

Cyber safety



Being online is part of everyday life for many children and young people. There's lots of great information and resources for playing, learning and socialising. There are real risks too. The best way to keep children safe is by staying actively involved in their digital world. You don't have to be an expert. Knowing where to find things out is what's important.

Keeping children safe

Parents/caregivers play an important role in the online safety of children and young people. Helping them develop social and emotional skills and positive relationships can contribute to a healthy, rewarding experience.

Talking about what they are doing online and showing a genuine interest helps keep them safe. Discuss how things work and solve problems together. Let them know they can come to you if anything is worrying them or they feel uncomfortable.

Family technology use

As with other areas of life children need boundaries and limits to help keep them safe as they grow and learn. You could discuss as a family how you will use technology and develop a family technology plan - there are many examples online. You may agree on things like:

- using devices only in open areas of your home – children are safer when you know what they are doing
- keeping devices out of bedrooms after 'lights out' – they can interfere with sleep and increase online risks
- no phones at mealtimes or other social occasions
- having regular technology-free time
- balancing screen use with plenty of physical activity, socialising and other interests.

Children learn by copying adults. Remember to model safe and healthy use of technology yourself. They are quick to see a double standard.

Setting up safe use

One way to have safer and healthier use is through software and settings that filter unsuitable content and let you choose when and for how long a device can be used. For example you can enable Google SafeSearch on all devices (including smart TVs) and parental controls on gaming consoles and streaming services such as YouTube, Netflix or AppleTV. If you decide to use these controls discuss this with your child/young person and explain why. Involving them in these decisions helps keep communication open and builds trust.

Using these tools can reduce the chance of your child or young person seeing inappropriate content but it is not guaranteed. They can encounter concerning content through peers at school, on public transport, at playdates, sleepovers and other social events. The use of these tools in addition to ongoing conversations will have the best results.

No software can completely guarantee children's safety. Your active involvement and building a trusting relationship is very important.

Learning safety skills

Children and young people need to learn online safety skills. Help them know:

- to question what they see online and realise not everything is real. You might ask 'Why are they doing that?', 'What would happen if they did that in real life?'
- people online may not be who they say they are

- the difference between information which shouldn't be shared online, eg name, address and other information which could be shared with friends, eg hobbies
- what they put online is not private and may be seen and used by people it is not intended for, eg family, friends, current or future employers
- sharing sensitive personal information, even with a friend could make them more vulnerable to bullying. They lose control over who sees it even if it is deleted, expires or 'disappears'
- how to screen, block and report unwanted contacts
- to use a PIN, access code or facial recognition on their devices so if these are lost or stolen others can't send texts or images to contact lists
- to have complex passwords, change them often and never share them with friends
- the risks of 'geolocation' or 'checking-in' functions that identify their location. These can be limited or disabled
- to tell you or another trusted adult if they've seen inappropriate content
- how to and where they can get help if they need it. The services listed on the back of this Guide are a good place to start.

Encourage regard for others by teaching them:

- to be kind and respectful in every communication
- to pause before posting anything to make sure it is respectful – they are still learning to self-regulate
- it is better to have difficult conversations in person.

As they get older your young person can develop a positive 'digital identity'. When well-managed this can showcase skills and creativity.

Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying includes posting embarrassing or damaging information, images or videos, sending hurtful messages or spreading gossip. It can happen anytime day or night, escalate quickly and involve a lot of people. Many children and young people do not tell their parents because they are afraid they will overreact and make things worse.

If there is cyber bullying:

- show you understand what this means for your child or young person. It can have a big impact emotionally, socially and sometimes physically. Reassure them it can be dealt with and you will support them

- do not say you will take their phone or device away. They may hide the bullying from you and removing devices can cut them off from supportive friends and services, eg Kids Helpline, eSafety Commissioner
- collect evidence of the bullying before deleting or blocking – take screen shots, print pages, save videos, note web addresses. Do not respond, this can often make things worse
- report it to the site or service. If they do not remove it within 24 hours the eSafety Commissioner can help to have it removed
- report it to the school if it is by another student. Keep a written record of contact with the school
- don't confront the person or people responsible. This can make things worse
- report serious threats to your local police. Cyber bullying could be against the law.

Help children and young people:

- have other responsible adults to talk to if they don't want to tell you
- seek support if they are very upset. School counsellors, the Kids Helpline or eheadspace are good places to start
- know how to support a friend who is bullied. If this happens, encourage them to seek help from a trusted adult. It can be a big emotional load to carry alone.
- know what to do if they have bullied someone - see Parent Easy Guide 'Bullying'.

If there is bullying work with your child to deal with the situation rather than take away their device. This can cut them off from friends and online support services. They can feel as though they are the one being punished.

Social media

Connecting with friends and others is very important to children and young people. They can spend a lot of time on social networking sites and apps such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Discord or TikTok. Most require users to be over 13 years of age. This is for legal reasons and does not mean children this age have the maturity to cope with social media. They do not require proof of age. If you provide access for a child under 13 years it is important to supervise their use as there can be many risks.

Encourage your child or young person to:

- communicate with others on social media in a respectful, kind way
- set privacy settings so their profile is only seen by people they intend, and check settings often
- decide whether to use a nickname, avatar or an image of something they like instead of their photo
- let you view their profile and ‘friend’ you or accept you as a ‘follower’. Explain your reasons
- realise most messages and images they share can be accessed, saved, manipulated and distributed by others. Personal information may be misused or their identity stolen
- get permission from friends and others before putting photos of them online and ‘tagging’ them. ‘Tagging’ provides information about the person’s activities and creates a link to their profile they may not want. They could ask their friends to do the same for them
- ensure geolocation data is turned off and metadata not embedded when sharing photos
- understand the risks of ‘friending’ people, accepting ‘followers’ or ‘chatting’ with people they don’t know in real life. They may not be who they say they are and intend harm. This is called ‘catfishing’
- learn how to report abuse or inappropriate content
- tell you or another trusted adult if anything concerns them. Assure them they won’t be punished or have devices taken away. Remind them to collect evidence before blocking or deleting offending material
- understand there may be consequences if they engage in bullying behaviours.

Some young people may set up decoy or fake accounts parents are not aware of - reasons could include wanting to hide their online activities or to anonymously cyberbully someone.

It can help to set up your own social networking accounts so you know how they work. Keep talking to your child/young person and check in regularly about their online world.

Online grooming

Online grooming is when someone makes, or attempts to make, online contact with someone under 17 years for any type of sexual purpose (or under 18 years when the other person is in a position of authority). This is a crime.

Help children and young people understand the importance of:

- only talking online with people they know and trust; not responding to any request to communicate more privately, share excessive personal information or engage in sexual conversations
- telling you or another trusted adult straight away if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or sends them something sexual, even if it is someone they know
- not listing a webcam in their profile
- never accepting gifts or agreeing to meet online friends without you.

If you think your child is in danger contact the police. You could also report any concerns to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation.

The most important thing is that children know what to do if something worries them, or they are asked to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable. If you think your child is in danger call the police immediately.

Sharing sexual images

Children or young people may not realise the harm sending sexual texts, images or videos ('nudes' or 'sexts') can cause to themselves and others.

Help them understand:

- they may lose control over who sees it, even if they only send it to a friend
- it can have a big impact on mental health and wellbeing.

In South Australia it is illegal to make, share, request, access or have sexual images, videos or other depictions of themselves or others who are (or seem to be) under 17 years. This includes real or fictional depictions such as cartoons, digitally altered or AI-generated images or videos.

Sharing, or threatening to share, intimate images or videos without consent in order to shame or humiliate someone is also an offence. This is 'image-based abuse'. It is also an offence to film or share images of someone being humiliated or degraded, such as in a school yard fight, without their consent. You can report it to the police, ReportCyber at cyber.gov.au or the eSafety Commissioner at esafety.gov.au. The eSafety Commissioner can help have it removed and may also take action against the person involved.

If any of these things happen to your child or young person reassure them it can be dealt with. They will need extra care and support from you.

If your child tells you they have shared/posted an image of someone without their consent reassure them they were right to let you know and that you will support them to resolve the problem responsibly. Depending on the nature of the post it may be helpful to get legal advice. If it involves students at your child's school it may help for you and your child to discuss this with a school leader, counsellor or your child's teacher.

The eSafety Commissioner website has many resources for parents if you're not sure what to do.

Pornography

Children and young people can come across pornography by accident or by searching for it. Parental controls on devices can reduce the risk.

- If your child has come across it stay calm, talk about what happened and be aware of how they may feel. Answer their questions honestly and appropriately for their age and stage of development. Problem-solve together.
- Young people need to understand pornography is not real life and can change how they view healthy sexual relationships. Talk about respectful relationships and discourage them from viewing it.

Games and apps

Games and apps can be lots of fun and great educational tools that build skills and a sense of achievement. Recent studies show many children and young people would like their parents/carers to play online games with them and understand the benefits they get from them.

- Learn about the games they are playing and help them find new ones that match their interests and skills.
- Free games often have a lot of advertising. It can be hard for young children to tell the difference between advertising and the game.
- Sometimes children and young people can be exposed to inappropriate content in pop-up ads in free games.
- Many have in-app purchasing which can cause bill shock for parents. Prevent this by installing parental controls and not saving credit card details on devices you share. The eSafety Commissioner website has information about in-app purchasing.
- Games are designed with 'hooks' that challenge children and young people just enough, and the positive feelings from small wins can keep them playing a long time. This can lead to gaming addiction. Help them balance their screen time with other activities. Time spent playing games can mean less time doing slower, more mentally demanding tasks such as reading, playing board games or being physically active.
- If you are concerned about your child's mental health seek support from a mental health professional. It can help to do this before you decide to restrict access as this may impact their wellbeing.

Gambling risk

Games and apps can imitate gambling or have gambling strategies embedded. There are no warnings as gambling content does not require classification in the same way as violence or sexual material. Exposure to simulated gambling at a young age can groom children for gambling and make it more likely they will gamble when older. They can think gambling is based on skill rather than chance and believe the more they play the better they will get, just as they do in other games. This is reinforced when games make it easier to win than in real-life gambling.



Parents can:

- help children recognise gambling and understand how it works
- avoid gambling in front of children and not engage in gambling as a family
- check the 'No Game' and 'Australian Council on Children and the Media' websites for the gambling content of games.

Violence

Games with graphic violent or sexual content have been linked to emotional problems, particularly in younger children who are not able to fully understand what is real and what isn't.

Violent games put children at risk of:

- thinking it's OK to be aggressive or behave inappropriately
 - being insensitive to others and desensitised to violence
 - becoming anxious of their world
 - increased angry feelings, thoughts and behaviour.
- Players can identify with a violent character and think their behaviour is OK. When violent behaviour is rewarded it is more likely to be repeated and to increase.

You could:

- check the game's classification and reviews
- not allow 'first person shooter' games where the player is the aggressor
- restrict games where characters are mutilated or killed or where there is sexual violence
- play games with children and note their reactions. Do they become aggressive, frightened or upset? Ask what they like about the game and their favourite character. Help them question whether the behaviour would be OK in real life
- install parental controls to restrict the duration and timing of play and access to games with specific age ratings. Explain your reasons for doing this.

Lead by example and don't play violent games in front of children. You may need to be firm when limiting violent games as some children like these the most.

Multi-player online games

Young people often enjoy multi-player online games. They can play with friends and meet new people anywhere in the world.

You could:

- remind young people not to share private information
- monitor when they play. Some happen in different time zones which can mean young people are playing when they should be sleeping. Using rapid-fire games can also cause hyperarousal of the brain and make it harder to pay attention at school and fall asleep at night.

Problematic game use

It can be hard to know whether a child or young person's gaming is becoming a problem. Some signs include:

- it affecting their school or social life, health or wellbeing
- becoming isolated and preoccupied with gaming
- being anxious when not playing and losing interest in friends and other activities.

It can help to:

- look at what else is happening in their life to see why games have become so important
- keep communication open, eg asking what they like about the games
- seek help early from a psychologist specialising in cyberpsychology and/or addiction.

It can be hard for children and young people to limit or stop playing games without help. They may want to talk with a counsellor or contact the Kids Helpline or eheadspace.





Want more information?

Support for young people

Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 551 800 anytime

Information and free phone or online counselling for anyone aged 5 to 25

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

Headspace

Information and free, confidential support for anyone aged 12-25

To talk face to face find your local centre at <https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/>

Call 1800 650 890 to talk by phone or chat online at www.eHeadSpace.org.au

Youth Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636 anytime, chat online 3pm-12am

Support for young people feeling depressed or anxious www.youthbeyondblue.com

ReachOut

Information for young people and their parents, including on cyber bullying and safety

<https://au.reachout.com>

Youth Law Australia

A free and confidential legal advice, assistance and referral service for young people and their advocates <https://yla.org.au/>

Cyber safety

eSafety Commissioner

Online safety information and to report cyberbullying www.esafety.gov.au

Beacon Cyber Safety App

Information for parents to help keep children and young people safe online

<https://beacon.telethonkids.org.au/>

Alannah & Madeline Foundation

eSmart resources for parents www.alannahandmadeline.org.au/

ThinkUKnow

Information for parents on children's digital safety and to report online grooming

www.thinkuknow.org.au

Take It Down

A free service to help remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude or sexually explicit images or videos taken when a young person was under 18 years

<https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/>

Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation

Information for parents and to report online child sexual exploitation

www.accce.gov.au

ReportCyber – Australian Cyber Security Centre

A national site for reporting cybercrime www.cyber.gov.au/report

Google Safety Centre

Online safety tips for parents, including Google SafeSearch <https://safety.google/families>

No Game – Government of South Australia

Information on simulated gambling in games www.nogame.com.au

Department for Education

Information for families and students on cyber safety, bullying and harassment

www.education.sa.gov.au

Bullying no way

Information and resources, including for children of all ages www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Reviews/ratings - apps, movies, games

Children and Media Australia

Information about children and media and app review service 'Know before you load'

www.childrenandmedia.org.au

Common Sense Media

A USA site with reviews of movies, games and apps www.commonsensemedia.org

Australian Classification

Classification ratings for movies and games www.classification.gov.au

Parenting

Raising Children Network

Information about raising children, including online safety www.raisingchildren.net.au

Families Growing Together

Free 'Cyber safety' workshops for parents <https://dhs.sa.gov.au/how-we-help/child-and-family-support-system-cfss/family-support-services/families-growing-together/families-growing-together-workshops>

Parenting SA

For other Parent Easy Guides including 'Safe screen use', 'Television' and 'Protecting children from sexual abuse'

For videos 'Children, teens and pornography' (Dr Justin Coulson), 'Simple steps for cyber safety' and 'Managing screen time' (Kristy Goodwin) www.parenting.sa.gov.au



Government of
South Australia

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

© Government of South Australia.

Revised: 04/2024.