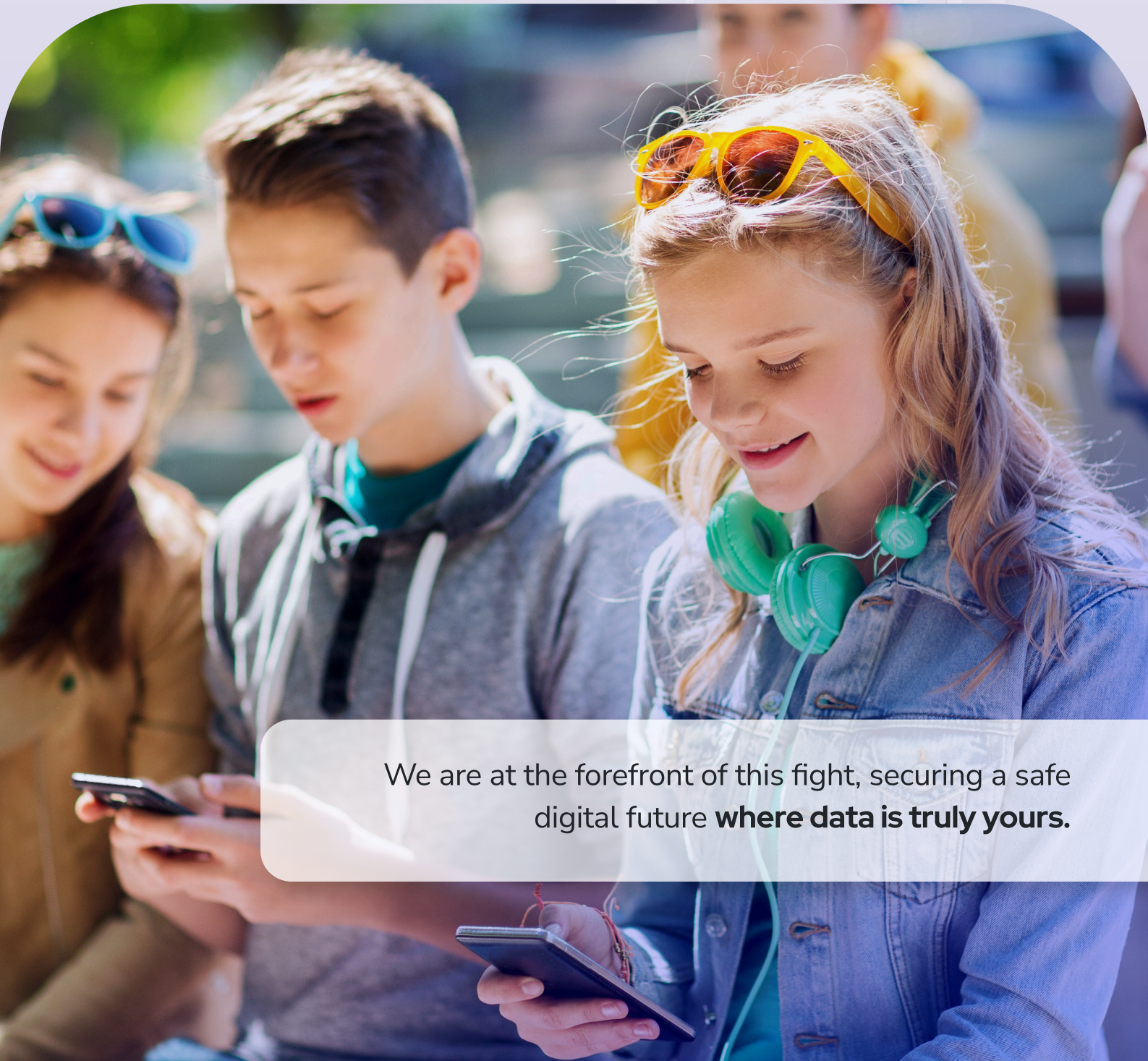


MINORS ONLINE

POCKET GUIDE FOR PARENTS ON HOW
TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN IN 2026



We are at the forefront of this fight, securing a safe digital future **where data is truly yours.**

TABLE OF CONTENT

- 00. *Introduction*
- 01. *Our Manifesto*
- 02. *Minor's Online: The Digital Landscape
In Numbers*
- 03. *What Are The Risks In 2026?*
- 04. *What You Can Do?*
- 05. *Hotlines*
- 06. *About SOMI*
- 07. *Sources*



00.

INTRODUCTION

Dear parent,

Growing up in the digital world is exciting, full of opportunities and challenges. And for **our children**, the digital world isn't just a tool. It's their playground, their classroom, and even their town square.

The **internet** helps young people build digital literacy, **sharpens their ability** to navigate a complex world, and allows children to find communities that share their interests and passions^[1].

However, **we cannot ignore the shadows**. The same platforms that foster connection can also expose young users to harmful content, dark design patterns and exploitation^[2].

This guide is here to help you safely and consciously navigate your child through this world, allowing them to explore, learn, and have fun without feeling overwhelmed.



How An Healthy Digital Environment Looks Like In 2026?

A healthy digital environment isn't a life without screens. It's one where screens are used with intention. According to OECD, the most confident children aren't those with the most restrictions, but those with confidence in their digital abilities. Digital literacy is associated with the capacity to evaluate the accuracy and quality of online content^[3].

01.

OUR MANIFESTO

At **SOMI**, we believe that safety isn't a cage but it is a fundamental human right that unlocks true freedom. That's why your goal as a parent isn't to patrol the digital borders, but to guide your child to thrive within them.

This guide moves past fear and toward digital resilience, so you can support your children online with wisdom and understanding.



KNOWING IS POWER

Understanding the risks is the first step to neutralizing them.



PRIVACY IS A RIGHT

Every user has a right to have control over their own digital footprint.



CONNECTION IS KEY

The best firewall is a child who feels safe talking to their parents.

In 2026, personal data is the currency of the web. Teaching your child that their personal data, like their location, their photos, and even their "likes", has worth is an essential first step.

We aren't just protecting our children from the world. We are preparing them for it. That is the ultimate challenge, and you are more than ready for it.

02.

MINORS ONLINE: THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE IN NUMBERS

Universal connection

97% of young people (aged 16-29) across Europe use the **internet daily**^[4].

Safety gap

While **164 countries** have legal measures for Child Online Protection, many still struggle with enforcement (only **94** have effective strategies to implement them). If the law is the shield, **you are the frontline**^[5].

Hidden risks

Across **25 countries**, **80% of the children** report feeling at risk of **exploitation online**^[6]. Predators often use **grooming techniques** disguised as friendly interactions in gaming environments or social media platforms, creating communities with shared interest to cultivate relationships with the victims^[7].

The AI shift

Generative AI has evolved into a **companion and educator** for children worldwide. The new digital literacy skill today is therefore the ability to distinguish **“what is real”** from what is synthetically generated^[8].

03.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS IN 2026?

Knowledge is your first line of defense. By understanding how the digital world can be misused, we can better equip our children to navigate it safely.

Sexual Exploitation & Abuse

The use of digital tools to facilitate sexual abuse or the exploitation of vulnerable minors.

Addiction and Manipulative feed

This includes persistent cyberbullying, harassment, and other forms of aggression that follow a child from the playground to their bedroom.

Harmful content

Exposure to material that promotes violence, self-harm, toxic social standards and age-inappropriate content often follow a child from the playground to their bedroom.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE.

Child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) and grooming practices have been proliferating at an alarming rate, with **99% of harmful content now publicly available on the Internet**^[9].

Social media and everyday apps are now the primary landscape for digital harm. While we often think of the "dark web" as the danger zone, the reality nowadays is that child safety is most frequently compromised on the **platforms we use daily**.

In 2025, **Instagram removed 4.2 million** instances portraying child nudity and physical abuse, while Facebook addressed **6 million pieces** of sexual exploitation content. Europe has become a central hub for these activities, with **70% of all known CSAM traced back to European servers** in 2024 (+4% since 2022).

The most significant shift in the last two years is the explosion of AI-generated CSAM. Between 2023 and 2024, reports of suspected AI-generated abuse material increased by 1.325 %, rising from 4.700 to 67.000 cases.

What Is Digital Grooming?

Grooming is a process where an adult builds an emotional connection with a child to lower their defenses. Today, this often starts with "small favors" in video games or by posing as a peer on social media to build trust.

+1.325%

*increased in reported cases
between 2023 and 2024.*

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE.

Perpetrators can now use GenAI to create hyperrealistic sexual images of a child without the child ever knowing or ever being involved. Why does this matter?

The scale

Over **1.2 million children across 11 countries** had their images or likeness digitally manipulated into sexually explicit deepfakes using AI tools^[10].

Classroom reality

In some countries, this rate amounts to roughly **one in 25 children**, equivalent to one child per average classroom.

Youth at risk

Young people aged 16-24 are nearly four times more likely to be exposed to sexually explicit deepfakes than adults aged 55+ (20% vs 6%).

Even when no 'real' child is involved, the harm is real. This technology normalizes the sexualization of children, fuels abuse, and violates children's fundamental right to protection^[11].

ADDICTION AND MANIPULATIVE MEDIA.

Screen addiction isn't a lack of self-control, but rather the outcome of sophisticated engineering. **Social media platforms employ psychological “hooks”, or dark patterns**, specifically crafted to keep children engaged for extended periods, all to maximize advertising profits.

What is a dark pattern? Dark patterns are intentional design choices used by online platforms to manipulate users' behavior, usually without their knowledge or consent^[12].

Each 'like', 'comment', or 'share' triggers a release of dopamine similar to drugs and alcohol.

This forced engagement creates significant **psychological consequences for young users** including depression, anxiety, body image issues, sleep problems, and reduced academic performance.

Moreover, AI-powered engines analyze every second a child spends on a video to build a hyper-personalized feed ^[13]. This creates a "flow experience", a state in which the child feels entertained but completely loses track of time and reality^[14].

The Parent's Insight. Spotting the "Flow".

If your child seems zoned out or becomes unusually irritable when asked to put their device away, they may be caught in an algorithmic "flow state." Instead of taking the phone, try "bridging" and talk to them about what they were watching. This helps the brain transition out of the dopamine loop.

ADDICTION AND MANIPULATIVE MEDIA.

Behind a playful surface, Big Tech is often **harvesting and processing a massive amount of personal data** without a valid legal basis or parental consent, often resulting in three unlawful practices.

Lack of transparency

Cookie banners can be misleading, opt-out options are hidden, and tracking continues despite refusal.

Targeted vulnerability

These practices expose minors to invasive profiling that undermines their privacy and safety.

Commercial exploitation

Personal data can be misused for subtle marketing, targeting and building up of detailed profiles, and economic exploitation.

Commercial exploitation and financial risks form a duo. Many children have been shown to experience problems while online involving money, including accidental purchases, subscriptions for paid services and purchases without permission from their parent to use credit card^[17].

HARMFUL CONTENT

The "Filter Bubble" has never been stronger^[18]. Since algorithms prioritize content users have already engaged with, a simple search for a diet or fitness tip can rapidly result in a stream dominated by extreme eating disorders or hazardous exercise practices.



Instagram has been shown to expose minors to harmful content, including misogynistic ideologies and restrictive gender roles, which can cause deep psychological harm.



Research indicates that Meta's algorithms may amplify this issue by recommending or promoting content linked to child exploitation and CSAM.



Hyper-personalized feeds like TikTok's often promote deadly challenges. The "Blackout Challenge" has been linked to the death of a 13-year-old girl in Germany in May 2024.

When filtering becomes extreme, **the bubble turns into a black hole, also known as a Rabbit Hole**. In the constant effort to maximize "engagement time", algorithms begin recommending content that is increasingly extreme, drawing children deeper into harm.

The Parent's Insight. Breaking the Loop.

The "Rabbit Hole" thrives on passive scrolling. Encourage your child to be an active user and tap "Not Interested" or close the app. This sends a signal back to the algorithm to stop the escalation.

04.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

BE THE FIRST MOVER, BE THE ROLE MODEL.

Your child is observing you, therefore it is important that you set a good example. Avoid using your phone during social moments. Always ask for your child's permission before posting a photo of them. This teaches them the value of digital consent^[21].

KEEP YOURSELF UPDATED.

To help them build their digital skills, you need to first strengthen your own. Get comfortable with privacy settings, safe search options, and parental controls. When you understand how to use these features, you become a trustworthy resource for them.

EMPOWER, DON'T JUST RESTRICT.

Banning devices usually fails and may lead children to conceal their online activities. Instead, focus on empowering them digitally. Discuss the concept of a digital footprint and emphasize that online actions have real-world effects. Teach caution when encountering suspicious links or attachments. Encourage exploration of safer, privacy-respecting alternatives to popular platforms.

SPEAK TO YOUR CHILD.

When something feels off with your child, start the dialogue before a crisis occurs. Ask open-ended questions like: *"Have you ever felt pressured to share a photo or information you didn't want to?"*; or *"What would you do if someone was being mean to you in a game lobby?"*; or *"Should we check our privacy settings together this weekend?"*.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

SEEK HELP AND SUPPORT.

You are not alone in this fight. If an issue becomes serious, such as grooming or persistent cyberbullying, reach out for professional help. School and authorities, helplines and communities can provide you with the assistance you and your kid(s) need.

CLR: CALM, LISTEN & REASSURE.

If your child comes to you with a problem, follow this simple 3-step approach.

CALM

When the truth feels overwhelming, take a deep breath. Reacting with anger or panic will make the door close.

LISTEN

Listen with an open mind and without judgment. Your goal isn't to fix it immediately, but to deeply understand.

REASSURE

Ensure your children know you're always there for them. Trust grows when they feel that their safety matters more than any punishment.

The Parent's Insight.

Safety is built on trust, not surveillance. Respecting your child's privacy while maintaining an "open door" policy, is the best firewall you can have. When you respect their space, they are much more likely to invite you into it when they feel unsafe.

05.


HOTLINES


If something goes wrong online, you don't have to handle it alone. The European Union provides specialized services for every type of digital risk.

 In the Netherlands

 [Centrum Seksueel Geweld](#)

 [Meldknop](#)


 [OffLimits](#)

 [Safer Internet Centre](#)

 In Europe

 [BIK \(EU\)](#)

 [Child Helpline International](#)

 [International Association of Internet Hotlines \(INHOPE\)](#)

06.

ABOUT SOMI

The Foundation for Market Information Research (SOMI) is a **non-profit organization** established to identify and influence issues of social importance.

SOMI is a recognized claims foundation in the field of privacy and data autonomy and is committed, among other things, to the **protection of the fundamental rights of consumers and minors who use various online services.**

SOMI investigates abuses, informs the public and helps injured parties. SOMI does this by conducting **collective proceedings and claiming compensation.**

SOMI is currently investigating alleged GDPR violations by TikTok, Meta (Instagram and Facebook) and X (formerly Twitter).









With the app that SOMI has developed, we want to restore ownership and control over your (minor's) personal data.

All your Data. all yours.










07.

SOURCES

-  [1] Entertainment, Communication, Education, Creativity and Service are the main opportunities and benefits offered by the Internet nowadays. What are the risks my child might face online? (n.d.). Better Internet for Kids.
-  [2] Protecting children from violence and exploitation in relation to the digital environment. (2024). UNICEF.
-  [3] Children in the digital environment. (n.d.). OECD.
-  [4] Eurostat. (2025, July 15). 97% of young people in the EU use the internet daily. Eurostat.
-  [5] Global Cybersecurity Index 2024: 5th Edition. (2024). In ITUPublications. International Telecommunication Union Development Sector.
-  [6] Protecting children online. (n.d.). UNICEF for Every Child.
-  [7] Protecting Children in Online Gaming: Mitigating Risks from Organized Violence. (2025). In UNICEF. UNICEF Innocenti.
-  [8] Vargas-Madriz & Others (2026). Navigating an evolving digital world. In A. Schleicher (Ed.), PISA 2029 Media and Artificial Intelligence Literacy (MAIL) Assessment Framework.

SOURCES

-  [9] On the topic: Statista. (2025, December 16). Instagram: CSAM content removal Q2 2019-Q3 2025; Statista. (2025a, December 16). Facebook: CSAM content removal as of Q3 2025; and Negreiro, M. & European Parliamentary Research Service. (2022). Combating child sexual abuse online. In EU Legislation in Progress (Report PE 738.224; p. 2). European Parliamentary Research Service.
-  [10] One day this could happen to me (By Dame Rachel de Souza). (2025).
-  [11] Artificial Intelligence and Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. (2026). In UNICEF.
-  [12] Car, P., Filippo Casseti, & Members' Research Service. (2025). Regulating dark patterns in the EU: Towards digital fairness. In EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service (Report PE 767.191). European Union.
-  [13] Algorithms. (n.d.). Better Internet for Kids.
-  [14] Commercial exploitation through addictive design: respecting children's rights and safeguarding their protection online – a balancing act. (n.d.). Better Internet for Kids.
-  [15] parentzone.org.uk. (n.d.). Short changed and out of time. In parentzone.org.uk.

SOURCES



[16] Algorithms. (n.d.). Better Internet for Kids.



[17] Online Privacy checklist for parents: How to protect your child's identity and personal information online. (n.d.). UNICEF for Every Child.



✉ welcome@somi.nl

☎ +31 10 310 5257

CIC Rotterdam
Groot Handelsgebouw
Stationsplein 45, unit A4.004
3013 AK Rotterdam The Netherlands

KvK: 66169208
RSIN: 856425205
IBAN: NL79 BUNQ 2066 6319 49