

Safeguarding Children

# Parental Guide for Online Safety



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# Content

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# Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to bully a person or group. Bullying is repeated behaviour with the intent to harm others. Behaviour may include:

- + Abusive texts and emails
- + Posting unkind or threatening messages, videos or images on social media websites
- + Imitating or excluding others online
- + Inappropriate image tagging

For many teenagers, their online life is an important part of their social identity. Many young people fear that parents might take away their devices and refuse access to the internet and so do not report cyberbullying to their parents. Teenagers are also often concerned that parents' actions

will make cyberbullying issues worse, so it is important to remain calm and supportive.

Trolling is when a user intentionally causes distress by posting inflammatory comments online.

Trolling differs from cyberbullying in that trolls aim to gain attention and power through disruption of conversation by encouraging a defensive reaction from those they attack. Cyberbullying usually focuses less on the reaction of the victim, and more on the feelings and authority of the bully. Cyberbullying is usually repeated behaviour, while trolling can be one-off.

**What can I do?** As a parent, you can help your child and encourage them to take control of the issue.

- + **Talk to them about cyberbullying before it happens.** Work out strategies to address any potential issues and reassure your child that you will be there to support them.
- + **Advise your child not to reply** to any messages from a bully. Often if bullies don't receive a response they will give up.
- + **Learn how to block a bully** so they are no longer able to make contact.
- + **Keep a record of harassing messages** in case authorities become involved. Put them somewhere your child won't continue to see them.
- + **Contact the website administrator** or use the reporting function to ask for content to be removed or to report harassment.
- + **Inform school if cyberbullying** involves another student. The school has a policy in place to help manage the issue.
- + **Remember that if your child has** been involved in cyberbullying and seems distressed or shows changes in behaviour or mood it may be advisable to seek professional support.

# Social networking & Online games



Social networking describes a variety of services like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, Snapchat, Minecraft and many others. Even Online games come under social networking.

All of these services enable direct interaction between individuals. Users can post information about themselves, display photos, tell people what they've been up to, chat and play games. Social networking forms a part of the social identity of many teenagers.

## Grooming

Online grooming is the illegal act of adults making contact with a child online for the purpose of establishing a sexual relationship. Often this will be via a social networking site, but it may also be through other online service.

**What can I do?** As a parent, you can help your child have positive experiences on social networking sites.

- + Stay involved in your child's use of new technology. Set up your own account and learn about privacy settings so you can understand how you can best protect your child.
- + **Check the age restrictions for the social networking service or game.** Some social networking sites are created especially for children under the age of 13, but most mainstream sites like Facebook, Instagram and others require the user to be 13 or older.
- + **Advise children to set their accounts to private** so that only people they want to see it can view their information.
- + **Encourage children to think before they put anything online.** Information posted online can be difficult or impossible to remove. An inappropriate image posted today can have a long term impact on their digital reputation.
- + Show them how to set up location services on their phone so they are not inadvertently broadcasting their location.
- + **Remind children to be careful when making new friends online;** people may not be who they say they are. Never arrange to meet an online friend unless a trusted adult is with them.
- + **Report any abuse or inappropriate content** to the social networking site and show children how to do this too.
- + Learn how to keep a copy of online conversations and how to block people prior to an issue occurring.

# Sexting



**Sexting [verb] = sending a sexually explicit message.**

The term 'sexting' describes the use of technology to share personal sexual content. It's a word-mix of sex and texting. It can also include posting this type of material online. Young people often consider sexting as a way of connecting in a relationship.

While sharing suggestive images or text messages may seem like innocent flirting or fun, sexting can have serious social and legal consequences. To help protect their reputation, young people need to consider what they share online, and how they handle messages and images sent to them by others.

In most instances of sexting, young people willingly share inappropriate photos of themselves. However sexting can also happen in response to peer pressure. Accidents can also occur; for example, the sender or receiver of sexts may have their phone stolen by someone who decides to publish the images online.

## What can I do?

- + **Talk to your child about sexting to prevent any issues from arising.** Make sure they are well aware of the risks that may occur if their images were to be spread beyond the person they intended them for.
- + **Remind your child about the social and legal consequences of sexting.** If anyone in the photo or video is under 18 they may be committing a crime if they send, receive or forward messages.
- + **If your child has been involved in sexting, remember to stay calm and be reasonable about the consequences.** Sexting is not uncommon behaviour and your child is not alone in being negatively impacted. Rather than adding to the distress, focus on finding a solution for your child.
- + **Try to get the image/video removed from all locations** to the greatest extent possible. If sexting content is posted online, report it to the website administrator.
- + **Seek help from the school if necessary.** School will help you to track who might have the image or video and where it might be posted.
- + **Ensure that your child is supported if they have been negatively impacted by sexting.** Their friends are critical so try to help them stay connected to them for support, both online and offline.

# Mobile Phone Safety



Mobile phones are a great way for children and teenagers to stay in touch with their parents, family and friends and provide access to fun and functional resources like games, the internet, music, apps and more from anywhere at any time.

Many young people would never be without their mobile phone, and a mobile phone provides you with immediate access to your children. However, the fact that they are 24/7 and you can't always be there to supervise means there are potential risks. These can include high or unexpected bill costs, cyberbullying, sexting, broadcasting their location to unintended others through 'checking in' and access to inappropriate material.

## What can I do?

- + **Stay involved with your child's use of their mobile phone.** If you don't have a good understanding of how their phone works and what they use it for, ask them to show you.
- + Investigate phone plans and pre-paid contracts. Decide what your child needs from their mobile phone so you are well-educated on options before you approach a provider.
- + Help your child to understand that they should treat their phone like a wallet, and that every text message, phone call or download costs money.
- + Let your child know that it's ok to tell you if they come across something that worries them, and that **their phone won't be taken off them if they report something to you.**
- + **Check automatic download settings and in-app purchase settings** on your child's mobile phone, as these can incur extra costs or use up credit quickly.
- + **Consider keeping credit card details away from your children** so music and apps cannot be purchased without your knowledge

# Offensive or Illegal Content



Children and young people may not deliberately seek out inappropriate content. Children can inadvertently access disturbing or illegal content while undertaking online searches or by clicking on unknown links.

Offensive or illegal content may include topics, images or other information that could be damaging to young people online. This is content that may:

- + include footage of real or simulated violence, criminal activity or accidents, promote extreme political or religious views or be sexually explicit and can include illegal images of child sexual abuse
- + promote hate towards individuals or groups on the basis of race, religion, sexual preference or other social/cultural factors, violence or unsafe behavior.

## What can I do?

- + Be aware of how your child uses the internet and explore it with them. Discuss the kinds of sites that are ok to explore and those that are not.
- + consider using parental controls such as filters to help manage your child's online access.
- + Remind your child not to open spam email or click on pop ups, prize offers or unfamiliar hyperlinks in websites.
- + Help your child use search engines to locate websites. Consider developing a list of favourites for younger children. Enable safe search options.
- + Reassure your child that access to the internet will not be denied if they report seeing inappropriate content to you.
- + Remind them not to respond if they are sent something inappropriate and that they should leave a website immediately if they feel uncomfortable or worried.

# How much is too much?



Your child may be spending too much time online if their online behaviour is having a negative impact on other aspects of their life.

To many parents it can seem as though children and young people are constantly online. Often they are multitasking; for example downloading and listening to music while studying and chatting with friends or sending messages on their mobile phones.

The number of hours children and young people spend online can vary significantly. There is no guideline for the 'right' amount of time for children to spend online, however if their online behaviour appears to impact negatively on their behaviour or wellbeing, or that of the family, it may be time to discuss expectations and establish time limits.

## What can I do?

- + The longer you wait to address the issue, the more difficult it can be to overcome. So if you see an emerging problem arising from excessive use, act on it right away.
- + You may like to install a filter on the laptop or computer your child is using which can be adjusted to limit the amount of time an internet connection will be available on that device.
- + Consider implementing family agreements about the amount of time your children can spend online. You might like to have a rule where the Wi-Fi password of the day is only given once all homework/chores/family time is done. A similar approach can be used to limit access to devices.
- + If your child seems particularly anxious or irritable, or you notice them seeming isolated from friends or other activities, there may be an underlying mental health issue. Consider getting help from school counsellors or your GP who can refer your child to a professional psychologist.

