful of drawing a clear line between victims and perpetrators.

3. Focus on the positive.

Research suggests that vulnerable people ‘in real life’ tend to be vulnerable online (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, Ybarra, & Turner, 2011). However, in addition to imposing certain risks, there are also benefits to social media use for youth with intellectual disabilities.

These include:

- Providing an opportunity to remain anonymous from the label of ‘intellectual disability’ and promote other aspects of one’s identity (Beart, Hardy, & Buchan, 2005; Holmes & O’Loughlin, 2014).
- Providing an alternative medium through which youth with intellectual disabilities receive social feedback (Holmes & O’Loughlin, 2014).
- Challenging the issue of isolation among youth with intellectual disabilities through broadening their social networks.

Topics related to online safety, such as sexting, need to be communicated through a positive lens rather than through narratives of risk and shame (Setty, 2018a).

4. Start with the fundamentals.

Focus on the basic principles that keep people safe online. Examples include:

- Don't accept friend requests from people you don't know.
- Protect your password.
- Use your privacy settings.
- Keep private things private.
- Be careful about clicking on links from sources you don't know.
- Don't share your financial information online.
- Report any harassing or abusive content to the social media provider, a trusted family member, a friend or staff.

5. Use Technology

Most young people are probably familiar with using technology, so be sure to use online resources in your program so youth become familiar with these resources and can refer to them later. For example, Thinkuknow is an online resource that teaches kids about online safety through games (<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>). Make sure participants have enough time for hands-on practice (Kramer et al., 2013; Swanson & Deshler, 2003).

Examples of Community Resources

For Youth:

1. **Thinkuknow**

An online resource from a UK organization that teaches kids about online safety through games: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

2. **Youth Organizing (YO!) Disabled & Proud**

A youth with disability-led organization in the US with safety tip sheets and anti-bullying resources: <http://www.yodisabledproud.org/resources/safety-online.php/>

3. **Staying Safe on Social Media and Online**

A resource developed by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities in the UK: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities/publications/staying-safe-social-media-and-online>

4. **Need Help Now**

A Canadian organization that supports teens in stopping the spread of sexual pictures and videos that can be considered peer exploitation: <https://needhelpnow.ca/app/en/>

For Youth Workers:

1. **Effective Teaching Methods for People with Intellectual Disabilities**

Strategies from American Addiction Centers:

<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/effective-teaching-methods-for-people-with-intellectual-disabilities/>

2. **Going Places Safely (K-Grade 2)**

Lesson from Common Sense Education in the US (requires creating a free online account):

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/lesson/going-places-safely-k-2>

3. **Talking Safely Online (Grades 3-5)**

Lesson from Common Sense Education in the US (requires creating a free online account):

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/lesson/talking-safely-online-3-5>

4. **Safe Online Talk (Grades 6-8)**

Lesson from Common Sense Education in the US (requires creating a free online account):

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/lesson/safe-online-talk-6-8>

5. **Risky Online Relationships (Grades 9-12)**

Lesson from Common Sense Education in the US (requires creating a free online account):

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/lesson/risky-online-relationships-9-12>

6. **Childnet International**

Online resources developed by a UK organization for professionals discussing internet safety with youth: <https://www.childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals>

7. **NetSmartz**

Online resources developed by a US organization for professionals discussing internet safety with youth: <https://www.netsmartz.org/specialneeds>

8. **Keeping the ME in Media: Thoughts, Ideas and Tips for Supporting People with Intellectual Disabilities to Use Social Media**

Tips for supporting people with ID to use social media (from Volume 2, Issue 4 of Toronto's Vita Community Living Services' *The Direct Support Workers Newsletter*):

<https://connectability.ca/Garage/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Keeping-the-ME-in-Media-tips-social-media.pdf>

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