S·O·S Safe Online Standards

IMPROVING DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH

GUIDE: Using Privacy & Safety Settings
Taking Control of Your Online Space

This guide is for teens and families who want to understand how privacy and safety settings can support safer, more comfortable online experiences. You do not need technical knowledge to use this guide.

Big Picture
Privacy and safety settings are tools, not punishments. They're there to help you shape your online experience.

Most social media platforms include features that help users manage privacy, content, and interactions. These tools are often overlooked or misunderstood. This guide explains what they are for and how they can be used in realistic ways to reduce stress and limit unwanted experiences.

These Tools Are About Control, Not Getting in Trouble
Privacy and safety settings help teens feel more in control of their online space, not just safer, but more comfortable using it.

Key Takeaway
Using safety settings is a form of self-care, not a sign that something is wrong.

Different settings may feel right at different times, depending on what someone is experiencing. What works one week might need to change the next week, and that's normal.

How Settings Can Support You Day to Day (Teen Reflection)
Knowing how to adjust who can contact you, what content appears, and how interactions are handled can make online spaces feel safer and less overwhelming.

Common Tools That Can Help

- Blocking or restricting accounts
- Muting words, topics, or people
- Reporting harmful or rule-breaking content
- Limiting who can message or comment
- Turning off or reducing notifications

Teen Tip

You don't have to leave a platform or delete everything to make it feel better, sometimes one small setting change can make a big difference.

These tools can reduce exposure to upsetting or distracting content without requiring teens to leave platforms entirely.

Let your feelings guide your settings

As teens use social media, it can help to notice moments when content or interactions feel intrusive, upsetting, or draining. These feelings are useful information.

Reflection Moment

If something online leaves you feeling tense, annoyed, overwhelmed, or stuck scrolling, that may be a sign a setting could help protect your space.

Signals It Might Be Time to Adjust a Setting

- Feeling stressed after scrolling
- Getting unwanted messages
- Seeing content that feels overwhelming
- Feeling distracted by constant notifications

Reframe

Needing to change a setting isn't a failure, it's a healthy way to respond to how something is making you feel.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is awareness, comfort, and well-being.

Supporting safer use at home (For Families)

Families can support safer use by learning about these features alongside teens and keeping conversations focused on comfort and safety rather than control.

For Parents & Caregivers

Privacy and safety tools work best when they're framed as options, not rules.

Talking about privacy and safety settings as choices helps build trust, confidence, and shared understanding.

Conversation Starter

Is there anything online that's been bugging you lately?

Why this helps

Privacy and safety settings help teens feel more in control of their online space not just safer, but more comfortable using it.

Bottom Line

These tools help teens make their online space feel more comfortable and manageable, without having to leave the platforms they like to use.