

AGES
5+

Let's talk keeping safe online (including gaming and social media spaces)

- **Talk about it (and often).** The first and best thing you can do with your child is to talk to them! Ask them about why they want to be online and ask them too how they intend to connect with others (or already do). Ask them if they have an idea of the sorts of things that can go wrong and what their plan would be if something happened to make them feel upset, unsafe or worried. Asking them this first is the best way to get the conversation started, especially with older children who can feel they 'know it all' and bring a certain amount of eye-rolling to any chats you initiate. Avoiding one-way lectures is key here; what you're doing is sharing ideas and working together to come up with solutions. Tell them about your concerns and what you need to feel more comfortable about their going online. Don't be scared to bring out the 'it's my job to keep you safe' line and explain that what you're trying to do is come up with strategies together. Ask them what types of things they might have heard, and the experiences of other children their age. Ask them also what they might worry about being online, or what negative things they've imagined could happen to a child their age. Talk about what you want them to do if something ever happens or if they see anything inappropriate online, and practise the steps together. Talking about this upfront will make them more likely to come to you if they ever see something upsetting. Showing them that you're available to talk about these things is crucial because, in doing so, you're giving them an invitation to come to you with problems, questions or worries. We might think 'Oh they know they can always come to me', but giving these messages explicitly as instructions means they know ahead of time what to do if they need.
- **Consider a written agreement or contract.** If you give your child a device that connects to the internet, you are also giving them the opportunity to connect to others online. Make it clear to them that you own the device and it's a shared responsibility about how it's used. A family tech agreement or contract is a really good way to make sure everyone is clear about the online rules in your home (and

outside your home). There are many templates that you can use as a starting point, or you can create one of your own. The eSafety Commissioner, ThinkUKnow and Common Sense Media are some good places to start. Set clear rules (together) – what are some rules that will make you feel more comfortable with them using the internet? Consider what your boundaries are and ask them about what they think some fair rules might be as well. (Starting with their ideas first is always a better way to keep them listening and engaged; if we launch into a big lecture or set of conditions, they can switch off.)

Things to consider:

- Will there be limits to screen time?
- Will there be some apps or games that are a 'hard' no?
- Do you want them to show you who their 'friends' are on social media apps?
- Will the written agreement be revisited and possibly revised in the future? How often? Every six months or once a year?

Having clear rules and deciding together what they are will help keep them safe, keep communication open and clear and make them more likely to stick to rules.

- **Screens where you can see them.** Rather than giving a child an iPad to take with them wherever, consider having a shared central computer (like in the living room). Yes, this might be a bit 'old hat', but it's still an important baseline, especially for young children. This way you can keep an eye on what they're up to – and they'll be less likely to search for anything they know they shouldn't. (We all have different ideas about child and teen privacy, and that is something for you to navigate as an individual or with the other parent. But bottom line, we want to keep the lines of communication open and based on trust, so that they will come to us when and if they need.) As they get older, they'll have their own devices to use in private spaces, but even so, keep talking and sharing values, insights and ideas.
- **Make them aware of their 'digital footprint'.** Just because in some apps a photo or post can disappear after 30 seconds or 24 hours, it doesn't mean it's not been captured by others. Kids need to understand the idea that once something is up on the internet, it's permanent. There can always be screen-captures and archives and also, even when images or text is deleted, it often still comes up in searches. Because of this, they need to think carefully before putting anything online. This isn't just images or photos of themselves, but also the language they use; others can see inappropriate or abusive language, even years later. Better to err on the side of caution than to regret something later.
- **No personal information.** Because of the above point, it's so important that kids know that no personal information should ever be shared online – especially in public places like social media posts. This is a good hard and fast rule to have and can include things like phone number, address, and whatever else you decide.

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info@sexeducationaustralia.com.au | +61 (3) 9029 9681

- **Letting strangers (or perceived friends of friends) into private group chats.** Teens can be quite relaxed about letting someone into a group chat, especially if that person shows a profile picture of someone of the same age, even in school uniform. Remember, anyone can save photos from open Instagram or other accounts and use them to create fake profiles. Sexploitation is on the rise and involves blackmailers gaining entry into private or group chats and asking for photos (aka nudes). Because it's been normalised, teenagers will send an image and then that is used against them, with demands for money in exchange for not releasing the picture to everyone else in the group chat. Talking about this possibility is imperative with your teens as early as possible; it helps alert them to this practice so they can better manage their risk. And again, if it does happen to them, you've already talked about it so they are more likely to come to you, and sooner.
- **Know your parental controls.** Some games, apps, wifi networks and devices will have controls that block access to certain material that isn't appropriate for children. We recommend spending time and doing research to see what is within your control and making sure that all devices your young person has access to are as locked down as possible. (You can start by reading this page from the eSafety Commissioner.) Of course, these blocks and filters don't work as a magic wall against all harmful things on the internet - in fact, nothing replaces an active, engaged and informed adult. And remember, they won't just have access to devices in your home (but of course, it helps to do what you can to keep your own home environment controlled).
- **No sexual conversations** - if so, tell an adult. This is another one we recommend placing a hard rule around, and it's something that should be talked about a lot. It's also why body safety and knowing the proper names and functions for private body parts is so important! Children need to know that if they see people with no clothes on, or if anyone talks to them about private parts, they should look away and go and tell an adult immediately. If any stranger is asking to see any photos at all - including ones of feet for example, that can be a warning sign. Some kids might worry they'll be laughed at or get into trouble if this happens to them, so it's so vital we tell our children that it's always okay to come to a trusted adult and that they'll never be punished.
- **Know who they're talking to (and no strangers).** Get them to show you who they're talking to and who they're adding on their games and social media apps. It's not an invasion of privacy to at least ask to be shown who they're talking to, and before adolescence, we would argue it's okay to ask to see at least some of their conversations - especially if it's someone that you don't know is in their real life. On this point, all of their socials pages and games (where possible) should be set to 'private'.
- **Add them on your own socials.** If you have some of the same social media or even gaming apps as they do - add them! Kids will be more likely to be aware of what they're posting if they know mum or dad can see it too. But realise that the older they get, the more likely they will be to resist this, or have another shadow account which is their 'real' account.
- **Keep on top of apps.** SnapChat? TikTok? Roblox? Minecraft? It can feel like technology is constantly evolving (it is!), and there are always new apps out there. But it helps if you can keep on top of at least the most popular sites and apps that kids are visiting. This can be as simple as looking up something your child mentions or every now and again, just doing a search or two online to see what's popular right now. Have a read about these apps. Do they have child safety features? What are the concerning elements of them? Read reviews about their safety. Knowing what your kids are using will help you be prepared. Follow organisations like Safe on Social to keep up to date with the latest trends and issues.
- **Watch out for online bullying.** Of course, along with interactions between people online come the worries and risks of online bullying. We can't hide our children away from the world, nor the internet, so the best we can do as parents is be prepared and set up channels of communication so that they feel they can come to us if something is wrong. Have a chat with your child about what bullying looks like - either face-to-face or online - and talk with them about why it isn't okay. Keep an eye out for the signs that they may be being bullied (like withdrawing from social activities, even online). Talking with them about the subtleties of put-downs, and how some people can make others feel bad with 'joke's and small comments can help them recognise it when it happens, and know that it's wrong. A simple thing you can say to your child is: 'If you ever feel bad after someone has said or done something, then that's like a message from yourself to yourself that something wrong has happened. Trust those feelings and talk to me about it if you want.'

Conversation starters (try one of these openers to get the chat going):

'Do you think children your age should have friends of friends added to their social media pages?'

'Have you heard of anyone getting upset about something that happened while they were online?'

'Do you know what might upset you online? Can you think of an example?'

'What would you do in that situation?'

'What would you do if something happened to a friend that upset them?'

'Has anything ever upset you online?'

'Do you think it's different, having friendships online compared with face-to-face?'

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