Script for Internet Safety Audio Clip

Modern life can be tough for parents and caregivers, especially when it comes to technology. We have to think about not only where our kids are physically, but also where they are online. And because the internet can take our kids anywhere, and connect them to anyone, it's a lot for us to figure out. For those of us who have kids with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the complexities can feel even more challenging. But, technology and social media have some upsides for our kids as well.

For instance, for our kids who struggle to read social cues or body gestures, text-based communication—like text messages and social media posts—can be easier to understand and respond to. Texting and online communication also give our kids more control over how fast a conversation takes place, giving them time to think about the messages coming in and the ones they want to send out. In many ways, technology opens avenues for our kids to feel more a part of their peer groups and the world around them. These are all good things.

As parents and caregivers then, our job becomes helping them use these technologies and digital spaces safely. We can work with our kids to create healthy online habits in lots of different ways.

We can teach them not to give out personal information to someone online who they've never met in person. We can encourage them to talk to a trusted adult about anything that happens online or messages they receive that make them uncomfortable, worried, or upset. And we can remind them that pictures and social media posts can be impossible to delete once someone else receives or shares them.

Unfortunately, there are also some scary online realities. Kids with intellectual and developmental disabilities are at higher risk of cyberbullying and receiving sexual requests online, and they are less likely to learn about social media safety at school. As parents and caregivers, we should balance these realities by seeking out reliable sources of information and support and educating ourselves and our kids about these risks.

Technology and social media can open important doors of community for our kids with intellectual and developmental disabilities . Working with them to create healthy online habits and boundaries empowers them to walk through those doors safely and grow strong into a wider, more connected world.