



News Release

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Prevent the Harm – Protecting Kids from Online Bullying

Commissioner Cavoukian urges parents to familiarize themselves with smartphone apps

TORONTO, November 18, 2013 – With more than a million apps available to download from both Google and Apple's online stores, it is harder than ever for parents to keep up with the latest technologies. This Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, Dr. Ann Cavoukian, Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner, is encouraging all parents to be proactive and make it a regular practice to review their children's smartphone and app settings.

Commissioner Cavoukian recommends these [seven tips](#) to parents:

1. *Adjust parental boundaries.*

Just as you have certain boundaries about what your kids can do in your house, you should have the similar limits for their smartphone. Most smartphones have parental controls that allow parents to limit what their children can access: YouTube, camera, and the Internet, to name a few. Take the time to review what they can access and adjust the settings.

2. *Understand the apps.*

Some apps may just seem like fun, but it doesn't mean they can't have serious consequences. For example, Snapchat is a free app that allows the user to send an image or video to a group of recipients that can be viewed for a short time before it is automatically deleted. However, there is another app, Snap Save, which can store these received images or videos without the sender knowing, thus allowing a potentially regrettable image or video to later resurface. Make sure to read about an app and discuss it with your child before they download it, to make sure that you are comfortable with it.

3. *Set guidelines for apps.*

Along with setting up parental controls, you can also limit what your child downloads. You can disable app downloads completely, only allowing them when you're around; disable in-app purchases (purchases within an app that is already downloaded that can cost a lot of money); or, only allow your child to download apps that are rated within a certain age category.

4. *Keep your child's location a secret!*

Many apps use location tracking. This means if your child posts a picture on social media, someone may be able to follow his or her whereabouts. Ensure that location settings are turned off for the apps that may share this information.

5. *Enable strong privacy settings.*



Always understand what your child is sharing online. On smartphones and in social media there are privacy settings that you can change to limit the personal information he or she can share with the world. Control what other people see about your child's online usage.

6. *Clearly explain: what you post online can last forever!*

Once you post something online it's very hard to delete. It can be used to bully your child, prevent him or her from getting into a school, and even from getting a job. Children are impulsive and don't think about the consequences of their actions, and that's why you need to continually reinforce the risks of what they post online.

7. *Draft a contract of responsibility for your child.*

The final, and probably most important, tip is to draft a contract of responsibility with your child. It's hard to deny your kids access to a smartphone when all of their peers have one, but you can still have control over how they use it. Create guidelines for how and when they can use their smartphone.

Along with these tips for parents and the [Stop Bullying...by Design section on her website](#), Commissioner Cavoukian has created [BEWARE of Bullying bookmarks](#) that are being made available to schools across Ontario to educate students about steps they can take to prevent cyberbullying.

Quote

"With one click of a button, anyone in the world can have access to your child's most private information; however, you can help protect your child from an impulsive decision that may lead to unintended consequences," said Dr. Cavoukian. "By familiarizing yourself with what apps are out there and how your child is using them, you can help Stop Bullying... by Design."

View the [Commissioner's Corner on YouTube video blog](#) about what parents can do to keep their children safe from smartphones and apps.

About the Information and Privacy Commissioner

The Information and Privacy Commissioner is appointed by, and reports to, the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and is independent of the government of the day. The Commissioner's mandate includes overseeing the access and privacy provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, as well as the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*, which applies to both public and private sector health information custodians. A vital component of the Commissioner's mandate is to help educate the public about access and privacy issues.

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