



5 Critical Gaps Hiding in Your Back-to-School Digital Safety Plan

As the 2025 school year begins, districts face familiar yet increasingly complex challenges. Social media conflicts are escalating into physical incidents, while student mental health continues declining due to constant online engagement.

This year brings heightened stakes with AI introducing new dangers — from AI-generated explicit content to sophisticated grooming tactics.

Bark works with over 3,600 schools and helps protect 7 million students across the U.S. navigating these realities. Here are the most important emerging challenges as well as actionable solutions to support your staff, students, and community this fall.

THE PRIMARY ISSUE:

Online safety remains difficult to manage

Tech moves faster than regulation

By the time a restriction is in place, a new platform, feature, or workaround has emerged. Reaction-based policies can't keep pace.

Adults are under-aware and under-prepared

Many parents assume “not my kid” or lack understanding of how online life impacts mental health and career. Without parent partnership, district efforts can only go so far.

Restricting isn't teaching

Today's kids will live in a dual world where digital spaces shape their education, relationships, and identity. Bans alone can't prepare them — students need guidance to navigate an ever-evolving tech landscape safely and responsibly.

The 5 critical gaps and how your organization can address them

1 Online conflict persists, even with bans

The challenge: Phone bans may reduce disruption in the classroom, but most damaging activity — bullying, sextortion, and grooming — occur after hours. These threats will still impact school resources, safety, and attendance.



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What we're doing: Bark is supporting schools with tools to help engage parents early. This includes hands-on training for both parents and kids around the time when a student receives a phone, as well as ongoing resources to build healthy tech habits at home.

What you can do:

- Partner with parents through tech nights and education events.
- Share tools like Bark's [Cell Phone Management Kit for Parents](#).
- Help families build tech cultures that reflect your district's safety goals.

2 Kids don't just need protection — they need skills

The challenge: Telling students what **not** to do doesn't equip them for the digital world they live in. They need critical thinking and real-life decision-making tools.

What we're doing: Bark integrates skill-building lessons in our digital safety trainings, from spotting AI deception to understanding data privacy.

What you can do: Teach students how to:

- **Recognize emotional manipulation:** AI can mimic friends, celebrities, and authority figures to influence behavior — often using flattery, urgency, or guilt to manipulate.
- **Understand data privacy risks:** Many AI tools collect and store what users type — which can include personal details, private thoughts, and even sensitive photos.
- **Spot the false sense of security:** AI can be helpful, but it's not always accurate, ethical, or safe. Teach students to verify, question, and critically evaluate anything AI-generated.

3 Mental health crises are an inevitable factor

The challenge: The emotional toll of digital life is constant and invisible. Likes, comments, and messages carry emotional weight long after students log off.

What we're doing:

- Partnering with **Talkspace** to connect kids with Bark Phones that come pre-loaded with mental health resources.

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- Learning from our monitoring customers how Bark alerts districts to certain behavioral insights, allowing them to provide help sooner.
- Embedding SEL in digital citizenship training.

What you can do:

- **Build digital resilience:** Teach students how to manage online rejection, comparison, and stress, emphasizing brain-based instruction.
- **Strengthen SEL for the digital world:** Apply empathy and decision-making to online experiences.
- **Acknowledge 24/7 exposure:** Students need strategies to unplug and reset.

4 Resilience > reactive safety lessons

The challenge: Safety curriculum is outdated in months. Reactive programs can't keep up with how fast tech — and risk — evolves.

What we're doing: Bark has shifted focus to real-life examples and underlying root causes. Our curriculum goes beyond today's threats to help students build lasting digital resilience — an essential skill for success

in a post-secondary world. The hands-on training in our **Connected Communities** digital curriculum is designed to support a lifetime of ethical, responsible internet use.

What you can do:

- **Invest in protective factors:**
 - Support trusted adult relationships.
 - De-stigmatize help-seeking.
 - Start conversations earlier before problems start.
- **Teach values, not just tactics:** Equip students to navigate whatever tech comes next.

5 Digital and physical worlds have fully merged

The challenge: Students no longer separate their online and offline selves. Conflict travels seamlessly across both — and educators may not see it coming since digital behavior is more difficult to observe.

What we're doing:

- Emphasizing ethical use, not just etiquette, in digital citizenship content.
- Training educators to recognize digital-origin challenges.



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- Advocating for earlier and deeper instruction on identity, values, and behavior.

Learn more about our new on-site, collaborative digital citizenship program available for 4th and 5th graders this fall.

What you can do:

- **Train staff:** Recognize signs of digital conflict and emotional distress.
- **Model conversations:** Show kids how to talk about online harm and ask for help.
- **Acknowledge dual worlds:** Digital life *is* life — start teaching it that way.

OUTCOMES THAT LAST:

Online safety remains difficult to manage

When we align efforts across school and home, shift from restriction to preparation, and support digital resilience — not just compliance — we build safer, stronger communities. We also unlock better academic performance and healthier emotional development.

Want help training your staff or bringing parents on board in 2025?

Let's talk. Bark can support your district with ready-to-use resources, hands-on workshops, and a partner-first approach.

Contact us at:
sales@bark.us
or scan the QR
code below to
learn more:

