Online safety

A guide for parents and carers

eSafetyparents

esafety.gov.au/parents

Online safety for parents and carers

As parents and carers you know your child better than anyone and have the best opportunity to support and guide them to have safer online experiences. This guide covers some of the key online safety issues for young people and includes a range of practical tips and advice on what to do if things go wrong. You can also find a list of important services that can offer extra support.

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Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to bully a person or group with the intent to hurt them socially, psychologically or even physically.

What does cyberbullying look like?

Examples of cyberbullying include:

- abusive texts and emails
- hurtful messages, images or videos
- imitating, excluding or humiliating others online
- spreading nasty online gossip and chat
- creating fake accounts in someone's name to trick or humiliate them

Online bullying can have a devastating impact on young people, whose online life is a key part of their identity and how they interact socially.

I think my child is being bullied

Your child may not tell you if they are experiencing bullying behaviour online because of a fear it might make things worse for them or they may lose access to their devices and the internet.

Signs to watch for:

- being upset after using the internet or their mobile phone
- changes in personality, becoming more withdrawn, anxious, sad or angry
- appearing more lonely or distressed
- unexpected changes in friendship groups
- a decline in their school work
- changes in their sleep patterns
- avoidance of school or clubs
- a decline in their physical health
- becoming secretive about their online activities and mobile phone use

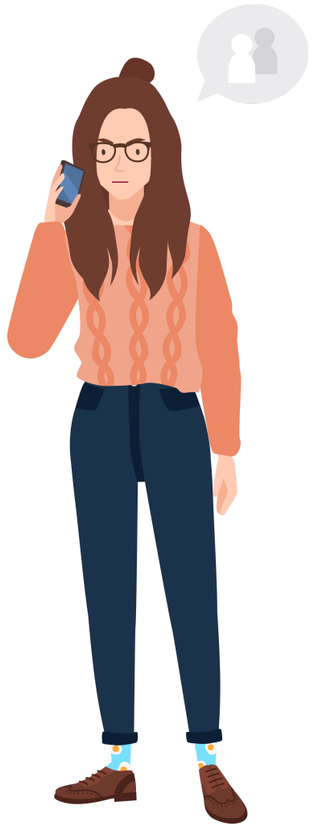
Cyberbullying

What can I do?

Talk to your child about cyberbullying before it happens. Together you can work out strategies to address any potential issues and reassure them you will be there to support them.

If your child is experiencing cyberbullying:

- **Listen, think, stay calm** — talk to them about what happened, try to remain open and non-judgemental, ask them how they feel and ensure they feel heard.
- **Collect evidence** — it is a good idea to collect evidence, such as screenshots, of the bullying behaviour, in case you need to report it later on.
- **Block and manage contact with others** — advise your child not to respond to bullying messages and help your child block or unfriend the person sending the messages.
- **Report to site or service** — many social media services, games, apps and websites allow you to report abusive content and request that it is removed.
- **Report to eSafety** — if serious cyberbullying is affecting your child and you need help to get the material removed from a social media service or other platform you can make a cyberbullying report to us.
- **Get help and support** — check in with your child regularly about how they are feeling. If you notice any changes that concern you, get help through a counselling or online support service.



Online pornography

Your child may discover online pornography unintentionally, or they may go looking for it. Either way, you can play a role.

How do kids find pornography online?

- Your child may actively search for explicit content online, out of curiosity or perhaps because their friends are talking about it.
- A friend or sibling (or an adult) may share inappropriate content.
- Your child may accidentally type the wrong word or phrase into an internet search or click on a link to something that looks interesting but turns out to be pornographic.
- They might click on links in phishing or spam emails, and pop-ups (even on harmless websites).

How can I protect my child?

- **Set some 'house rules'** — discuss the issue with all siblings and talk about where and when it is OK to use computers and devices.
- **Stay engaged** — talking regularly and openly with your child about what they are doing online will help build trust.
- **Use the available technology** — take advantage of the parental controls available on devices, and ensure the 'safe search' mode is enabled on browsers.
- **Build resilience** — talking about sexualised content can help young people process what they come across online and reinforce the importance of consent and respectful relationships.
- **Consider raising the subject of pornography yourself** — parenting experts recommend starting the conversation early (by the time they are around 9 years old) to help protect them from the potential impacts of coming across it accidentally. Every child is different, so decide when you think it is right to raise the subject with your child

Online pornography

- **Take a long-term view** — reinforce that if they do see something they do not understand, they can come and ask you about it.

For teenagers, the most important message is that pornography is not real life.

What can I do if my child has found pornography online?

- **Stay calm** — thank them for being brave enough to let you know and reassure them that you will sort it out together.
- **Listen, assess, pause** — ask them how they found it, where it happened, who (if anyone) showed it to them and how they felt when they saw it. Resist the urge to give them a lecture.
- **Reassure your child they are not in trouble** — try not to remove your child's device or online access completely, as they will see it as punishment.
- **Be sensitive to how they feel** — it is important to talk with your child about how the content made them feel. Encourage your child to talk to you about any questions they have.
- **Talk about the importance of consent and respect in relationships** — talk about the importance of always having permission to touch, hug, or kiss another person.

Further tips and advice about how to talk to your child about online pornography, depending on their age, are available on our website.

Sending nudes and sexting

It is important to talk with your children about the possible consequences of sending or sharing intimate images.

What are the risks?

Sharing intimate images may seem like a bit of fun or innocent flirting for young people, particularly those in a relationship. But things can go wrong and it is important your child understands this.

- **They lose control of the image** — once an image is shared, it can be copied and saved by others, shared with people the sender does not know and posted on social media and public websites.
- **Things can go wrong even in a trusted relationship** — a friend or partner may, on impulse and without thinking, share an image more broadly than the sender intended.
- **Images may not always be sent willingly** — young people may be forced or pressured into sending explicit images or videos.
- **The consequences can be serious** — for young people it could result in humiliation, bullying, teasing, harassment, damage to their reputation, and criminal charges or penalties.

The term 'sexting' is not often used by young people or in popular culture. Young people are more likely to refer to 'nudes'.

Sending nudes and sexting

How can I minimise the risks to my child?

- **Talk early, talk often** — have an age-appropriate chat with them about sending nudes. Consider asking questions using real-life examples like, ‘Do you think it was right for him (or her) to share that photo after they broke up?’
- **Promote self-confidence and that it is OK to say ‘no'** — let them know that they don’t have to give in to peer pressure or send intimate images just because others do.
- **Teach them about consent and respectful relationships** — help them understand the impact of sharing intimate images of others and that they are breaking someone’s trust when they do this.
- **Talk about the risks** — what can go wrong and the legal issues. Remind them that once an image is shared, it is almost impossible to get it back or control how it is shared.

What can I do when things go wrong?

- **Stay calm and open** — reassure them that they are not alone and you will work through this together.
- **Listen, and act fast** — there can be legal issues when intimate images of children are shared. You can report image-based abuse to eSafety. We can help to get intimate images removed and, in some cases, take action against the person who shared it. See more detailed advice on what to do and how to make a report on our website. You can also report the image to the site or service it was posted on.
- **Get help and support** — look after your child’s wellbeing and encourage them to speak with a professional counselling or support service.

Time online

Help your child achieve a healthy balance in their online and offline activities.

How much is too much?

There is no magic figure. The right amount of screen time can depend on a range of factors like your child's age and maturity, the kind of content they are consuming, their learning needs and your family routine.

It can be easy to focus only on the clock, but the quality and nature of what they are doing online, and your involvement, are just as important.

Signs to watch for:

- less interest in social activities like meeting friends or playing sport
- not doing so well at school
- tiredness, sleep disturbance, headaches, eye strain
- changes in eating patterns
- reduced personal hygiene
- obsession with particular websites or games
- extreme anger when being asked to take a break from online activity
- appearing anxious or irritable when away from the computer
- becoming withdrawn from friends and family

Reducing your own screen time sets a positive example.

Time online

Help your child manage their online time

- **Stay engaged and encourage balance** — keep an eye on the games, apps and devices your child uses by sharing screen time with them. Help them stay aware of their important offline activities, like hobbies and sports.
- **Create a plan** — involve your child in creating a family plan that balances time spent sitting in front of screens, with a variety of offline activities.
- **Use the available technologies** — parental controls and tools to monitor online time allow you to measure and set time limits on device use or internet access. But be honest and open with your children about why you want to use these technologies.

Online gaming

Online games can be great fun for your child, but make sure you can help them manage the risks.

What are the benefits and risks?

Many games can improve your child's coordination, problem-solving and multi-tasking skills, as well as help build social skills through online interactivity with other players. But it is important to understand what might go wrong.

Risks of online gaming include:

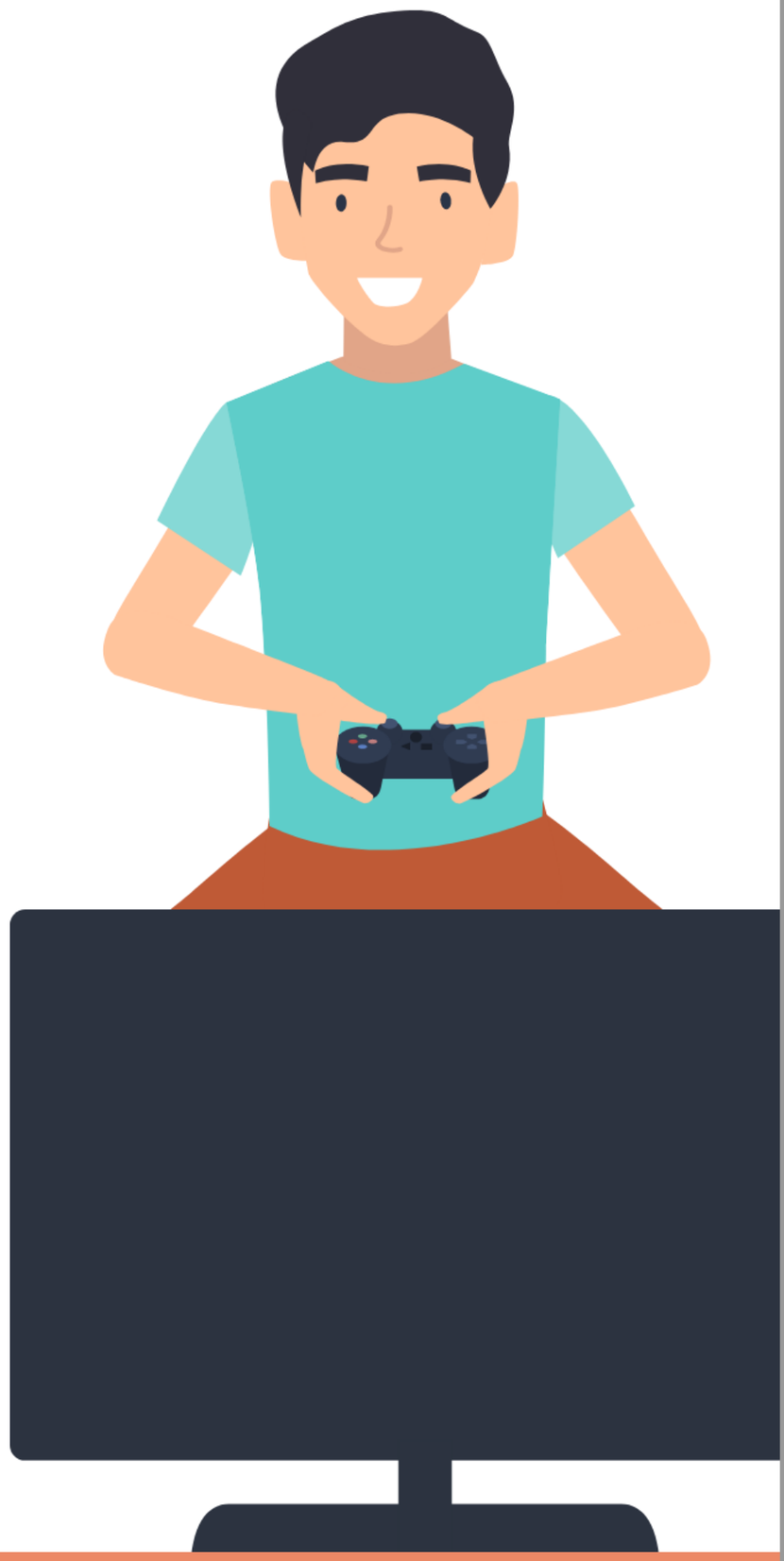
- spending too much time gaming, which can have negative impacts on your child's health, ability to study, and social and emotional wellbeing
- bullying and grooming through online or in-game chat
- games with gambling-like elements can normalise gambling for young people
- costs of in-game spending

How to create a safer gaming environment for your child

- **Prepare** — locate the computer or games console in an open area of your home and use available parental controls and safety features for devices, browsers and apps.
- **Build good habits** — help your child protect their personal information by using a screen name that does not reveal their real name. Teach them not to click on links provided by strangers, like 'cheat' programs to help with game play, which can contain viruses or malware.
- **Agree on strategies to help them switch off** — like a timer that signals game time is nearly over, with consequences for not switching off.
- **Stay involved** — talk regularly with your child about their gaming interests and who they play with online. Play alongside your child to get a better sense of how they are handling their personal information and who they are communicating with.

Online gaming

- **Be aware of what they are playing** — games vary in their level of violent or sexual content, and may contain themes, language and images that are unsuitable for your child.
- **Empower your child** — wherever possible, help them make wise decisions for themselves, rather than tell them what to do. Try to provide them with strategies for dealing with negative online experiences that will build their confidence and resilience.



Unwanted contact and grooming

Socialising online can be a great way for children to build friendships, but it can also put them at risk.

How to deal with unwanted contact

Unwanted contact is any type of online communication that your child finds unpleasant or confronting, or that leads them into a situation where they might do something they regret. This can happen even if they initially welcomed the contact. It can come from strangers, online 'friends' your child has not met face-to-face, or from someone they actually know.

- **Make their accounts private** — suggest that your child makes their social media accounts private or revises their privacy settings regularly.
- **Delete contacts they don't talk to** — ask them to go through all the people who follow them or are friends with them on social media and check that they actually know them.
- **Report and block** — if they receive any unwanted contact from someone they know or a stranger, encourage them to report and block this person.
- **Delete requests from strangers** — encourage your child to delete friend or follow requests from people they don't know.

How does online grooming work?

Grooming involves building a relationship with a child in order to sexually abuse them. This abuse can happen in a physical meeting, but it increasingly occurs online when young people are tricked or persuaded into sexual activity on webcams or into sending sexual images.

Unwanted contact and grooming

How can I protect my child?

- **Stay involved in your child's digital world** — keep up-to-date with the sites, apps and online chat services they are using, and explore them together.
- **Build an open trusting relationship** — keep communication open and calm so they know they can come to you when someone is asking them to do something that does not feel right.
- **Help your child to protect their privacy** — encourage your child to use their privacy settings on social media sites to restrict their online information to known friends only.
- **Teach your child to be alert to signs of inappropriate contact** — help your child recognise signs that an online 'friend' may be trying to develop an inappropriate relationship, such as asking lots of questions about personal information soon after meeting online, asking which room their computer is in, asking them for favours and doing things in return (abusers often use promises and gifts to gain trust).
- **Establish safety guidelines for meeting online 'friends' face-to-face** — explain that it is safest to keep online 'friends' online, but that if they do want to meet someone face-to-face they should let you know first. Let them know they should be accompanied by you or another trusted adult.
- **What to do if something goes wrong** — talk to them without being judgemental or angry and make them feel like they can come to you with anything, without fear of being punished or criticised. Find out what happened and act to protect your child. Call the police immediately on Triple Zero (000) if their physical safety is as risk. Report abuse or online grooming to your local police or Crimestoppers. Get help and support for your child from a professional counselling service.

Report abuse to us

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is online behaviour that is seriously threatening, intimidating, harassing or humiliating. We can take action to get serious cyberbullying material removed, and provide advice, support and assistance.

Image-base abuse

We can help to get the intimate images or video removed and, in some cases, take action against the person who shared it. We can also help with sextortion, or where someone is blackmailing you over your intimate images.

CyberReport

Child sexual abuse material

We investigate complaints from Australian residents and law enforcement agencies about offensive and illegal online content.

Help and resources

Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline provides free and confidential online and phone counselling to young people aged 5 to 25. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

kidshelpline.com.au or 1800 55 1800.

eHeadspace

eheadspace provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 - 25 and their families and friends. It is available 9am to 1am (Melbourne time), 7 days a week.

eheadpsace.org.au or 1800 650 890

Support for parents

Each state or territory has a dedicated Parentline that offers counselling, information and a referral service. Opening hours vary by state.

Parentline (QLD and NT) — 1300 30 1300

Parentline (VIC) — 13 22 89

Parentline (NSW) —1300 1300 52

Parent Helpline (SA) — 1300 364 100

Parentline (ACT) — 02 6287 3833

Parent Line (TAS) — 1300 808 178

Parenting WA Line (WA) — 08 6279 1200 or 1800 654 432

Help and resources

Support for schools

Many schools have detailed policies and procedures in place to help support children online, including how to manage issues like cyberbullying, sexting and other online concerns.

The Departments of Education in each state have policies and information for students, teachers, parents and the broader community on the appropriate use of technology. For more information, contact your child's school.

Australian Government

eSafetyCommissioner

esafety.gov.au/parents