

Connected kids: a comprehensive guide to ensuring online safety and well-being



International Centre™
FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN



About us

ICMEC

The International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC) is an international NGO headquartered in the US, and we envision a world where every child can grow up safe from exploitation, sexual abuse, or risk of going missing. For over 25 years, we have been a leader in identifying gaps in the global community's ability to protect children from abduction, sexual abuse and exploitation, and expertly assembling the people, resources and tools needed to fill those gaps. Our mission is to safeguard vulnerable children by:

- Powering the global search for children who are missing.
- Defending children from sexual abuse by disrupting the economics and mechanics of exploitation.
- Training frontline professionals to prevent and respond to cases of child exploitation.

We conduct research and develop capacity-building activities such as training, technology and legal protocols to support international stakeholders (governments, law enforcement, policy-makers, educators, medical professionals, NGOs and many others), helping them to better protect children against child sexual abuse and exploitation and respond to missing children reports.

You can read more about ICMEC on our website: www.icmec.org



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About us

HEROES

Trafficking of human beings (THB) and child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSA/CSE) are two big problems in our society. Inadvertently, new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have provided a space for these problems to develop and take new forms, made worse by the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, technical and legal tools available to stakeholders that prevent, investigate and assist victims — such as law enforcement agencies (LEAs), prosecutors, judges and civil society organisations (CSOs) — fail to keep up with the pace at which criminals use new technologies to continue their abhorrent acts. Furthermore, assistance to victims of THB and CSA/CSE is often limited by the lack of coordination among these stakeholders. In this sense, there is a clear and vital need for joint work methodologies and the development of new strategies for approaching and assisting victims. In addition, due to the cross-border nature of these crimes, harmonisation of legal frameworks from each of the affected countries is necessary for creating bridges of communication and coordination among all those stakeholders to help victims and reduce the occurrence of these horrendous crimes.

To address these challenges, the HEROES project provides an ambitious, interdisciplinary, international and victim-centred approach. The HEROES project is structured as a comprehensive solution that encompasses three main components: Prevention, Investigation and Victim assistance. Through these components, our solution aims to establish a coordinated contribution with LEAs by developing an appropriate, victim-centred approach that is capable of addressing specific needs and providing protection. The HEROES project's main objective is to use technology to improve the way help and support can be provided to victims of THB and CSA/CSE. Moreover, the HEROES project will establish new innovative strategies that in the short, medium and long term will improve the way in which LEAs and CSOs carry out criminal investigations, assist rescued victims and prevent the occurrence of these crimes. You can read more about HEROES on our [website](#).

SECTION 1

Supporting children to be safe and happy online

The top right corner of the page features several overlapping, hand-drawn yellow scribbled lines on a dark teal background.

This guide has been written to help adults who live, or work directly, with children and young people to support them to be safe and happy online.

TOPICS COVERED INCLUDE:

- The benefits of the internet.
- Putting children and young people at the heart of online safety support.
- Guidance on constructive conversations.
- Tackling challenging issues and responding to safety concerns.

Whether you are a parent or a carer, educator, social worker, medical or mental health practitioner, work in law enforcement, or are from any other professional background, you will know what a pivotal role the internet and technology play in the lives of children and young people. Through socialising, gaming, enjoying music and videos and completing schoolwork, use of the internet can be interwoven into every aspect of growing up.

Whilst the internet and technology, and all the amazing opportunities they offer, should be embraced as a positive, there are risks that children

and young people must be educated to identify, understand and manage.

Although age limits, verification, user terms and conditions and moderating and reporting services are all useful tools, online risk cannot be eliminated. Therefore, one of the most effective ways to support any child or young person online is through open and honest communication, and education about online risks and what to do to stay safe.

If children and young people are given opportunities to talk freely about the internet from an early age, with adults who are interested, engaged and supportive in their responses, this can be a useful way to share different safety messages at age-appropriate stages and pave the way to having more difficult conversations in the future. The value of regular conversation is a theme that is reinforced throughout this resource.

Technology companies and private industry have a significant role to play in this process too. It's imperative that companies are aware of the age of users who are accessing their platforms and do all they can to safeguard children and young people to protect their rights and ensure that they do not encounter age-inappropriate, harmful or dangerous content and interactions.

SECTION 2

Starting with the positives

Before talking to children and young people about the risks of being online, it's important to recognise the positive role it can play.



What opportunities are there in positive internet use?

Children and young people often highlight the importance of their online lives, and the wonderful opportunities the internet and technology have to offer them.

More than ever before, the internet is integral to the social lives of children and young people. They are also going online to find and build communities, form connections with others and develop long and impactful friendships.

The internet can provide young people with a space to seek out and become their authentic selves in a way they may not feel able to in their offline lives. It also offers educational and entertainment opportunities, where children and young people can explore different perspectives, learn new skills or research topics that interest them.

Top tips to help you acknowledge the positives

- 1 By showing interest in your child's online activities, beyond talking about the risks and harms, they are likely to feel more comfortable sharing their online lives with you.
- 2 Making time and space for these conversations in your daily lives creates a safe space to talk about young people's positive and negative experiences, both online and offline.
- 3 Remember that children and young people use the internet differently to adults, and that their internet use can be influenced by factors like new online trends, their peers and their age and location.
- 4 Be open to the idea that their internet use will change over time and try to remain curious and non-judgemental about children's use of technology. The more regular conversations you have, the less confusing these changes may seem.
- 5 When talking to children and young people about their online interests, it is best to avoid dismissive responses or phrases that could be seen as judgemental of the apps/games/trends that young people are engaged in. For example, phrases like, *'I just don't understand all these new apps,'* could be taken to mean you aren't interested, or don't want to hear about the young person's experiences.

SECTION 3

Putting young people at the heart of online safety support

Giving young people agency and ensuring their voices are heard in relation to the online world isn't just good practice — it's also their right.

Global children's rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely signed treaty in history, having been signed by 195 countries. The convention lays out 54 articles that explain the rights of the child in all parts of their lives. In recent years, the UN has said publicly that all children's rights apply in the digital world. They have also asked that those working to reduce harms faced online need to balance this with the promotion of beneficial activities, and the prioritisation of children's voices.

Online and offline, all children have the right to protection from harm, discrimination, exploitation or abuse, including sexual exploitation and abuse. Anyone in a position close to children has a duty to uphold and protect these rights. Children also have the right to rest and play using services that are safe and appropriate for their age, and for those services to protect them from violence and abuse in all forms.

Listening to children's voices

'Children have the right to have a say in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously. Therefore, listening to the voices, ideas, experiences, and concerns of children and young people is essential.'
— **Article 12 of the UN Convention**

Honest conversations with children and young people about their experiences are extremely valuable in protecting them from potential harm or abuse, as

well as respecting their right to express their feelings and ideas. By listening to young people, we can create a safe space that encourages them to raise any concerns they might have.

Keeping up a regular and open dialogue with young people can also help to ensure that your online safety support is relevant to their needs and interests and remains as up to date as possible.

Do you work in education?

If your setting is providing online safety education for children and young people, try to ensure that the sessions are interactive and engaging and allow opportunities for children to use their voices and express their ideas. It is also useful to offer children opportunities to provide feedback on what they were taught, and how useful, relevant and engaging they found it.

Using young people's ideas and feedback to inform your future activities, and making it clear how you have done so, can help children feel that their voices are valued and their ideas and views have direct impact. This also helps ensure that lessons are consistently useful and relevant and can help create a safe and supportive environment for communication. This, in turn, can help give young people increased confidence to come forward and share any concerns they may have about their online experiences.



How the experiences of children and young people can inform your work

Whatever your role, youth voice can be utilised in a wide range of ways to inform your work and heighten its impact and quality. In schools, many choose to elect children and young people as school counsellors, prefects or other student leaders. These roles are a great starting point for anyone looking to use children and young people's voices to inform their practice.

FOR EXAMPLE

Before developing and launching a unit of work on online safety, one school chose to have pupil counsellors run discussions in their classes. These discussions gave children and young people a space to voice their concerns about online safety, as well as their ideas about what would engage them in the lessons. Each pupil counsellor was given an opportunity to feed the key ideas back to staff, who were then given time to incorporate them into their planning. This process was then repeated at the end of the unit of work, with the goal of exploring how impactful and engaging the lessons were.

SECTION 4

Talking with young people about internet use

Talking regularly to young people about their technology use, and encouraging them to share their experiences, is a key part of helping to safeguard them.

The internet plays a significant role in the lives of children and young people and is integral to their social development as they get older. It no longer makes sense to distinguish between 'life online' and 'real life,' because a child's introduction to the internet often starts from the moment they are old enough to hold a connected device.

Whatever your level of knowledge or confidence, these five tips and conversation starters will help you initiate, manage and maintain an open and honest dialogue with children about being online, and help you support them to use technology safely and positively.

Can you show me how to...?

I'd love to hear what things you enjoy doing online and why!

1. BE POSITIVE AND OPEN-MINDED ABOUT THE INTERNET

It's important to recognise the exciting opportunities that going online can offer children and young people. Although the children you care for, or work with, may use the internet differently from you their experiences are still significant. If a child mentions something you haven't heard of, ask them to show you, or explain in more detail — or you may do your own research. Try to keep conversations about the internet broad, and value children's opinions when they're talking about what they enjoy doing to show that you are interested in all aspects of their online world.

Can I play this game with you?

Who can you talk to in this game?

2. TALK EARLY AND OFTEN

The most effective way to deal with any online issue is to make conversations about the internet a part of everyday routine. Talking openly about life online from an early age can be a helpful bridge to sharing safety messages and addressing more difficult conversations later. It also shows your child that you are someone who knows about the internet and can help them.

Before you use the tablet today, can you remind me what we agreed about where you could go for help?

What's your favourite way to communicate with friends online?

Have any of your friends ever experienced _____ online?

I'd like to talk about ____ with you, but first, what are your thoughts on it?

If someone you know needs help with something online, what do you do?

3. CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR CONVERSATIONS

Look for opportunities to talk together. Sometimes talking face-to-face can feel difficult, so talking alongside each other when out for a walk, when travelling or whilst doing an activity together for example are options that might make it easier. The environment needs to be right too — free from unwanted distractions, so that everyone involved can concentrate fully and knows that they are being listened to.

Remind the child often that they can talk to you about anything, no matter how difficult, and that they will not be judged or blamed. A child might not be ready to share something straight away, so show them that you are there to listen whenever they are ready. Don't pressure them to talk and provide them with alternative ways to communicate, e.g., writing it down. Talking about something from the point of view of their wider peer group can also be helpful, so they aren't sharing first-hand experiences.

What settings does this app have that you could use to support you?


4. KEEP IT RELEVANT

As they get older, children will use technology differently from when they first went online. Their knowledge and understanding will grow too, as will the challenges they may face on the internet. To get a sense of how much they know and what support they still need, ask open-ended questions to let your child lead the conversations you have. There are appropriate ways to approach all online safety topics with different ages. For example, with a teenager, nude images can be spoken about in wider conversations around consent and healthy relationships. For younger children, you could discuss what types of images are okay to share online and what parts of our bodies are private.

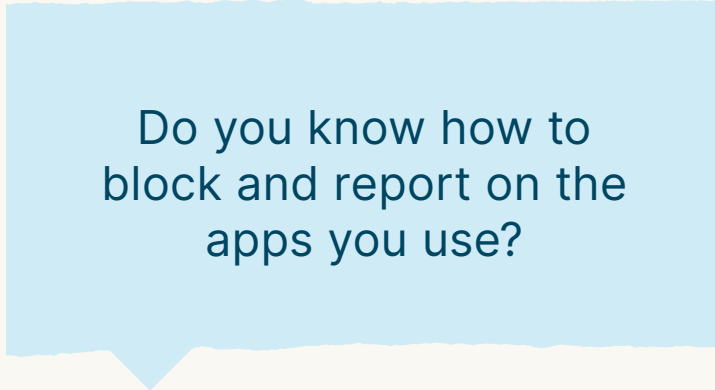
What's the best online safety advice that you've been given?

Can you give me any tips?

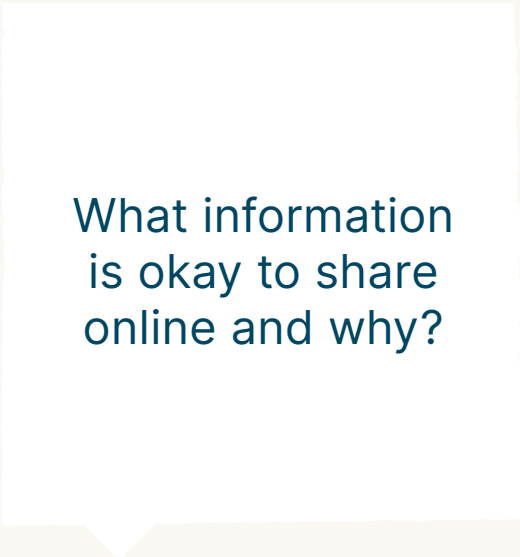
Is there anything you would change about the internet?



Do you think it's helpful to have content restrictions (parental controls) on mobile devices?



Do you know how to block and report on the apps you use?



What information is okay to share online and why?

5. BE PROACTIVE

Working together to create an agreement that outlines how the internet and technology will be used within the family, or within an educational setting, is a useful way to set clear expectations and boundaries. You might include time spent online, who your children can communicate with, appropriate apps and games and why safety tools are helpful to block and report inappropriate content. Ask the child what they would do if something went wrong online and they needed help, and reinforce the importance of telling an adult as soon as anything happens that makes them feel upset, worried or uncomfortable in any way.

SECTION 5

Definitions of key words and phrases related to online risk

When talking about online risks and harms with children, young people or other adults, it's important to use clearly defined language and terminology.

CHILD / CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (CYP)

Any person below the age of eighteen years.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is a broad category that defines the harm caused to children by forcing or coercing them to engage in sexual activity, whether they are aware of what is happening or not.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL (CSAM)

This refers to material that depicts and/or documents acts that are sexually abusive and/or exploitative to a child. The term 'child pornography' should be avoided, as it can imply consent and undermine the seriousness of the subject.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A form of child sexual abuse in which a person takes advantage of a power imbalance to coerce or groom a child into engaging in sexual activity of any kind. Coercive tactics might include offering gifts or money, pretending to be a peer, friend and/or boyfriend/girlfriend, and threatening to share images of the child. The term 'child prostitution' is not acceptable due to potential implications that the child is somehow willingly involved, complicit in or to blame for their abuse. Moreover, 'prostitution' is legal in some countries, while the sexual exploitation of children is a crime.

CONSENT

The agreement to do something, or permission for something to happen. Consent is required in many situations, not just situations of a sexual nature. For example, you should ask for consent before posting a picture of someone online or adding them to a group chat.

COERCION / COERCIVE CONTROL

The practice of persuading or manipulating someone to do something by using force or threats. Coercive control is an act, or a pattern of acts, of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten a victim.

FILTERING

An internet filter is a type of software that determines what content will be available to the user, or what will be restricted or blocked.

GROOMING

'Grooming/online grooming' refers to the process of establishing or building a relationship with a child, either in person or by using the Internet or other digital technologies, to facilitate either online or offline sexual contact with that child.

HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR (HSB)

This is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive. Child-on-child sexual abuse is a form of HSB where sexual abuse takes place between children.

**IMAGE-BASED ABUSE/
NON-CONSENSUAL
IMAGE SHARING**

A form of online sexual harassment which refers to nude, partially nude or sexually explicit photos or videos being taken and/or shared without someone's consent.

ONLINE HARM

Online harm is any behaviour that may hurt a person physically or emotionally that takes place on any digital platform.

ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Any unwanted sexual behaviour, conducted on any digital platform, which can make a person feel intimidated, threatened, humiliated or discriminated against. It is recognised as a form of sexual violence.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

Settings that can be applied to individual devices or services that allow or restrict the content that can be accessed to ensure that content is age appropriate.

SEXTING

Sexting has been defined as the self-production of sexual images, or as the exchange of sexual messages or images. It is important to note that it is often done by consenting adolescents, though there are forms of unwanted sexting, e.g., images that have been taken, shared, sent or received non-consensually.

SURVIVOR

A person who has been hurt, harmed or injured because of a crime, accident or other event or action, or who has suffered because of the actions of someone else. Those who have experienced a traumatic event may prefer to use the term survivor rather than victim (below), due to the positive connotations of resilience that it evokes.

VICTIM

Someone who has suffered because of someone else's actions or beliefs, or as a result of unpleasant or traumatic circumstances.

VICTIM BLAMING

Any language or behaviour that implies (intentionally or unintentionally) that the victim of abuse or harm is fully or partially responsible for their experience.


Wherever possible, these definitions have been informed by the Luxembourg Guidelines for Interagency Terminology.



SECTION 6

Finding the words

Talking about life online is great, but finding the right words can be challenging — especially when young people may have their own slang and terminology.



Children and young people's language

Children and young people often have their own expressions, idioms and terminology that they use throughout their lives, including to talk about and describe their online activities. The form and content of these communications can depend on several factors, including online trends, location, age group and wider interests.

Because of the evolving nature of children and young people's language, attempts to define key terminology will often go out of date quickly after being written. Regular conversations with a child or young person may help to understand their language more clearly, and sometimes asking what a term means is all you need.

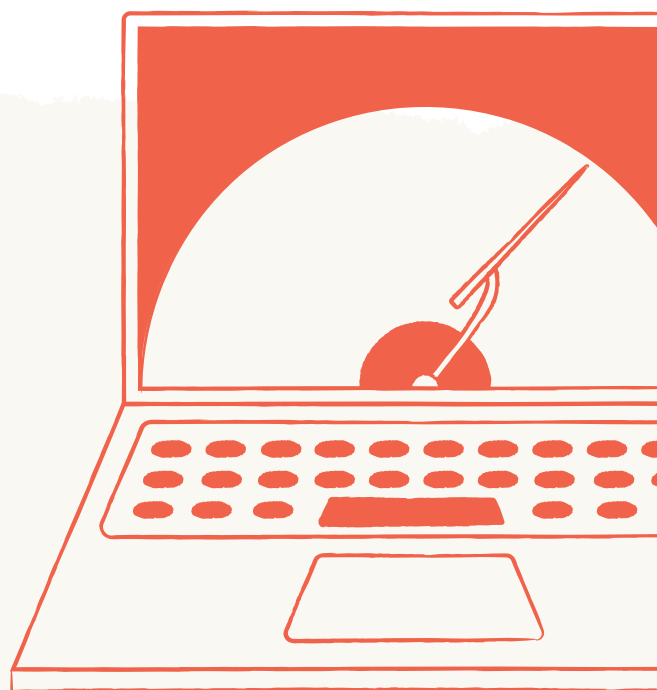
Clear communication about online risks and harms

The language that we use changes all the time, especially when talking about an online world that is constantly evolving. When talking about online risks and harms with anyone (adults or children), it's important to use understandable language and terminology which is respectful, promotes dialogue and avoids judgement.

Using the correct language, and being able to explain why it's important, also demonstrates that you know and understand the subject well and are therefore well placed to provide help and advice. However, simply having those conversations, and enabling them to take place, is of primary importance here.

Gender socialisation shapes how children communicate and perceive online behaviour, creating different expectations around sexuality, harm and shame. When adults engage with children in conversations about online harm and abuse, it's crucial to be mindful of these influences. Whether

adults are men or women, parents, teachers or mentors, these factors can impact trust and the conversation's dynamics. This highlights the importance of these factors in addressing online abuse and promoting open conversations with children and young people, ultimately enhancing online safety for everyone.



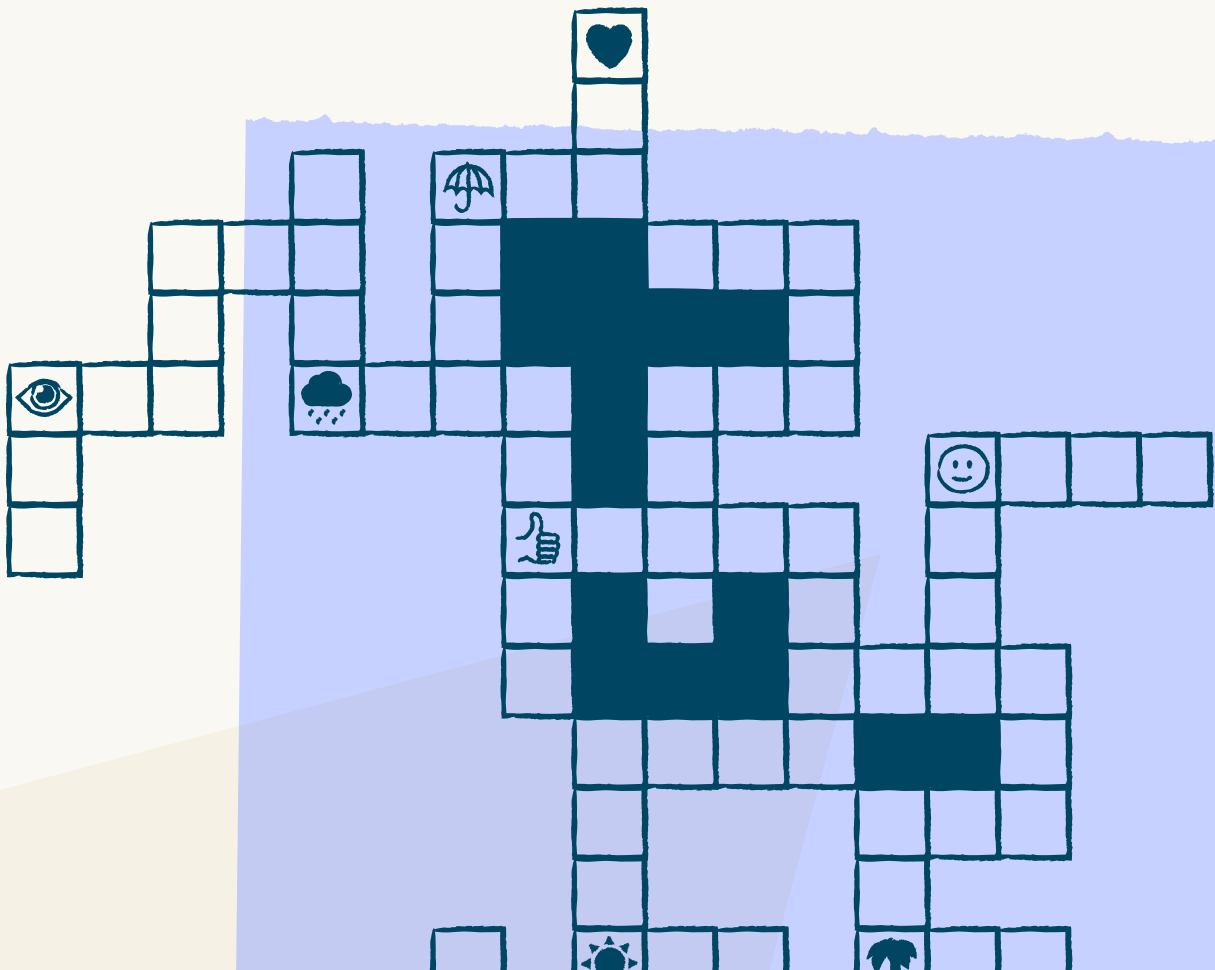
FOR EXAMPLE

For example, 'child pornography' is sometimes used to describe child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Child pornography is not an acceptable term and using such language acts to legitimise images which are not pornography. Rather, they are permanent records of children being sexually exploited and abused, and as such should be referred to as child sexual abuse material to reflect the seriousness of the offence that has taken place.

For more information about recommended terminology, turn to page 16.

Tips for finding the right words

- If you're unsure whether a child or young person is familiar with the topic you want to talk about, it can be helpful to start by asking how they describe it. E.g., while an adult might talk about 'sexting,' a young person might know that as 'sending nudes.'
- Use age-appropriate language. When talking to younger children about online risks and harms, it can be helpful initially to talk around the subject rather than naming it, as this could scare them. For example, instead of talking about the risks of 'grooming,' a more age-appropriate conversation would be discussing who we trust and how we know who to trust.
- As children get older, using more specific terminology can become both useful and appropriate. In incidences of online bullying, it can be useful to help children or young people be specific in their language — for example, if the online bullying becomes online sexual harassment.
- Avoid jargon or very technical terms in conversation without clarifying exactly what behaviour or risk you're describing.





In the case that a child or young person uses terminology that could be problematic, you should:

- Take time to research the appropriate language to use and the reasoning behind its importance, so that your own understanding is up to date.
- Avoid showing anger, disapproval or judgement. Instead, use the situation as an opportunity for open and constructive conversation.
- Explain to them clearly why it is important to use one term over another. For example, 'We use _____, because the term _____ could mean _____.'
- Approach children and young people with open-ended questions such as, 'What do you think the differences are between the two terms?' or, 'How might using one term over another make someone feel?'
- Be mindful of the context of the situation. Some terms, such as 'victim' and 'survivor,' can be personal to individual people. If you are speaking to a victim or survivor, try sensitively asking them what term they prefer to use. Make sure to then use this term moving forward and ensure others do the same.
- Remember that encouraging young people to use the correct terminology for genitalia, from the earliest age possible, can also help avoid confusion and misunderstandings in the case of child sexual abuse.



SECTION 7

Tackling challenging topics

To ensure that children and young people are informed and prepared for risks they may experience, it's important to have conversations about difficult topics.

As children get older, wanting more freedom and privacy online is natural. There will come a time when they're using the internet self-sufficiently daily, and this independence is a natural part of their development. Often, adults can plan for difficult conversations but occasionally they may be needed earlier than anticipated — for example, if a child is inadvertently exposed to online harm they don't understand.

Discussing challenging topics might seem like a daunting prospect, but it's important to remember that young people need support and guidance in all areas of life — especially when it comes to sensitive issues.

If you need to talk about something difficult with a child or young person, try to:

- Plan what you want to say in advance and seek support and information if needed so that you feel prepared.
- Choose a moment when there are no other distractions and you are not rushed for time, in an environment that feels safe to the child.
- Consider the best approach for the child. You might want to directly explain the concerns that led to the conversation or feel that asking some broader and more open-ended questions is more suitable in the first instance.
- Acknowledge that they might not feel ready to speak straight away, or there may be someone else that they feel more comfortable talking to. If possible, find a way to facilitate the next conversations.
- Insist that they are not at fault and that they have done nothing wrong. Whatever they tell you, it's important not to make them feel guilty about what happened.
- In some instances, the child might prefer to communicate differently, e.g., write their answers for you rather than verbalising them.
- Give the child time to process what you are saying and share their thoughts, without interruption or blame. If you are a professional, try to minimise notetaking and maximise active listening (maintain eye-contact if culturally appropriate, nod, etc.). Listen carefully to any confusion or concerns.
- Reassure them you are always there to help and even if you don't know the answers, you can find them out together.
- Get support quickly if they need it. This might be from family, friends, the school or other agencies.

SECTION 8

Recognising signs of online abuse

Identifying signs of abuse early, and taking action, is important in protecting children and young people.

Online abuse can be categorised as any type of harmful contact that happens on the internet. It can happen on any connected device and on any platform, e.g., social media, online chats, voice chat in games, comments on live streaming sites, text and messaging apps, email and private messaging. Children and young people can be at risk of online abuse from people they already know offline, as well as from those that they only know online.

Children and young people may experience various kinds of abuse online, including bullying, emotional abuse, online sexual harassment, exploitation or coercion and online hate. These incidents may also be in conjunction with physical, emotional or sexual abuse that's happening offline, such as bullying or an abusive relationship. Children and young people can also be groomed online.

This is a process of manipulation to develop a relationship with a child, with the intention of exploiting them and causing them harm. Harm caused by grooming can be sexual abuse, both in person and online, and exploitation to obtain sexually explicit images and videos of the child, including those that are taken by the child themselves. Grooming techniques could also be used to radicalise someone or to obtain financial information from the child or their family.

Open and honest discussions with children about consent and power imbalances are crucial in addressing online risks, especially in activities like livestreaming and related online interactions. Recognising these aspects not only boosts online safety but also deepens our understanding of digital interactions, promoting a safer online environment.



There are certain warning signs to look out for that may indicate a child is experiencing abuse or other difficulties online. For example, the child might:

- Make changes in their internet use, e.g., they start spending a lot more or a lot less time online than usual.
- Want to stop using apps and services or participating in offline activities that they previously enjoyed.
- Display unexplained changes in their behaviour, such as becoming withdrawn, distant, upset or angry after going online or using their devices.
- Become more secretive about their online activities. For example, not wanting to share information about who they're talking to and what they're doing online, and isolating themselves (closing their door or leaving the room) to use their devices.
- Mention names of friends, contacts or followers that you are unaware of and be vague, or unwilling to talk, about who they are.
- Start to talk about more adult issues, demonstrate behaviours or use language that is inappropriate for their age.
- Have unexplained gifts, credits or money to spend online.

The effects of online and offline abuse are wide-ranging, and can lead to a child or young person:

- Experiencing problems with their sleeping, including having nightmares.
- Being extremely tired and having difficulty concentrating.
- Displaying behavioural problems or falling behind at school.
- Becoming socially withdrawn.
- Being more emotional or experiencing unusual outbursts of anger.
- Taking less care of their appearance or presentation.
- Feeling anxious or depressed, or experiencing panic attacks.
- Developing an eating disorder.
- Having thoughts about, or carrying out, self-harm.
- Having suicidal thoughts.
- Suffering from other mental health difficulties.
- Having flashbacks or repetitive or disturbing thoughts.



When examining the effects of online abuse, it's also essential to understand the issue of re-victimisation. Content that has been reported and taken down always has the potential to be re-uploaded and shared online, subsequently leaving victims feeling fearful that they may have to relive their trauma again in the future. The effects of online abuse can be both short-term and long-term and trauma may resurface or be triggered later, even if the original incident has seemingly been addressed.

Listening and caring about a child who has suffered trauma is key to helping them heal. While you as a caring adult might feel helpless as content can be re-uploaded, your availability and support can already be a huge help to the child or young person.

SECTION 9

Supporting a child who has disclosed online abuse to you

Do

- Acknowledge how difficult it must have been to talk and let them know they've done the right thing by coming to you.
- Use language that lets the child know that what's happened is **not** their fault.
- Listen calmly and objectively to what they have to say. Reacting with shock or anger may close the conversation, and children are likely to remember this reaction in the future.
- Allow them to explain it in their own words, at their own pace.
- Reassure the child that whilst it cannot be kept a secret, only the adults who need to know will be informed.
- Save the evidence **where appropriate**. Evidence may include screenshots taken on a laptop or mobile device, emails, texts or online conversation histories. This is different in the case of CSAM — see the DON'T section for more information.
- Take notes after you've spoken to the child. Try to keep these as accurate as possible.
- Report the abuse as soon as possible to the relevant agencies (school, children's services, police) so that the details are fresh in your mind and action can be taken quickly.

Don't

- Interview, interrogate or decide if the child is telling the truth. Instead, listen impartially and keep it factual. Record statements and observable things, not your interpretations.
- Assume anything, speculate or jump to conclusions. Don't ask leading questions or provide language for the child.
- View images of CSAM. This is illegal and should be avoided. If a child reports that their device contains inappropriate images, ask the child, *'If I look at these images, what will I see?'* If it is CSAM or otherwise inappropriate/illegal images, the device should be brought to authorities.
- Make promises that may not be able to be honoured (such as promising you won't tell anyone or that this will never happen again).
- Ask the child to wait until another person can be present to witness the disclosure.

Avoiding victim blaming

Victim blaming is any language or behaviour that implies (intentionally or unintentionally) that the victim of abuse or harm is fully or partially responsible for their experience.

Whether you are a parent or carer, or work with children and young people in a professional capacity, victim blaming is damaging for children and young people and can discourage them from seeking support or talking openly about their experiences.

When young people fear that they will be in trouble they will be less likely to come forward and share their concerns and ask for the help they need. To avoid negative outcomes, it's crucial that young people are encouraged to talk to trusted adults and assured of a safe space for conversations.

Avoid phrases and questions like:

- Why did you do that?
- Why did you break the rules that we set?
- Why didn't you come forward sooner?
- What did you expect would happen?
- You should have known better.
- That was a dangerous choice.
- You put yourself in danger by...

If you work with children and young people, your setting's policies and procedures should promote anti-victim blaming attitudes and language. If adults in your setting display victim blaming attitudes, consciously or unconsciously, it is important to discuss this with them and challenge this behaviour in a constructive way.

SECTION 10

Reporting cases of online abuse

If you are made aware of, or have concerns about, a potential case of online abuse, then working in partnership with the right agencies ensures that the appropriate support is quickly received.

For parents and carers

Talk to your child to offer support and reassurance and, if appropriate, report the suspected abuse to the child's school and/or to the relevant national authority.

Report the incident online using the reporting, blocking or moderating settings available on the services that the child is using.

You can also report child sexual abuse material to the platform or site where it is hosted or via national and international reporting mechanisms. For more information see pages 28 and 40. If you think your child is in immediate danger, contact your local or national police force.

For professionals

All settings and organisations that work with children and young people should have child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures in place. The designated safeguarding person or officer will be able to let you know where these are if you are not familiar with them.

These documents should be regularly reviewed, read and understood by all adults. Ensure that you communicate with your safeguarding lead or line manager to keep your knowledge and practice up to date.

If you have any concerns about the welfare of a child, follow your setting's mandatory procedures to record the concern and escalate either to an individual or organisation with safeguarding responsibility, or to the relevant authority, e.g., local police, national reporting organisation or local support services.

If you think the child is in immediate danger, contact your local or national police force, a national helpline or other relevant agencies, such as your local child protection services.

Using correct terminology while reporting

If your role has mandatory safeguarding procedures, it is critical that any reports use correct terminology to accurately describe offenses. It is also useful for parents to use correct terminology, as it will help you access the correct support and guidance.





SECTION 11

Key online safety messages to share with children

Education and support are the best tools that a child can have when it comes to understanding and managing risk online.

The following key online safety messages cover a wide range of topics, based on the risks that children and young people may encounter online. Whilst lots of children and young people will be using Wi-Fi in their homes with filtering in place or may have content restrictions set up on

their personal devices, these kinds of controls are not guaranteed to be one hundred percent effective. Therefore, sharing key messaging can help support children and young people in their safe and responsible use of the internet.

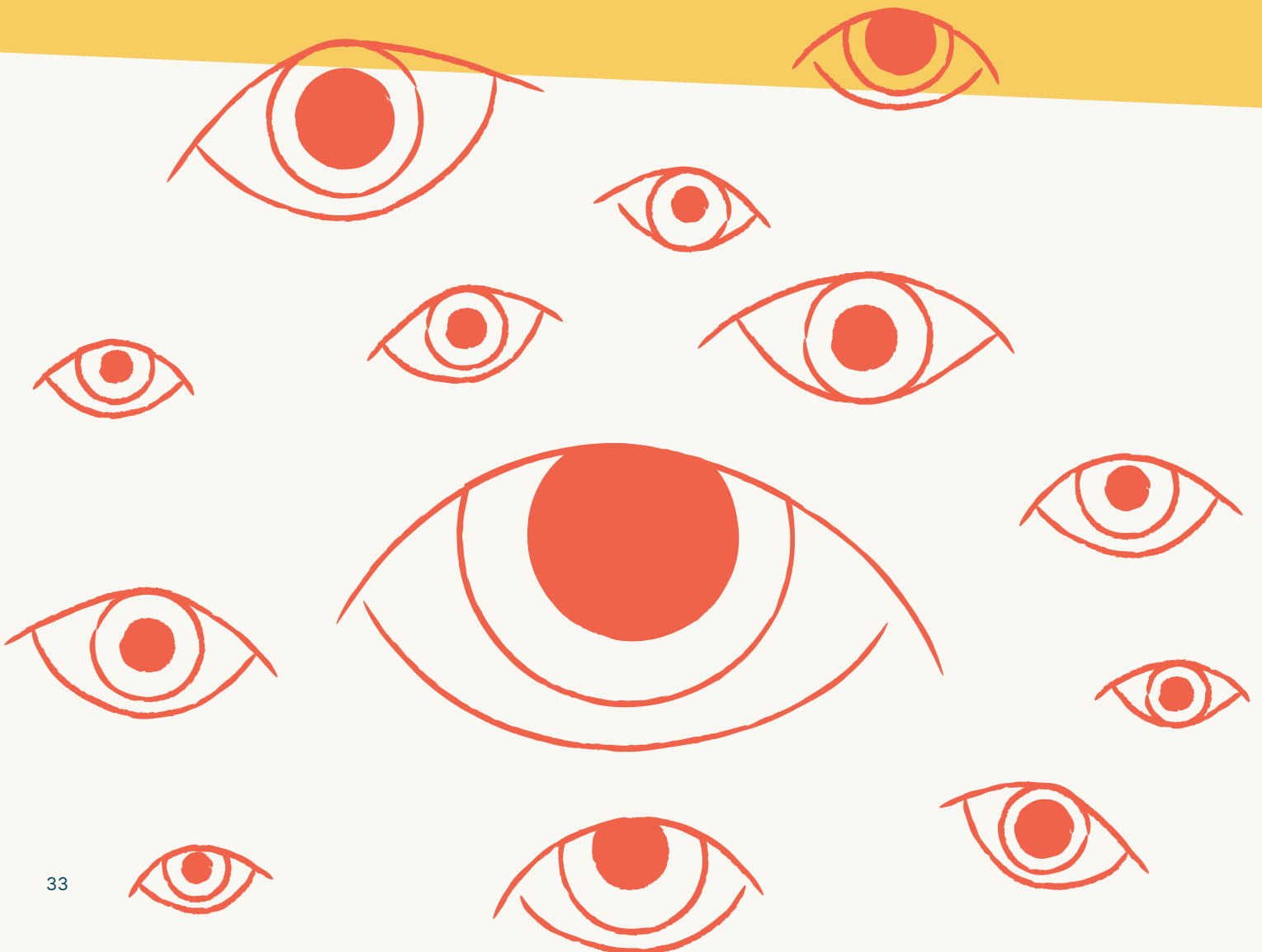
1. CREATING AND SHARING CONTENT

As children grow older, their interests are likely to move from merely consuming content to creating and sharing content of their own, and there are several factors that need to be considered if they are to learn how to do this safely and responsibly. Depending on the age of the child you are talking to, two useful questions to ask could include:

“Who can see what you are sharing online?”

It's important that children and young people keep their personal information safe and use the privacy settings that are available to them, to ensure that they're happy with the audience for their posts. They may need help to put these in place.

It's also essential to remember that even with these settings, screenshots can be taken, livestream can be recorded, messages and comments can be copied or forwarded on to others, and things posted online may resurface in the future.



“Do you have consent for what you want to share?”

When it comes to sharing content online, it's important that you have consent from whoever is in the photos or videos that you upload. Consent is a key concept for children and young people to explore and understand, and one that is often overlooked. A straightforward way to talk about consent is that it must be:

FREELY GIVEN

This means that no one should ever feel pressured into giving permission for something to happen.

REVERSIBLE

If someone gave consent in the past, it is their right to change their mind.

INFORMED

The person must be given all the information for them to be able to properly give consent.

SPECIFIC

This means that each example of seeking consent needs to be specific to that moment and that no assumptions can be made. For example, just because someone has given consent in the past doesn't mean that you can assume that they would give consent again.

Modelling consent is important. Before posting pictures or any other content related to the young people in your life on social media, show them what you want to post and ask for their consent.



2. ONLINE FRIENDSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

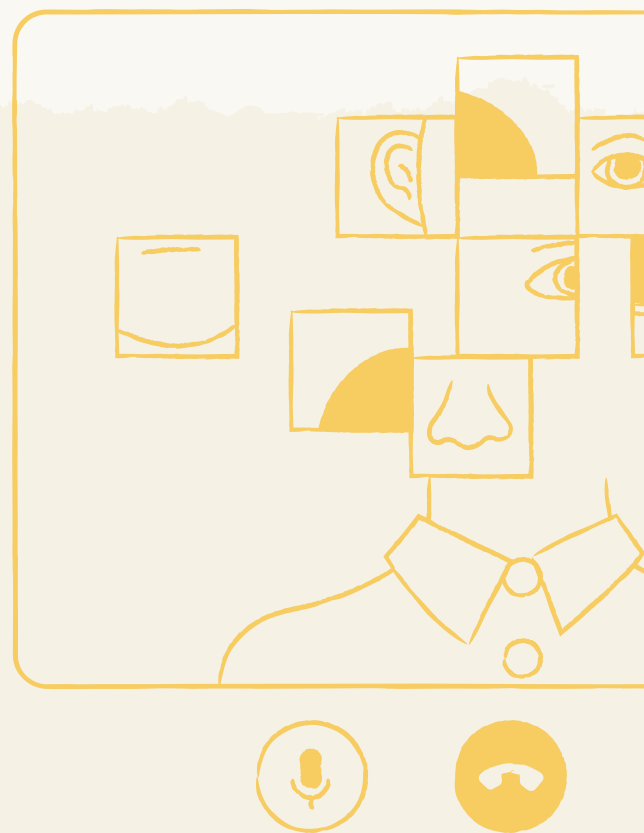
The online world is constantly evolving in terms of what children and young people can do, especially the ways in which they communicate with one another. There is little distinction now between 'life online' and 'the real world,' as being online is a natural extension of offline socialising and is very much a part of real life. At times, the people causing harm to children online may be individuals they know in their everyday lives, such as school friends, neighbours or even family members. For many children, the online and offline world are intricately linked, especially when it comes to addressing these concerns. Several of the 'online risks' are essentially variations of 'social risks' that emerge uniquely in the online environment. By understanding this connection between online and offline risks, we can provide better support and guidance to children as they navigate the digital world, ensuring their safety in all aspects of their lives. Depending on the age of the child you are talking to, two useful questions to ask are:

“How do you know this person?”

With so many children using the communication features offered within gaming platforms, friendships are developing online between people that have never met face to face, and so the messaging that children and young people receive must reflect this. Ensuring that an adult approves all friend requests is a useful step to take for younger children, as is investigating the settings that are provided to control whether the chat features are switched on or off.

With older children who can chat with other users online, it's important to talk about the kinds of things that are okay to discuss online and behaviours to be aware of that indicate something might not be right. Ensure that children

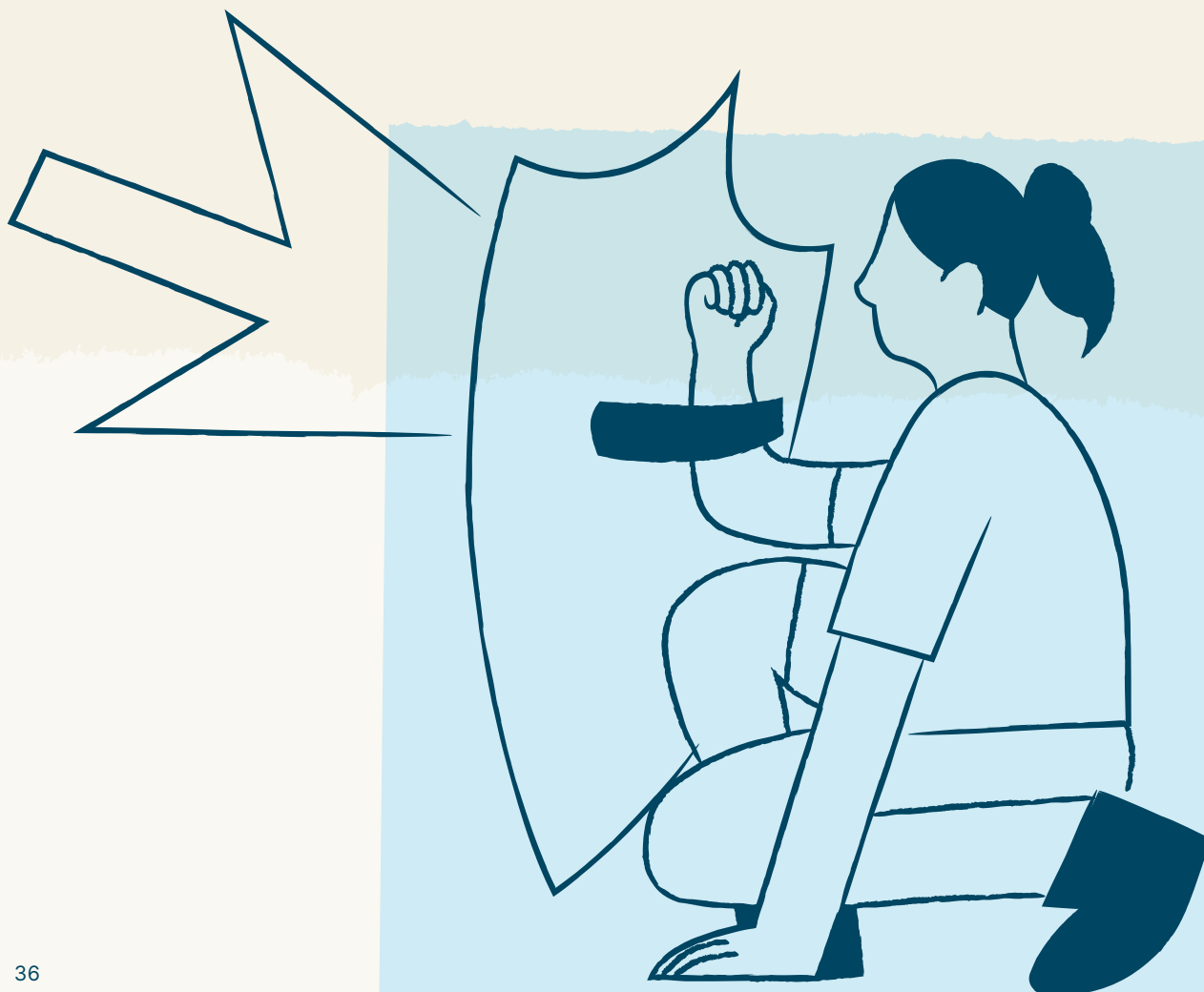
and young people know that friends made online are still strangers, and if any conversation or behaviour makes them feel uncomfortable (for example, if anyone is asking for personal information or for them to send images of themselves) then it's vital they speak to a trusted adult straight away.

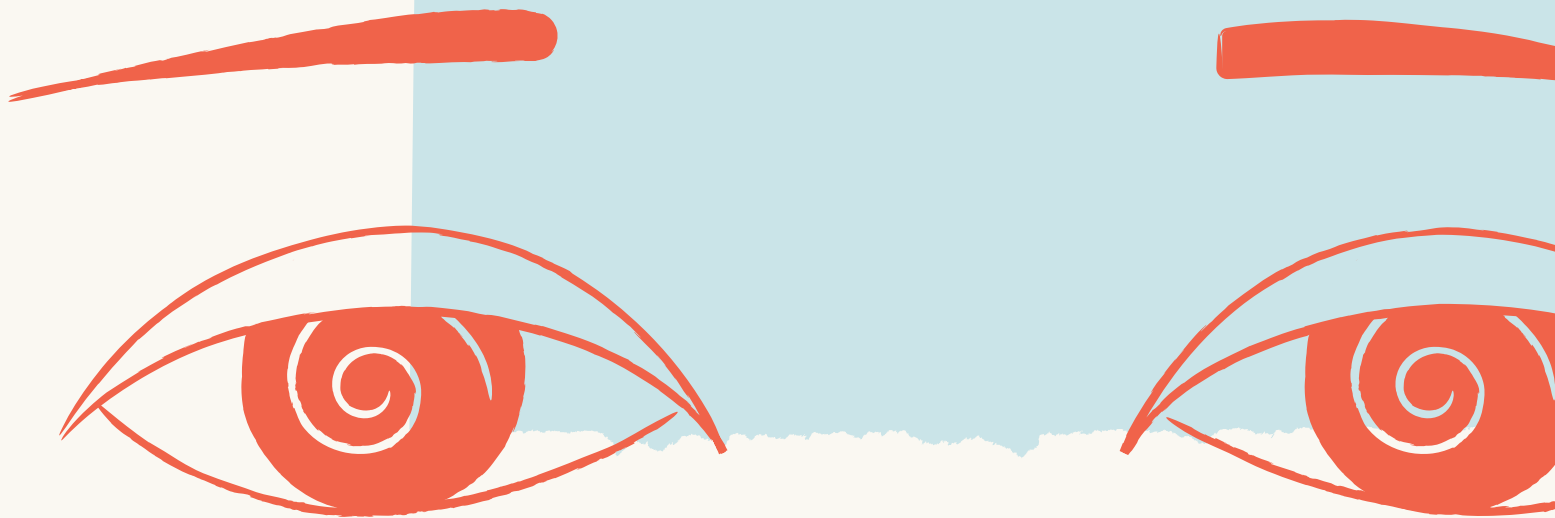


“What would you do if someone is pressuring you to do something that you don’t want to do?”

Pressure from others could include a number of different things, for example, requests to send images or videos of themselves (clothed, partially clothed or nudes), joining in with behaviours that might upset others or taking part in risky online challenges. The key messaging here is that no one has the right to pressure them into doing anything online that they are uncomfortable with, and to tell a trusted adult straight away if this is happening.

A ‘healthy’ friendship or relationship is not one that is based on an abuse of trust or power, and it’s okay to say no to things that they do not want to do. However, as a child or young person it can be difficult to say no under pressure, and so these are conversations that need to be started, and even practised, at an early age.





3. MENTAL HEALTH

The internet is an incredible resource and a brilliant way to connect with others, engage with entertaining content and explore new interests and trends. However, it's important that children and young people understand the impact that online content and interactions can have on their mental health and overall wellbeing. If going online is beginning to have a negative impact on children and young people's mental health, it's important to be able to recognise that this is happening and take necessary steps to redress the balance and protect the child in question. Depending on the age of the child you are talking to, two useful questions to ask are:

“How do you know when you've spent too long online or think you might need to take a break?”

Empowering children and young people to be able to look at themselves and identify the physical and psychological effects of going online is something that can be done from an early age. Young children may be able to identify physical symptoms such as sore eyes and headaches following too much screen time and will certainly be able to let you know how seeing something upsetting or scary makes them feel.

These conversations can then be developed and extended as children get older, delving more into the kind of content that they might be consuming or interactions they are being a part of and the effect that it can have, e.g., asking how influencer content makes you feel, having conversations around content being edited to 'improve' the aesthetic, and the fact that because people are likely to show their 'best selves' online, what you are viewing is not reality.

“What would you say to someone whose online activities were negatively affecting their mental health?”

This question is helpful for two reasons. Firstly, it gives children and young people the opportunity to demonstrate what they know about protecting their mental health online, as it will be reflected in the advice they give. Secondly, it highlights the fact that going online can impact your mental health and therefore it's useful to become as attuned to this fact as possible.

If children and young people are:

- Aware of the positive and negative emotions that going online can evoke.
- Aware of the warning signs that something might not be okay.
- Given the opportunity to talk about it openly and honestly.

Then conversations around the internet, technology, mental health and how to support each other will become a normal part of their development.

4. REPORTING CONTENT AND ASKING FOR HELP

If children and young people see something online that makes them feel upset, worried or uncomfortable in any way, then the most important thing that they can do is tell a trusted adult straight away. It's also important that any inappropriate online content, behaviour or interaction is reported to the correct services. Depending on the age of the child you are talking to, two useful questions to ask are:

“Who are the trusted adults in your life that you could go to for help if you had a problem online?”

This could be a family member, family friend, someone at school or any other adult in their lives that they feel comfortable enough to speak with.



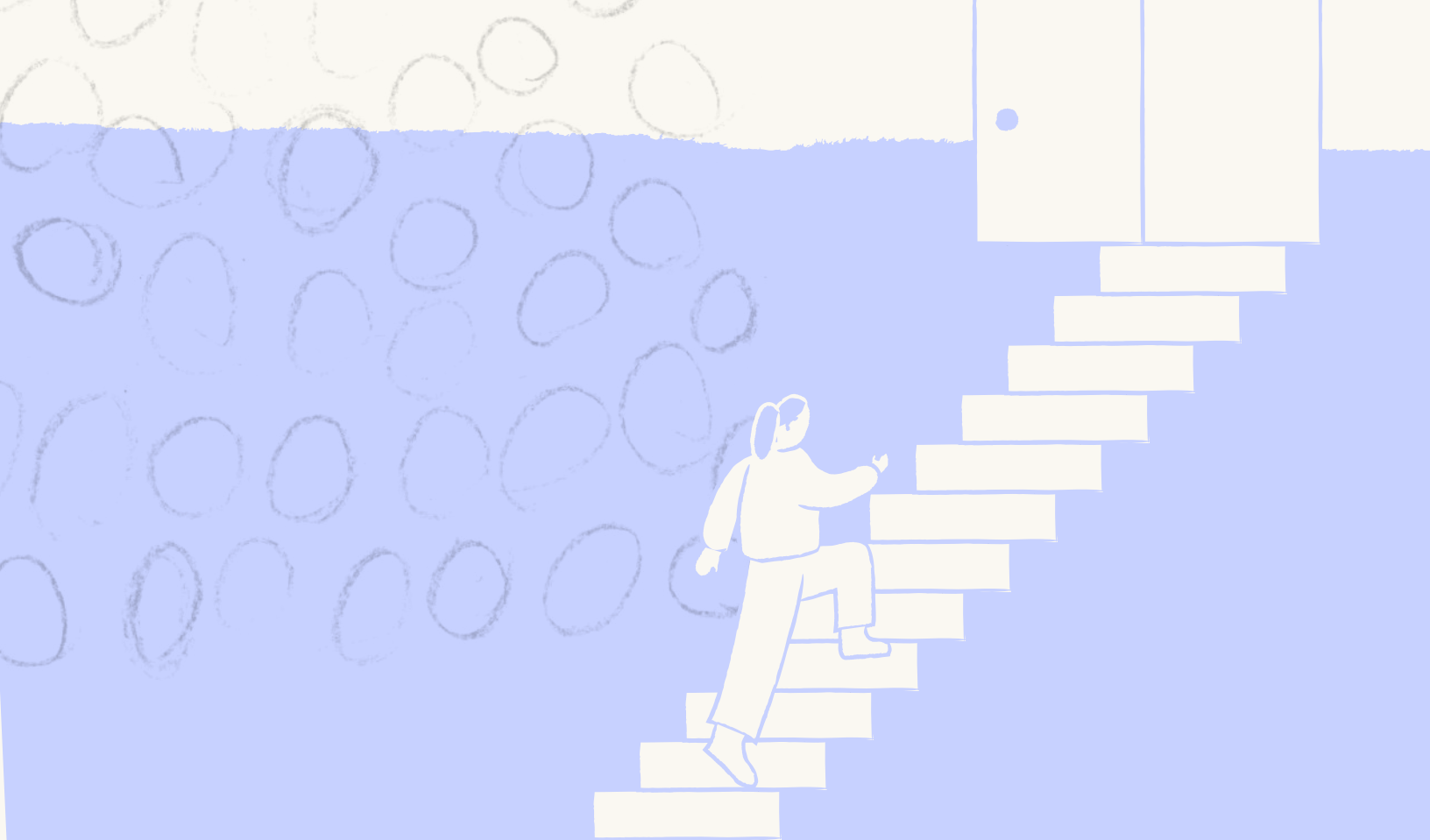
“Can you show me where to report something on this app/game/site?”

All online sites and services should have reporting channels available, where content or behaviour that breaks the user terms and conditions can be flagged to a moderator. However, these can sometimes be hard to find and children and young people may not know how, or when, to use them. Familiarising yourself with the reporting routes on popular services is a useful activity and by asking children if they know how to access these features you can assess their level of knowledge.

Unauthorised content or behaviour that can be reported might include:

- False information.
- Spam or unsolicited sales.
- Bullying or harassment.
- Hate speech on the grounds of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or other protected characteristics.
- Content that incites violence or terrorist activities.
- Content that encourages or promotes suicide or self-harm.
- Online grooming.
- Pornographic content or nudity.
- Child sexual abuse imagery.

If a child or young person does come to you with a problem that you need to report to an online service, then saving as much evidence as possible to substantiate the report is helpful. This might include screenshots of messages, images and chat logs. Depending on the country that you are in, there may be national reporting helplines or services for illegal online content that are available to you. If you feel that a child or young person is in immediate danger, then do not wait to get help — you may need to contact child protection services or the police.



Where to go for help

- Helplines allow you to talk with a trained professional via phone, text or chat. They will discuss your challenges and can help connect you with the right support. For a list of helplines near you, visit icmec.org/hotlines-and-helplines/
- Hotlines or reporting portals allow you to report suspected child sexual abuse images or videos online. Find your national reporting hotline at inhope.org/EN
- For a free service that can help you remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude or sexually explicit images or videos, visit takeitdown.ncmec.org/
- For resources for parents, carers, educators, and young people and detailed information about different online issues, visit UK Safer Internet Centre saferinternet.org.uk/
- For information and resources on helping to prevent online child sexual exploitation, visit thinkuknow.org.au
- For professionals who require more assistance in dealing with an online safety issue, reach out to the UK's Online Safety Helpline: saferinternet.org.uk/professionals-online-safety-helpline
- To report online threats, bullying, harassment, impersonation, violent content or self-harm content, go to reportharmfulcontent.com

Turning insights into action

Technology and the online world to offer children and young people an incredible range of opportunities. It is vital that the journey to becoming competent, independent internet users is nurtured at each stage by adults who are aware of how children and young people use technology and can provide effective advice and support when it's needed. By following the tips and information given in this guide, and by educating ourselves and the children in our care, we can create a safer, happier and more fulfilling online experience for all children and young people.

