Cyber safety

Parenting SA

The online world is part of everyday life for many children and young people. It is a huge virtual playground where they can play, learn and socialise. It can be accessed by computers, mobile phones and other electronic devices.

Parents can help children get the most from the online world by being involved from the start and helping them learn safe and responsible use. You don't have to be an expert. Knowing where to find things out and get help is what's important.

The online world

The best way to keep children and young people safe is to talk with them and be involved in their online world. You will be building your own technology skills, as well as a trusting relationship with your child. They will be more likely to come to you if something worries them.

Parents can:

- help children and young people understand the risks, and practise safe online skills at home and away from home

- supervise online activities and set rules and limits. These can change as children develop their online skills and become more mature

- talk about how and when you will use screen technology in your home. You might agree:
  - to keep devices in a room that is open. It will be easier to be aware of what children are doing
  - that devices will be out of bedrooms after 'lights out' as they can interfere with sleep

- make sure children and young people have plenty of technology-free time and develop a range of 'offline' skills and interests. Learning to entertain themselves without technology is a skill that needs practice.

Physical activity and creative play are important for healthy development

- model safe and responsible use yourself.

Don't let the online world shape children and young people's values. They need balanced information and guidance from you.

Helping children learn online safety

Make sure children and young people:

- question what they see online and realise not everything they see is real

- know your family values and become critical consumers. You might ask 'Why do you think they are doing that?' or 'What would happen if they did that in real life?'

- are respectful in all communication and don't do or say anything online they wouldn't in person

- do not share personal information without your knowledge

- know how to screen or block unwanted contacts that happen by phone, email, text, social networking or online games

- understand that what they put online can be seen by people they may not intend. It may be there forever and impact relationships and jobs

- know as they get older they can develop a positive online 'digital identity'. When well managed, this can showcase skills and creativity.

It is important to stay involved in your child's online life. How you do this will change as children gain skills and become more independent.

Helping parents be their best

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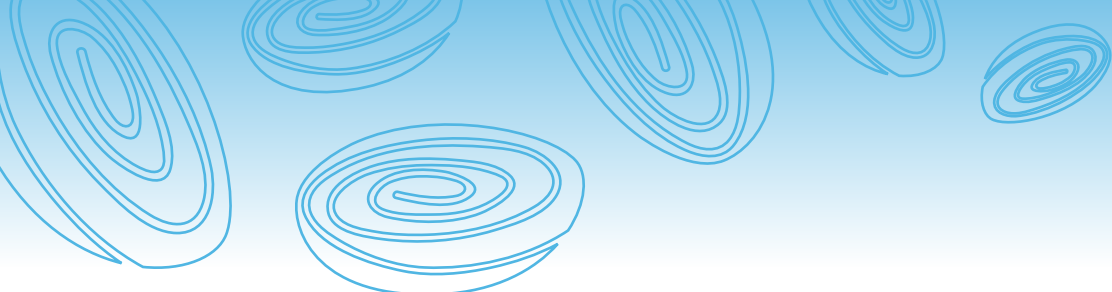
Online grooming

Online grooming is when an adult attempts to make online contact with someone under the age of 16 for sexual purposes. This is a crime.

Make sure children and young people:

- only talk online with people they know and trust in real life
- tell 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
- do not list a webcam in their profile
- never accept gifts or agree to meet online friends without you.

If you are concerned, contact the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, the Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network (ACORN), the Australian Federal Police or Crime Stoppers.

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 straight away.

Setting up safe internet use

There are things you can do to help keep children safe online, eg filter unsuitable content or monitor their internet use. If you decide to do this, make sure you are up front and explain your reasons. If you go behind children's back, it may encourage them to hide things from you.

You could:

- enable Google SafeSearch on all devices
- enable parental controls on streaming services such as YouTube, Netflix and AppleTV
- install software that filters content or lets you choose what times devices can be used/not used

- get to know how your child's phone or device works so you can help them use it safely
- know children's email addresses and passwords so you can monitor activity. If you do this, remember to let children know what you are doing and why
- check the permissions you are giving when you or your children install a new app. Your personal data such as photos and documents might be accessible to others. Read unbiased reviews before installing apps
- know how your device stores data, and whether this is secure. Many devices use 'cloud storage', eg Google Drive or Apple iCloud, to store data such as documents, photos or videos.

Make sure children and young people:

- know the risks and benefits of 'geo-location' or 'checking-in' functions that identify their location. These can be limited or disabled
- use a PIN or access code on their phone or device so if they are stolen they can't be used to send negative texts or images to contact lists
- do not expose younger children to inappropriate content.

The best way to keep children safe online is to know what they are doing. No software can completely guarantee their safety.

Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying is when technology is used to harm others. It usually happens more than once and can involve abusive or threatening emails or texts, making fun of someone, or posting embarrassing or damaging information or photos. It is a big concern because it causes harm, can escalate quickly and involve a lot more people than face-to-face bullying. It can also happen anytime day or night, and parents may not know it is happening at all.

If there is cyber bullying:

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

- use the report/block function to report it to the site or service it occurs on. If they do not remove it, contact the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner who can have it removed
- report it to the school if the bullying is by another student. Schools have anti-bullying policies and can help stop it
- do not confront the person directly if you know who is doing it. This can make things worse
- report serious threats to your local police. A threat made online could be against the law
- help your child get support if they are very upset. School counsellors, the Kids Helpline or eheadspace are good places to start.

Make sure children and young people:

- have other responsible adults to talk to if they are not comfortable telling you
- keep a record of bullying messages, eg screenshots
- know how to support a friend who is bullied
- know not to bully others, and to act in a respectful way at all times
- are careful about personal information which could make them vulnerable if shared online. Remember once it is online, they lose control over who sees it.

Sometimes people put offensive messages online for 'fun' and to provoke a response. This is called 'trolling'. If it continues, it is considered to be cyber bullying and sites are obliged to remove the material.

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Don't threaten to take a child's phone or device away or stop them going online if they are bullied. This can cut them off from supportive friends. It may encourage them to hide the bullying from you, and they can feel like they are the one being punished.

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Social networking

Having friends and connecting with others is very important to children and young people. They can spend a lot of time using social networking sites to do this.

Some young people use Facebook to keep in touch with family, and Instagram, WhatsApp and Snapchat to contact friends. Apps that involve messaging between individuals are becoming more popular but can be risky if children are messaging people they don't know and trust in real life.

Most sites require users to be over 13 years of age. However, operators don't have to ask for proof of age. If a parent provides access for a child under 13 it is important they supervise their use as there can be many risks.

Make sure children and young people:

- know that most messages and photos shared can be accessed by others
- set privacy settings to ensure their profile is only seen by people they intend, and check these settings often
- let you view their profile and 'friend' you or accept you as a 'follower' on sites/apps they use
- know they can use a nickname that doesn't identify them and an image of something they like instead of a photo of themselves
- know the risks of 'friending' people, accepting 'followers' or 'chatting' with people online if they don't know them. How do they know they are who they say they are? They may intend harm. There is also a risk that personal information or photos could be misused or their identity stolen
- get permission from others before putting photos of them online and 'tagging' them. Encourage them to ask their friends to do the same for them. 'Tagging' provides information about the person's activities and creates a link to their profile they may not want
- know how to report abuse or inappropriate content to the social networking service or other agency.

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It can help to set up your own social networking accounts so you know how they work.

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Sharing sexual images

Make sure children and young people understand the risks of sending or forwarding sexual texts, images or videos (called 'sexting') and the harm this can cause to themselves and others.

Help them understand:

- they have no control over what happens to the image or who sees it, even if they only send it to a friend
- the image could be online forever, even if using apps that only display images for a short time
- the impact this can have on relationships.

Sending sexual images of themselves or others under 18 years could also be classed as possessing and distributing child pornography. This can have serious consequences.

Sometimes intimate images are shared without consent to shame or humiliate someone. This 'image-based abuse', or threatening to do it, is an offence. You can make a report to the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner or ACORN.

It is also an offence to film or share images of someone being humiliated or degraded, eg in a school yard fight.

If any of these things happen to your child, reassure them that it can be dealt with. They will need extra love and support from you.

Games and apps

Games and apps can be great educational tools that build skills and a sense of achievement, as well as being lots of fun. They can be downloaded from the internet and many are free. Even young children can spend a lot of time playing them.

- The best apps are those where children can experiment and try out their own ideas, eg creating drawings or music.
- Some apps are labelled 'educational' but are not much more than repetitive activities.
- Free apps often have a lot of advertising and 'in-app purchasing'. These can be real purchases and cause bill shock for parents. It is also hard for young children to tell the difference between advertising and the game.

Check for inappropriate content, eg violence, sexualised images, coarse language or gambling. The Australian Council on Children and the Media has a 'Know before you load' service that can help you find good apps and avoid the pitfalls.

Gambling risk

Most parents would never encourage their children to gamble. However, simulated gambling may be embedded in children's games without parents realising. There are no warnings because gambling content does not require classification in the same way as violence or sexual material.

Exposure to simulated gambling at a young age can make it more likely children will gamble when older. They can think that gambling is based on skill rather than chance. They often 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 activity as a family
- check the Australian Council on Children and the Media website for the gambling content of games.
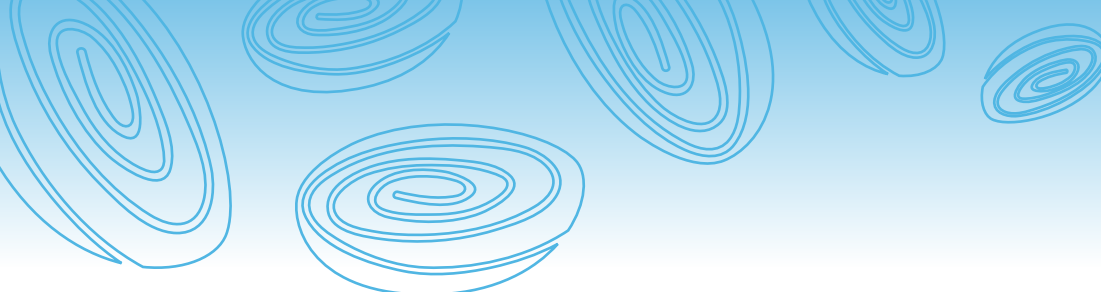
Violence

Games with graphic violent or sexual content have been linked to emotional problems, particularly in younger children.

Children are at risk of:

- thinking it's OK to be aggressive
- being insensitive to others being hurt
- becoming scared of their world

- increased angry feelings and aggressive 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.

Parents can:

- agree with children about appropriate games. Check the game's classification. If you are unsure about a game, you could hire it first to view the content. Games classified for children can still contain a lot of violence (see the Australian Classification website)
- not allow 'first person shooter' games where the player is in the role of the aggressor
- not allow 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 the gaming device's parental control software. These will also restrict access to in-game purchases.

Lead by example and don't play violent games in front of children. Children are quick to spot double standards. 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 with similar interests anywhere in the world. Some games have player moderators but many are run on private servers and it is impossible to moderate how players behave.

Parents can:

- remind young people to be cautious about sharing personal information
- monitor when they play. Some games happen in different time zones which can mean young people are playing when they should be sleeping.

Problem game use

When children and young people spend a lot of time playing games they spend less time doing slower, more demanding tasks like reading or playing board games. They also spend less time being active.

Frequent gaming can affect school and social life. A young person can become isolated and preoccupied with gaming. They may become anxious when not playing or lose interest in friends and other activities. It is important to look at what else is happening in their life to see why gaming has become so important.

It can be hard for 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.

Children with special needs

Children and young people with special needs can be held back from using online technology due to fears for their safety. Parents might think that not being online is the best option. It is important to consider the benefits children and young people can gain from being connected with others and what would be involved in keeping them safe.

If children and young people with a disability are online, make sure they are taught safe and responsible use. They may need some extra support.

Want more information?

Counselling

Kids Helpline
Phone 1800 551 800
Phone and online counselling for children and young people aged 5-25
www.kidshelpline.com.au

eheadspace
Phone 1800 650 890
Phone and online support for young people aged 12–25 their family and friends. Also has a parents' guide to Instagram
www.eheadspace.org.au

ReachOut
Online mental health support for young people with information on online safety and bullying www.reachout.com

1800 RESPECT
Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours
National sexual assault, domestic violence counselling service

Beyond Blue
Phone 1300 224 636, 24 hours
For free, confidential support if you are experiencing anxiety or depression. This can occur after a person is abused

Lifeline
Phone 13 11 14
Free 24-hour crisis counselling and information about support services www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service
Phone 1300 659 467, 24 hours
Phone and online counselling for people 15 years and over
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Cyber safety

Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner
Information on online safety for parents (iParent) and women (eSafetyWomen), children and young people. Includes cyber bullying, sexting, trolling, digital reputation, online gaming. Provides a guide to games, apps and social networking. You can report cyber bullying and offensive material. Has resources for Aboriginal families and schools (Be Deadly Online) www.esafety.gov.au

ThinkUKnow
Cyber safety for parents and teachers including privacy management, sexting, gaming consoles. Has guides for young people on using a number of social media sites
www.thinkuknow.org.au

Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network (ACORN)
A national site for reporting cybercrime
www.acorn.gov.au

Australian Federal Police
Report cybercrime at www.afp.gov.au

Crime Stoppers SA
Phone 1800 333 000
www.crimestopperssa.com.au

Stay Smart Online Alert Service
A free service for Australian internet users to explain recent online threats and how they can be managed
www.staysmartonline.gov.au/alert-service

Australian Council on Children and the Media
Information about children and media, and app review service 'Know before you load'
www.childrenandmedia.org.au

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

Department for Education and Child Development
Information for families and students about cyber safety, bullying and harassment
www.decd.sa.gov.au

Google Safety Centre
Online safety tips for parents, including Google SafeSearch
www.google.com.au/safetycenter/families/start

Government of South Australia
Information about simulated gambling in games www.nogame.com.au

Parenting

Healthy children
A US website with an online tool for developing a family screen-use plan
www.healthychildren.org

ReachOut for parents
Information for parents to support their children aged 12-18 through everyday issues and tough times, including technology use, social media and cyber bullying
http//parents.au.reachout.com

Raising Children Network
Parenting information, including safe game use www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA
For other Parent Easy Guides including 'Safe technology use', 'Television' and 'Protecting children from sexual abuse'
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Child and Family Health Service
Information on child health and parenting
www.cyh.com

Nature Play SA
For outdoor activities for children
www.natureplaysa.org.au

Government of South Australia