

# 5-Minute Parenting Guide: Catfishing

Recognize  
tricky people online

Stop scams  
before they start

Stay connected  
as a family

**Catfishing is the fast growing online safety issue parents aren't talking about:**

- ▶ **TikTok:** 62% increase in fake accounts taken down.
- ▶ **FBI:** Catfishing scams targeting youth have tripled.
- ▶ **60%** of kids rarely or never talk to parents about appropriate online behavior.



## Step 1: Get Informed

### What is Catfishing?

'Catfishing' is when someone creates a fake online identity to trick kids of all ages into believing they are someone else. It works best on uninformed kids who lack awareness about catfishing.

### How does it work?

They create a profile online (social media, gaming, etc.) using photos of someone else and pretend to be someone the child thinks is age appropriate, has shared interests and/or is attractive. To uninformed kids, this can feel normal, flattering, exciting and fun.

### What's the point?

Romance or financial scams, bullying, exploitation, harassment, amusement, boredom, loneliness, etc. While the intent may not always be to cause harm - it's always deceptive. And kids should always know who their online 'friends' are.

# Step 2: Teach Kids to be AWARE

"Kids who are Aware and Alert can Avoid catfishing."



## AWARE

Kids should instinctively possess a healthy skepticism when meeting new people online. This starts with making sure they're informed and Aware. Here's how any adult can have these conversations:

### Younger Kids

#### First, Define....

- "Sometimes tricky people pretend to be someone else online."
- "During screen time, sometimes people pretend to be someone else to trick kids into believing they are someone else."

#### Then Discuss....

- "Why is it important to know if someone you meet during screen time is pretending to be someone else?"
- "Why do you think someone you meet would pretend to be someone else online?"

### Older Kids

#### First, Define....

- Ask them to define it for you (they likely already know, but be ready with your definition).
- "What's catfishing?"
- "Why do they call it that?"

#### Then Discuss....

- "How did you learn about it?"
- "Do you know anyone who's been catfished? What happened? "
- "Why do you think people get scammed?"
- "Are you worried about it? What do you or your friends do when meeting someone new online?"

# Step 3: Teach Kids to be ALERT

"Kids who are Aware and Alert can Avoid catfishing."



## ALERT

Once kids are Aware of catfishing, they should also be Alert to the signs and red flags. Using the conversations starters below, we can help them look past the person and recognize tricky behavior.

### Younger Kids

#### "A tricky person might....."

- Share strong feelings quickly, like compliments.
- Ask for photos, money or personal information.
- Ask personal or private questions (Where do you live? Are your parents home?)
- Not share information about themselves.
- Tell you to keep something secret.
- Invite you to an unfamiliar game, app or website.
- Make you feel uncomfortable in any way - always trust your feelings!

### Older Kids

#### "Someone catfishing you might....."

- Refuse to video chat, talk on the phone or meet in person.
- Not post videos to social media, like Snapchat, Instagram or TikTok.
- Refuse to send you a selfie in real time.
- Not have many followers or posts on social media.
- Share strong feelings quickly (compliments, flirting, intimacy, attraction, etc.)
- Send or ask for flirty, sexy or intimate photos.
- Ask for money, personal information, etc.
- Make you feel uncomfortable in any way - always trust your instincts!

# Step 4: Teach Kids to AVOID

"Kids who are Aware and Alert can Avoid catfishing."



## AVOID

When an Aware kid is Alerted to a red flag or something feels wrong, they should know how to Avoid or respond to a potential catfishing situation.

### Younger Kids

"If you think someone is being tricky or you don't feel safe...."

- "Don't respond, don't engage and immediately come tell me or a trusted grownup."
- To create space for kids to reach out for help, always let them know in advance **they won't get in trouble** if they meet a tricky person, make a mistake or feel unsafe online.

### Older Kids

"If you think someone is catfishing you...."

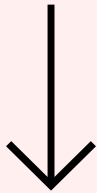
- "Don't respond, don't engage and come tell me or trusted adult."
- "Here's how to quickly verify their identity...."
  - Ask for a selfie in a certain pose in real time ("Send me a pic of you holding up 4 fingers on your right hand and winking")
    - If they can't do it right away, that's a red flag.
  - Reverse Image Search:
    - Look up their photos on sites like [images.google.com](https://images.google.com), and see if they belong to someone else.

# Step 5: A Safe and Connected Family

"Kids who are Aware and Alert can Avoid catfishing."



**Read the Guide**

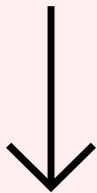


**Have the Conversation**

AWARE

ALERT

AVOID



**Empower Your Kids Online**

Learn more at [www.thetechsavvyparent.com](http://www.thetechsavvyparent.com) or sign up for our newsletter here!