



ONLINE SAFETY TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT ONLINE RISKS

PARENTS AND CARERS GUIDE

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This information is for parents and carers to help them talk with their child about online risks.

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Digital technology provides valuable opportunities for children and young people. Being able to safely use digital technology is an important skill they will need as they grow, learn and engage with others.

Regular conversations with your child about online safety will help them to:

- identify and avoid online risks
- learn how to manage some online risks
- know how to get help if things go wrong
- be safer and have a better online experience.

Talking with your child about online risks will depend on their age and stage of development. As your child develops they will need more information.

Even with good skills and knowledge, things can still go wrong online. It is important for parents and carers to stay involved and interested in the online and offline lives of their child.

Types of online risks your child might face

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that happens online. Cyberbullying involves:

- a misuse of power in a relationship
- behaviour that is repeated or can be repeated
- behaviour that causes harm.

Cyberbullying often occurs along with face-to-face bullying.

If your child is involved in cyberbullying with their school peers, you should talk with the school. Schools may be able to help with cyberbullying even if it happens off school grounds and outside of school hours.

Online abuse (also called cyber-abuse)

Online behaviour that threatens, intimidates, harasses or humiliates someone. It can occur between people:

- of equal power
- who don't know each other.

Unwanted contact

Any type of online communication that makes a child or young person feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Unwanted contact should be taken seriously. In some circumstances it can lead to online grooming, child abuse and other harmful behaviour.

Breaches of personal data and information

Children and young people may provide others their personal information unintentionally. Children may also share information where they do not understand the risks involved.

Examples include:

- Providing their personal details and photographs for online competitions and activities.
- Hidden data attached to photographs.
- Social media apps disclosing the location of the person using the app.

Financial risks

Children and young people may become financially active online before they have developed an understanding of money, budgeting and credit. This may expose them and their family to financial and security risks.

Children and young people may access restricted gambling and online gaming sites. Sites may encourage, prompt or trick children and young people to engage in financial transactions.

Nudes and sexting

Some young people exchange nude, nearly nude or sexual pictures or videos. They may also exchange sexual messages. This usually occurs in a relationship with a friend or peer. One or both young people may consider this to be a private exchange. Some young people may place their nude, nearly nude or sexual pictures or videos on social media or other sites.

Privately shared pictures, videos and messages may be forwarded on to other people, without permission or knowledge. Content that is on the internet can be viewed by a wide audience and may remain online for ever.

The law says that children and young people must not create, send or receive nude, nearly nude or sexual videos or pictures.

The South Australia Police are available for you to talk to about this type of online behaviour.

Online grooming and child sexual abuse

Grooming behaviour plays a key role in the sexual abuse of children and young people. It involves a person forming a relationship with a child or young person so sexual abuse can occur.

Grooming and sexual abuse of children can occur offline and online. It can involve a child or young person being forced, enticed, manipulated, blackmailed, deceived or coerced to take part in sexual activity.

Online grooming may involve someone:

- forming a relationship with your child online
- having sexual conversations with your child online
- requesting nude, nearly nude or sexual pictures or videos
- requesting to meet in person.

A child or young person may not know they are being groomed. They may not understand the intentions of the individual or identify the dangers.

Some children and young people understand the behaviour is wrong, but may not be able to tell a trusted adult or friend. They may:

- be scared, confused or embarrassed
- have been threatened not to tell
- mistakenly feel responsible for the situation.

Online grooming and online child sexual abuse may be done by someone:

- known to the child / young person and their family, in person or online
- only known by the child / young person online.

Always act immediately to protect and support your child. If you suspect child sexual abuse or grooming may be occurring, contact the [South Australia Police](#). Call 131 444 for non-urgent police assistance. In an emergency call 000.

Inappropriate and harmful content

This may include words or pictures that involves:

- physical or sexual violence against people and animals
- criminal activities (for example, terrorist acts, drug use)
- advice on harmful behaviour (for example, promotes problematic eating habits or self-harm)

- hate-based and degrading messages or pictures directed at people:
 - who are from different cultures or countries
 - because of their appearance (for example, colour of skin, type of clothing, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ability/disability, language spoken or accent).

Some online behaviours may be illegal. If you believe the behaviour is illegal, contact the South Australia Police.

Pornography

Online pornography may be viewed unintentionally or intentionally. The impact on a child or young person will depend on their age and stage of development, the type of content seen, circumstances in which content is viewed and, personal characteristics of the child or young person.

For some children and young people viewing pornography can be confusing, upsetting and in some circumstances can even cause harm. For young people, viewing pornography may lead to misunderstandings about sexual practices, gender stereotypes, body images and intimate relationships.

For more information about children, young people and pornography, visit eSafety www.esafety.gov.au

When inappropriate and harmful content has been accessed

Sometimes inappropriate and harmful content is accessed unintentionally. Your child may have been sent or shown inappropriate and harmful content which they did not want to see.

Other times children and young people may seek-out inappropriate or harmful content. They may do this because they are:

- curious
- want to take risks
- be experiencing peer pressure
- looking for information. This could be information about topics they feel embarrassed or confused about. They may not feel OK talking with adults about the topic
- not yet fully aware of the dangers.

Responding

Plan your response. Stay calm when talking with your child.

Check in with your child to make sure they are feeling safe and OK. Children and young people may have different reactions when they see something worrying or harmful online. Even if they say they are OK, be interested and begin a conversation. Monitor the situation and check in regularly.

Be curious and seek to understand your child's behaviour. This will help you better understand the situation and provide the right types of support.

Talk with your child about how they came across the content. Ask:

- Were you looking for particular information or curious about something?
- Did someone send you the content?
- Is anyone else involved?
- Do you see this type of content often?

Ask how they feel about the content they saw. This may help your child talk more freely, without feeling blamed, humiliated or shamed. Use these incidents to teach about responsible and safe use. Support them to find the right type of information in safe ways.

You may need to have serious conversations with your child about the online content they have seen. Talk about why you are worried. You may need to put in place stronger supportive and protective measures.

Set clear expectations about online behaviours with your child. This can be done through a family digital technology agreement. Download a family agreement from eSafety.

Importantly, warm and supportive relationships increase the likelihood of children and young people speaking up when things go wrong.

Supporting resilience

Experiencing some small online problems may be OK for some children and young people. This can help them develop resilience and healthy coping strategies. Children and young people can only develop resilience and healthy coping strategies when they are supported by parents / carers and other trusted adults and friends.

Conversation starters about online safety

Conversations with your child about online safety are an important way of keeping them safe. Start early, before there is a problem. Do this in ways which are appropriate for your child's age and stage of development.

Use these starters to help get the conversation going:

Early years – 7 years

- How do you get help if something goes wrong?
- Why is it important to be kind online?
- What makes you feel sad, worried, uncomfortable or frightened online?
- Do you know what your personal information is (for example, name, address, birthday, age, location). Who can have this information and why?

7 – 11 years

- What information should you keep private and why?
- Can you use technology to help keep your information private?
- Is there a difference in knowing someone online and someone in-person?
- How do you know what you see and read on the internet is real or true?

11-14 years

- How do you help someone who is having a difficult time online?
- Have you ever heard the term 'nudes'? Tell me about this.
- Tell me about cyberbullying. Has this ever happened to you or someone you know?
- How might your online reputation affect your future?

14 years and over

- Can you spot 'fake news' and online advertising?
- What do you do when someone is being abusive online?
- What do you do if you come across online content that is harmful or illegal?
- Tell me about what you can't do online (for example, nudes, sexting, trolling, harassment, stalking)?

Resources

Bullying. No Way!

Online advice for families about preventing and responding to bullying.
www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

eSafety Commissioner

Online advice for families about online safety.
www.esafety.gov.au

Kids Helpline

Phone and online counselling service for people aged 5 - 25.
1800 55 1800 Anytime. Any reason.
www.kidshelpline.com.au
Online information for families.

Headspace

Phone and online support and counselling service for people aged 12 - 25.
1800 650 890 mental health and wellbeing support.
www.headspace.org.au
Online and phone information for families.

Other parent and carer guides

Online safety: supporting safe and responsible use.

Online safety: what to do when your child has an online problem.

www.education.sa.gov.au

