

Fact Sheet

Cybersafety



The internet can be a wonderful tool for children to learn, communicate with others and play games, but this isn't without risks. Children are accessing technology and the internet at a younger age than ever before. It's never too early to start chatting to your child about how to stay safe online. The key message is that if they ever see anything that makes them feel unsafe, worried or scared, then they should report to you or one of their safety helpers.

Unwanted contact and online grooming

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship with a child in order to later abuse them. Online grooming is the use of the internet to trick, force or pressure a young person into doing something sexual, like sending a naked video or image of themselves. The risk of online grooming increases if a child posts personal details, accepts contacts or 'friend' requests from people they do not know, responds to anonymous users, visits sites meant for adults or posts inappropriate photos or messages.

Dealing with unwanted contact

- Listen to what your child has to say and stay calm.
- Try to remain open and non-judgemental, check they are okay and ensure they feel listened to.
- Find out what has happened.
- Call the police immediately on triple zero (000) if their physical safety is at risk.
- Report unwanted contact and online grooming to the platform where the contact has occurred and your local police.
- For advice and support, contact Kids Helpline and Parentline.
- Try not to remove their devices as they will see this as punishment and then may be less likely to tell you if something happens in the future.

Online pornography

It's easier than ever before for children to view pornography online. A child may be intentionally searching for pornography, accidentally stumble across it as a result of another search or be shown something by a friend or sibling. For children, encountering pornography can be distressing and in some cases, pornography can have unhealthy consequences for young people. This could include exposure to violent or confusing messages about sexual behaviour, consent and gender stereotypes, as well as teaching misleading ideas about sex and intimate relationships.

What to do if your child has found online pornography

- Listen to what your child has to say and stay calm.
- Try to remain open and non-judgemental, check they are okay and ensure they feel listened to.
- Find out how they found the pornography, where it happened and how they felt when they saw it.
- Reassure your child that they are not in trouble.
- Try not to remove their devices as they will see this as punishment and then may be less likely to tell you if something happens in the future.
- Encourage your child to ask you any questions they may have.
- Use this opportunity to discuss with your child the importance of having consent to touch, hug or kiss another person and having respect for others.

Sending private images

Sharing private images, also known as 'sexting' or 'sending nudes' might seem like fun to young people but it is important they know that things can go wrong. Once an image sent, even if it is to someone they trust, it can be used and shared by others and posted on the internet for anyone to see. Young people sometimes feel pressured into sending private images or videos. The consequence of having private images shared on the internet can be serious and cause humiliation, bullying, teasing, harassment, damage to their reputation and criminal charges or penalties.

What to do if your child has sent a private image

- Listen to what your child has to say and stay calm.
- Try to remain open and non-judgemental, check they are okay and ensure they feel listened to.
- There can be legal issues when private images of children are shared. Report the situation to the [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#) so they can remove the image. Action may be taken against those who have shared the image.
- For advice and support, contact [Kids Helpline](#) and [Parentline](#).

Time online and gaming

The amount of screen time which is appropriate will vary depending on a child's age, maturity, what they are doing when they are online, their learning needs and your family routines. Considering whether your child's screen time is impacting other factors in their life such as socialising, sports or sleep will help you to decide whether your child spends too much time online. There are many games available which provide educational benefits for children such as developing problem solving, multi-tasking, coordination, memory and social skills. Unfortunately, there are also risks from gaming, such as excessive time spent online, bullying and grooming through in-game chats, games with gambling elements and the financial cost of gaming.

What to do if you think your child spends too much time online or gaming

- Stay engaged and aware of which games, apps and devices your child is using by sharing screen time with them. Keep chatting about the games which interest them and who they talk to online.
- Help your child to continue their offline activities, as well as having to earn time online to create a healthy balance.
- Create a family plan that balances online and offline activities.
- Agree on a strategy to help your child switch off their device such as a timer and a consequence for not turning off on time. Reducing your own screen time can model a positive example.
- Use parental controls and tools which monitor online time, set time limits and internet use. Be honest, consistent and open with your child about why you have set these limits.

Signs that your child is experiencing an online problem

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

How to minimise online risks

Keep chatting

- Reinforce messages consistently by talking to your child about online safety regularly. It is an ongoing conversation overtime as your child grows up.
- Build open and trusting relationships with your child from an early age so they know they can talk to you if they are ever worried by anything they see online.
- Encourage your child to make positive decisions about their online choices. This will build their confidence and resilience to issues which can occur online and provide them with useful strategies for dealing with issues in the future.

Educate

- Educate your child to be alert and able to recognise the potential dangers of online activities. There are lots of age appropriate resources available and these can be found in the resource section below.
- Ensure your child knows what to do and how to react if they ever find themselves feeling unsafe online and who to report to.

- Show your child how to protect their personal information and how to keep their accounts private.

Family rules

- Create family rules by finding ways to monitor your child's use of online games, social media and other websites.
- As a family, decide on screen time limits and consequences for not sticking to these rules.
- Make sure devices are used in public areas of your home and not taken into bedrooms and bathrooms.
- Block any inappropriate games and websites.
- As a family, ensure that devices are charged in a central location overnight and not in your child's bedroom.
- Ensure that parental controls are enabled on all the devices in your household which children have access to.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, call the Police on triple zero (000)
- Office of the eSafety Commissioner - <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>
- Parentline - <https://www.parentline.com.au/>
- Kids Helpline - <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- eHeadspace – <http://eheadspace.org.au>

References and resources

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