



Australian Government



Parents and carers

Understanding the online world of your child or young person

What is your child navigating online?

This resource gives you an overview of some of the spaces, content and emerging issues shaping the online world of your child or young person right now.

Use it to feel more informed and confident when talking with them about their online life. You do not need to be an expert. You just need to know enough to stay curious and be willing to connect with your child to help reduce the risk of online harm.

Where children spend their time online

Children go online to connect, belong, express themselves and explore who they are. Most of what they do online is positive, social or creative. They move between spaces throughout the day: from messaging apps to video platforms to gaming communities, and often within a single hour. The lines between these spaces can be blurred. Some commonly used online spaces are:

Group chats and messaging apps

Most day-to-day peer communication happens in group chats and messaging apps. They are private, fast-moving spaces where many children's social lives play out.

Short-form video platforms

Short-form video platforms are where children watch, create and share content shaped by recommendation algorithms (automated systems that decide what content is shown to them based on what they have watched before).

Gaming and online communities

Gaming and online communities, including social media, are spaces where children may build friendships, develop skills and find a sense of belonging. These relationships may be built with people they have never met in person.

Feeds and comment sections

Feeds and comment sections are where children follow and engage with online creators, peers and communities on short-form video platforms, gaming platforms, social media and other online communities.

'The online world isn't all evil...there are fandoms where people get the support they need. There's so much potential for it to be such a good thing; people just need to turn it into that.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16, PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Note

Online social media minimum age

Australia's social media minimum age legislation restricts children under 16 from accessing certain platforms. This does not mean younger children cannot go online at all. It means the spaces look different.



If your child is in primary school:

They are most likely using gaming platforms, messaging apps and video content, all of which can involve peer interaction and unexpected content. Stay curious and keep conversations about their online activity open.

If your young person is in secondary school and approaching or past 16:

Access to a wider range of online spaces may be new or expanding. This is a moment to connect about what they are seeing, who they are connecting with, and what they would do if something felt uncomfortable.

Understanding algorithms

Algorithms are automated systems that decide what we see online. They are designed to keep people engaged. Content that causes a strong reaction tends to appear more often. This means harmful, extreme or one-sided content can appear alongside educational and entertaining content.

Once a child engages with even a mild version of harmful content, the algorithm learns from this and starts showing them more of the same. Research shows that on some platforms, users see harmful content before they even search for it or engage with it.

Children do not always have to go looking for harmful content. Sometimes it finds them.

Emerging issues to know

You can learn about some of the emerging online issues below, so you can recognise them and respond if your child experiences them. Some of these issues may be hard to read about. Learning about them does not mean your child has experienced them. It means you can notice the signs, ask questions, and support your child when they need you.

This list does not cover every online risk. Your child may also face other issues, such as cyberbullying or image-based abuse. Visit [eSafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au) to learn more about other online safety risks.

Term
Deepfakes and AI-generated content
What is it?
Deepfakes are digitally altered images, videos or audio that make a real person appear to say or do something they did not. They are created using artificial intelligence (AI) and are often very hard to detect.
What does it mean for children?
Anyone can create a deepfake. They are increasingly being used by peers to embarrass, impersonate or harass others. If your child is affected by a deepfake or other AI-generated content, you can report it to the eSafety Commissioner (see the 'Where to get help section' for contact details).
The eSafety Commissioner (2025) reports that they remove up to 98% of reported image-based abuse content. When you know what deepfakes and AI-generated content are, you can recognise them and respond quickly.

Term
The manosphere
What is it?
The 'manosphere' is not a single place but a loose network of online content, accounts and communities. It promotes rigid ideas about gender and harmful attitudes toward women and girls. It often frames itself as advice for young men about status, success and masculinity.
What does it mean for children?
Algorithms often show young men content that appears to be about fitness or self-improvement. This can be a starting point that gradually exposes them to more extreme content over time.
Children who feel isolated, are looking for a sense of belonging or are searching for purpose may be more likely to engage with this content. The more they engage, the more the algorithm shows them similar content.
When you know what this content looks like early, you can ask questions and start a conversation with your child before it goes further. This is about the content they have seen, not about who your son or young man is.

Term

Content creators and parasocial relationships

What is it?

Content creators are people who produce videos, posts or other online content, often as their main job.

A parasocial relationship is a one-sided emotional connection where a person feels close to someone they don't know in real life. This can happen with content creators because of repeated viewing, small interactions like 'likes' or comments, or because the creator feels relatable. The connection feels real to the child, but the creator does not necessarily know they exist.

What does it mean for children?

Children can invest a lot of emotional energy in content creators and may take on the values and behaviours those creators model. This can be a normal part of how young people explore their identity and belonging online. Who a child follows, why they follow them, and how that creator makes them feel can tell you a lot about their experience and inner world. Following creators can provide inspiration, entertainment, learning opportunities and a sense of community.

Ask open questions about the creators your child watches, or have them show you. This is a good way to stay connected and understand their online world.

Term

AI companions and chatbots

What is it?

AI companions are apps or platforms that allow users to create and interact with computer-generated characters. These characters are designed to feel like real relationships. They can hold conversations, remember details and respond in ways that feel personal and supportive.

An AI companion is different from a real relationship. It's designed to agree with you most of the time. It rarely sets boundaries, and it doesn't have needs of its own in the way a person does.

What does it mean for children?

Some children use AI companions to practise social skills, manage loneliness or explore their identity. This is not always harmful.

However, real relationships involve conflict, compromise and uncertainty. When children spend a lot of time with AI companions, it can become harder for them to manage this over time.

Find out who – or what – your child is talking to online. Ask open, curious questions about the apps they use. This is a good starting point.

Term

Online hate and social unrest

What is it?

Online hate is content that targets a person or group because of who they are. This includes their race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability or other factors. It can include harmful comments, images or videos designed to intimidate or silence people.

Some online content aims to increase division and distrust between groups of people. It can spread quickly because algorithms tend to show content that causes a strong reaction.

What does it mean for children?

Children can see hate online without looking for it. Repeated exposure can shape how they see the world and the people around them.

Some children may be targeted because of who they are. Others may follow or share hateful content without fully understanding its impact.

When you model respect and talk regularly about what your child sees online and how it makes them feel, you can notice early if something is affecting them.

Next steps

Use the how-to guide on the following pages for practical tips on how to start and keep having conversations about your child's online life.

Visit esafety.gov.au/parents for resources tailored to parents and carers.



Report illegal and harmful online content or online abuse to the platform or service first, then report it to **eSafety** at esafety.gov.au/report.

How to talk with your child about their online life

Staying connected with your child protects them more than monitoring or restricting them. Children who feel they can talk to a parent or carer without fear of judgement are more likely to tell someone when something goes wrong. This guide gives you practical steps for starting and continuing those conversations.

The platforms children and young people use in primary and secondary school may look different, but the same principles apply. Consider your child's age, developmental stage, emotional readiness and individual needs. Curiosity, connection and low-pressure conversations are the most protective approaches you can take.

The conversation starters below include options for both primary and secondary age groups.

What you will need

- ⦿ A low-pressure moment (rather than a sit-down talk triggered by concern).
- ⦿ Genuine curiosity about your child's online world.
- ⦿ A willingness to hear things that might surprise you and to manage your reaction before it affects theirs.

Before you start

Before you talk with your child about their online life, remember these points. For more information about communicating and connecting with your child, see the connected resources listed at the end of this guide.

- ⦿ **Curiosity over interrogation or judgement.** Ask questions to learn, not to catch them doing something wrong.
- ⦿ **Manage your own emotions first.** If your child tells you something that alarms you, pause before you respond. How you react will affect whether they come to you again next time.
- ⦿ **Make it ongoing, not a single event.** A single sit-down talk triggered by concern, without much previous curiosity, may feel like an interrogation. These conversations work best when they happen naturally, as part of everyday life.
- ⦿ **Use their language, not yours.** Avoid technical terms like 'manosphere' or 'parasocial relationships' if they are not the phrases your child uses. Ask about it from their perspective instead.

Step 1: Start with what your child or young person enjoys

Lead with genuine interest in what your child likes online, not with what worries you. This builds the trust that makes harder conversations possible later.

Tip

Follow your child's lead. If they engage with one question, stay on that topic rather than moving through a list. The questions to the right can help you start the conversation.



Step 2: Ask about what they are seeing or experiencing

Once the conversation is flowing, open it up to what your child is encountering online. This includes the good and the not-so-good.

Tip

Share when you feel unsure too. For example: 'I find it hard to tell what's real online. How do you figure it out?' This shows you are learning too, not just asking the questions.



If your child is in primary school:

- ◉ What games are you playing at the moment? Can you show me how they work?
- ◉ What do you like watching online? What makes it good?
- ◉ Who do your friends talk to or play games with online?
- ◉ Ask your child to show you their favourite game, creator or video. Watching, playing or exploring together can help you understand what they enjoy and create natural opportunities for conversation.

If your young person is in secondary school:

- ◉ What do you like online at the moment?
- ◉ Who do you follow a lot? What's their story? What do you like about them?
- ◉ What are your friends watching right now?

If your child is in primary school:

- ◉ Is there anything in your games or videos that ever feels weird or makes you feel uncomfortable?
- ◉ Have you ever seen something online that confused you or felt a bit wrong?
- ◉ What is fun about being online? Is there anything that is not fun?

If your young person is in secondary school:

- ◉ Have you found anything that seemed fake or edited to make someone look bad?
- ◉ Have you ever seen stuff online that felt like it was trying to convince you something was true but it felt off? What did you think?
- ◉ Has anything ever shown up in a group chat or your feed that made you uncomfortable? What did you do?

Step 3: Ask about safety and support

Gently ask what your child would do and who they would tell if something went wrong online. The goal is not to alarm them but to make sure they know the answer before they need it.



Tip

If your child says they would not tell anyone, or are not sure, that is useful information. Stay curious rather than worried in your response. For example, you might try: 'What makes it hard to tell someone?'

If your child is in primary school:

- ◉ If something happened online that made you feel bad, what would you do?
- ◉ Is there someone at school or home you would feel okay talking to if something felt wrong online?

If your young person is in secondary school:

- ◉ If something happened online that made you uncomfortable, who would you tell?
- ◉ Is there anything about your online life you would like me to understand better?
- ◉ Could I do a better job of learning about what you're into online? I'm open to it.

'It's not so easy to just block someone online; sometimes it feels even harder to.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16, PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Step 4: If they disclose something, lead with thank you

If your child tells you something difficult, such as something they saw, something that happened, or something that made them uncomfortable, thank them before you do anything else. Your response in this moment helps influence whether they come to you next time.



Tip

Try not to immediately fix, restrict or escalate if your child tells you something difficult. Support them in the moment and stay in the conversation first.

If your child is in primary school:

- ◉ Thank you for telling me. That was really brave. Can you tell me a bit more about what happened?
- ◉ I am really glad you told me. Let's figure this out together.

If your young person is in secondary school:

- ◉ I am really glad you told me that. Can you tell me more about what happened?
- ◉ That sounds like a lot to deal with. I am not going to get upset. I would like to understand.



Report illegal and harmful online content or online abuse to the platform or service first, then report it to **eSafety** at esafety.gov.au/report.

Connected resources

- ◉ Strategies to connect with your child or young person
- ◉ Protective and risk factors for children and young people

What if it does not go to plan?

Sometimes the conversation does not go the way you hoped, even when you try. Your child might shut down, seem annoyed or give one-word answers. That is normal, and it does not mean the conversation was wasted. Be kind to yourself. Pause, then try again. The goal is not a single successful conversation. It is the relationship that makes those conversations possible over time.

Practical ways to support safer online experiences

You do not need to be a technical expert to help keep your child safer online. Alongside ongoing conversations, these everyday actions can make a real difference:

- ◉ Review privacy settings together.
- ◉ Use age-appropriate safety features.
- ◉ Know how to block and report users.
- ◉ Review app/platform permissions and location sharing.

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

For children and young people

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au. Free, confidential counselling for bullying and other harmful behaviours, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7.

headspace/ehespace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au. Mental health, wellbeing and early intervention support, available 9 am–1 am daily.

For parents and carers

Parenting support lines

ACT: 02 6287 3833

New South Wales: 1300 1300 52

Queensland and Northern Territory: 1300 30 1300 or parentline.com.au

South Australia: 1300 364 100

Tasmania: 1300 808 178

Victoria: 13 22 89

Western Australia: 08 9368 9368

For all ages

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au. Mental health support for stress, anxiety and overwhelm, available 24/7.

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line: 13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Free, confidential bullying support for children, young people, young adults, parents and carers, available 24/7.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au. Crisis support and counselling if things feel overwhelming, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers.

QLife (LGBTIQA+ young people):

1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au. Free, anonymous peer support and referral service, available 3 pm–9 pm daily.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Available for free 24/7 to support people impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence.

eSafety Commissioner:

esafety.gov.au. Report cyberbullying, get advice, and request content removal support.

Australian Human Rights Commission:

humanrights.gov.au. Support for cases involving discriminatory harm. Reports can be made via the website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

State, territory and non-government education sectors will reflect the expectations of the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian schools in their policies and procedures by Term 1 2027. This includes making reasonable efforts to initiate a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. By Term 1 2027, all schools will also publish or link to policies and procedures that align with the National Framework (or equivalent contemporary jurisdiction specific Frameworks) and their local policies and school context.