



How predators trick children - what parents need to know

Unmasking the online predator

Social engineering is how predators use natural human behaviour to trick someone into doing something they wouldn't normally do.

Sometimes they can do this without the target knowing they have been tricked.

These predators are masters of disguise. They can pretend to be someone a child knows or might try to make friends with them in a game. Sometimes they pretend to be an authority figure. We know that children often feel like they know the person, which means they might not see them as dangerous and therefore might not think they are a predator. We refer to these people as **dodgy tricksters** instead of predators. The term dodgy tricksters can help children see that someone could be tricking them by pretending to be someone else.

These dodgy tricksters use social engineering tactics against children, adults and businesses. They try to access a wide range of things such as child exploitation material, personal information, money or data. The tactics they use can work on all sorts of people – young people, older people, people who speak different languages, and people who live in other countries - Dodgy tricksters can trip anyone up.

By talking about the social engineering tactics that dodgy tricksters use, we can help children notice when someone is using them online. Teaching children what to look for will help them be sceptical and savvy online.

Six key ways how predators are masters of disguise

1. Giving and getting

A gift makes people feel good about the person who gave it to them, and it also creates a sense of duty to pay back the favour somehow. People are more likely to say yes to someone if they feel that they owe them something.

What it looks like: Dodgy tricksters do this to make themselves seem likeable and make children more likely to agree to their requests.

Someone who gives them:

- a valuable in-game currency, like gems
- vouchers they can use online
- online currency.

2. Experts or an authority

When someone looks credible, knowledgeable or appears to be in a position of power, children are more likely to do what is asked.

That is because children are taught not to question authority.

What it looks like: Someone who says they are:

- an expert (pro gamer, influencer)
- powerful (talent scout, brand ambassador, modelling agent).

3. Rare or special

People want things when they think something is limited or a special deal just for them.

What it looks like: An offer that the child thinks is rare or unique:

- an offer to model
- a chance to play in a game that is restricted to only the best players
- sharing a secret.

4. All about the likes

Humans are more likely to do things to please people we like. We like people who:

- are like us
- give us compliments
- co-operate with us.

What it looks like: Someone who:

- talks about the games, sites and apps the child likes
- compliments them about the things they care about (you know so much about gaming)
- plays co-operative games.

All this leads to the child dropping their guard, which makes them more likely to agree to do things for the dodgy trickster that they wouldn't normally do.

5. Consistency

People like to do what they said they would do and are more likely to agree to do something if they have already done it before. People also want to act in ways that match how they see themselves.

What it looks like: Dodgy tricksters will exploit this knowledge by starting small and then asking for more and more. For example, they might request a photo of a child's pet at the start of the friendship. Then they ask for another innocent photo from the child.

This makes the child feel like all the warnings about **not sending photos** don't apply to this person, 'they only want to see my pets so they can't be dodgy'.

Once the photo sending is established, it is easier for the dodgy trickster to exploit the child by asking for more personal photos.

They might also trick children by shaping the way that children see themselves. For example, they might compliment the child for taking risks and being **brave** and then use this to convince the child to do things they are not sure about, for example, '**c'mon, I thought you were a rebel.**'

6. Everyone else is doing it

People often copy what others are doing. If they feel **all their friends are doing it**, they may be more likely to accept behaviours and risks that they would not usually accept.

What it looks like: Dodgy tricksters make it look like these behaviours and risks are the social norm.

When unsure of how they should behave or react, children will look to what their peers are doing to help them find the answer.

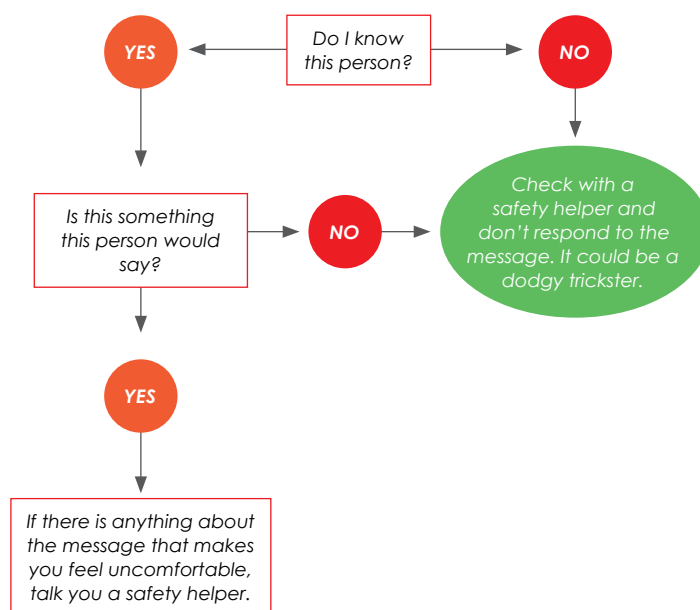
Some examples may include:

- everyone at school is doing live streaming
- you're old enough to do that, heaps of 12 year olds do
- did you see how many people watched that TikTok?

Promoting scepticism

Talk to your child about using a mental checklist whenever they are online.

Below is a flowchart that can help.



Need support of more information?

- If you believe a child is in danger call **Police 000**
- Resources to teach child safety skills to children and young people are available from the **Daniel Morcombe Foundation website**.

1300 326 435

DanielMorcombe.com.au