



## First Aid Poster for Digital safety skills for 3-9-year-olds

Väestöliitto's and Sua varten somessa project's Poster (2022), Raisa Cacciatore & Henriikka Kangaskoski

How to guide young children's safe use of media, social media behavior and digital safety skills? Where to start, when the whole digital environment and devices feel as an overly strange and a scary world?

The simple language digital safety-skills poster is aimed at guardians of the youngest children and for early childhood education. The pictures make the poster also interesting to children.

You can print the poster in A4 or A3 size on the wall of your home, child group or class. This nicely illustrated, colorful poster tells about everyday skills, worth going through with young children. In this way, you can promote the safety of children with smart devices at an early stage.

### Why is this needed?

Our aim is to promote adults' ability and desire to start talking about digital safety skills already with young children. We want to promote adults to dare, to be able and start implementing digital safety skills by giving insight into how children can be protected from an early age. We want specially to help adults who are unfamiliar and feel uncomfortable with digital skills.

The poster offers an understanding of the connection between real life and the digital world to even the smallest child. Smart devices offer the same things and feelings as in real life: hobbies, friends, learning and emotions. These are the same things which are present in children's everyday life all the time anyway.

Children's cognitive abilities to understand what they see or to filter the material coming from a smart device have not yet developed. Although children may be very handy in using devices, it does not mean they will not still need help and support to deal with the things they come across on the devices. In these situations, the presence of a safe adult is important. You can start learning how to use digital devices together.

### Do young children need this?

Today, children use various smart devices at an increasingly young age and very independently.

Even young children spend a lot of time in front of the screen on a tablet or mobile phone. If online, they can accidentally get lost on scary or distressing websites or see unpleasant pictures or videos. Older children may also show improper or frightening pictures or videos on their mobile phones to younger children, etc.

In Finland, at 18 months, children spend on an average over half an hour, and at 5-years-old more than two hours a day, using e-media devices (Niiranen et al. 2021). Many preschool-aged children already have their own cell phone. Of 5–6 and 7-year-olds respectively, 87% and 100% have their own telephone, of which 75% and 89% are smart phones (DNA 2022).

Because of this, also sexuality-related safety skills in digital surroundings must be openly discussed with children from an early age in a manner appropriate to their developmental level (WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA 2010).

Every adult who is close to the child must ensure that the child receives digital safety skills before using smart devices. In this way, unpleasant experiences can be prevented and children are protected even in the environment of smart devices.

### How to start?

- Be interested in children's smart device and media usage so that children want to share with you what they are doing there.
- Start also the active and preventive path of digital safety skills with young children. This poster helps in the first steps of speaking about this.
- Talking to children is the key! It is the adult's responsibility to start the conversation. The fact that children do not tell adults if something bad or dangerous happens online is a huge problem. No help will reach them if they remain silent and suffer alone from the bullying, sexual harassment or violence they may experience.

### What to talk about?

- Children are interested in the body, body functions and secretions. Poop, pee and fart are important to a child and at the focus of development. Children want to talk about them, and an adult must know how to talk about them in an age-appropriate way. All parts and functions of the body are important. Explain about body differences, body parts, secretions and hygiene. Maintain open talk between children and adult.
- What is the difference between private and public? Where can you be naked? Even children must know they have the right for privacy! *No one must agree to be filmed. Private places are not photographed. They do not have to be shown, and others are not allowed to touch them. If someone asks or demands for naked pictures of body parts, you must refuse. If you see or receive a picture on a media device of someone's private place, for example a penis, always tell an adult.* If the children don't know these things, it's easy to persuade them into "funny" pictures of the butt or toileting, while playing.
- A smart device is never "just a conversation between two people" but is connected to the whole world at every moment. The pictures, videos and writings put on it can spread all over the world. Which devices are smart? You can observe the spread of images together with the child using different locations, such as the image on the wall at home compared to the image at the bus stop. A picture of one's hand or a baby can spread in hundreds of copies immediately around the globe. All children have the right for guidance and information so that they can move safely in digital environments.
- Tell children: *You don't have to be in the pictures. If someone takes pictures of you, or wants/demands taking pictures, you can say no. Your pictures is your own. No one must have them.*

*If someone films you secretly or has taken nude photos of you, tell an adult. Think carefully before sharing photos and videos online or via messages to friends or groups.*

- *The same rules apply to smart devices as face-to-face. The same security skills also work on devices. Say no, go away, tell a safe adult if something bad happens or you feel afraid. How do you exit or close the device? Not all things are ok with smart devices! It is normal to get scared or be afraid of some picture, video or nasty talk. It is not your fault. Adults know how to advise and help! You can also talk to adults about the feelings that can arise in the digital world.*
- *Emotions can be strong also on digital devices. Share your feelings with adults. You can experience embarrassment, confusion, fear, joy, fun and other feelings. You can feel bad about something or feel really guilty if you think you have done something wrong. You can tell about all your feelings to adults who know this and will help you.*