

Online Safety

A Parent's Guide



Who is this guide for?



It's never too early to teach your child how to safely navigate technology and the online world.

This handy guide has been developed by Life Ed Queensland's education team in line with advice from the eSafety Commissioner of Australia ([esafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au)). As well as up-to-date advice for parents and carers, the guide provides simple steps to help children make positive choices and stay safe online.



Australian Government



eSafety Commissioner

For decades, the Life Ed program has been a rite of passage for millions of children. Supported by our much-loved mascot Healthy Harold and a team of specialist educators, our program includes:

- Nutrition and the benefits of exercise
- Legal and illegal drugs including alcohol, cigarettes and vaping
- Bullying and cyberbullying
- Cybersafety
- Sexual health
- Respectful relationships and consent
- Mental wellbeing



Michael Fawsitt
Life Ed Queensland CEO

Thanks to valuable supporters like you, and the generosity of thousands of donors through our Kids Protect Team, we're able to take the program to schools across Queensland, reaching even the most remote and disadvantaged communities where health and safety education is often needed most.

We want to raise resilient and happy children. I hope this online safety guide is a helpful tool to support your children and family.



Preschool parents

Four out of five parents say their preschooler uses the internet. While there are a host of learning opportunities for children under five, unsupervised use or extensive screentime can present risks.

Here are some tips to navigate your youngster's start online:



Check the ratings. Choose age-appropriate content. Check and familiarise yourself with age ratings and consumer advice on the apps and sites your child will be accessing.



Make some rules. Set clear ground rules for using devices and stick to them! Try using a timer to monitor screentime, or only allowing device use after sunset.



Lead the way. Young children can inadvertently access inappropriate content. Supervising, or better yet, exploring websites and apps together, reduces this risk.



Talk to your child. Start the conversation about safe and respectful online behaviour and help them understand what is and is not acceptable.



Make the most of parental controls. Available on devices, in web browsers and within app settings, parental controls can help block inappropriate content.



Be a role model. Set expectations by modelling responsible online behaviour.

Primary school parents

As your child gets older, their tech and internet use will increase.

Gauging the level of access a child should have at any given age, can be a minefield. There are no hard-and-fast rules, but consider your child's level of maturity, their sense of responsibility, and adherence to your technology-use rules.

Here are some handy tips to help you navigate the primary school stage:



Think before sharing. Remind children that photos and videos that are shared online will always be available. Even if deleted, they can remain on the internet forever.



Protect privacy. Speak to your child about why it is important not to share personal information such as date of birth, home address, phone number, school address or other identifying information online.



Secure accounts! Encourage your child to choose strong passwords to protect their online accounts. Strong passwords are longer and contain random numbers and symbols.



Encourage open conversations.

Talk to your child about what to do if approached by a stranger online or if they see content they are unsure about. Let them know they can speak to a trusted adult when something negative happens online.



Create a family tech agreement.

This is effectively a contract which clearly outlines the rules for technology use in your household.

You can find one on our Life Ed website lifeeducationqld.org.au/cybersafety-guide/





Secondary school parents

As children move into secondary school, they may spend even more time online and choose to take their first steps into the world of social media. Parents can help manage this stage by having some important conversations. Here are some things to be aware of:



Inappropriate images. Discuss with teens what they should do if they are asked to send nude photos and explicit images or if they receive such content from someone else.



Location, location, location. Photos and videos taken on smart devices contain metadata such as the time, date and location the image was taken. Check location settings on all devices to avoid accidentally sharing this information with strangers online.



Manage digital reputations. Remind your child that everything they say and do online forms part of their digital reputation. Being mindful of respectful online behaviour and only sharing images and videos of others when they have given permission to share, will go a long way to maintaining a positive digital footprint.



Safeguard data. Help your child to understand the types of data businesses collect from their online activity to use for advertising. Parents can control cookies by using ad blockers and other add-ons that limit the amount of information third parties can collect regarding a child.



Social media

All social media sites and apps have a minimum age recommended for use. While most platforms require users to be at least 13 years of age, there are other sites that have been developed especially for younger children.

Determining if your child is ready to join a social media platform will depend not only on their age, but also their level of maturity and resilience.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do they know what to do if they have a negative experience?
- Does your child understand why it is important to protect their privacy online?
- Has your child followed your existing rules around online use and behaviour?
- Is your child clear on who to speak to and/or how to report cyberbullying and online abuse?
- Does your child know how to manage the privacy settings on their devices and within apps? Are they willing to let you supervise their social media use and accounts?
- How are your child's current friendships? If they already have had some negative experiences and interactions in friendship groups, these are often exacerbated when using social media.

If you feel confident in your child's ability to manage their social media profile, behaviour and privacy, they may be ready to begin exploring this medium.

Remember: readiness will vary from one child to the next, and it is important to consider your child, independent of their friends or siblings.



Online time

The age and maturity of your child will help you to determine the appropriate amount of screen time for your family. Factors such as homework or school requirements, personal attitudes and family device use rules will all serve to influence your decisions regarding screen time.

How much screen time is too much?

Parents often worry that their kids are spending too much time online. We know that excessive screen time can impact on sleep, exercise and interpersonal relationships with friends and family. If your child is constantly connected to their device, they could be missing out on their daily dose of exercise to maintain good physical and mental health. If they are choosing their device over time with friends when they visit or ignoring family members in favour of online activities during mealtimes or other events, it may be time to switch off.

Aim for a healthy balance by encouraging your child to play outdoors, read or join in other activities. Studies show that time offline has a positive impact on mental and physical wellbeing.





What can I do to reduce screen time?

If you feel screen time has become an issue for your child or in your household, there are a few simple strategies you can employ to boost offline time.



Ask. Find out why your child wants to go online. Perhaps you could suggest an alternative activity



Turn off notifications. Switching off notifications can minimise distractions



Zone out. Create device-free spaces in your home



Clear consequences. Be consistent with rules and guidelines



Be the leader! Role model time away from screens in your own daily life

There are plenty of additional tools and apps available for parents who wish to further monitor their child or family's internet use, but experts say it's best to work towards maintaining open and honest communication with children. Building a foundation of trust is important for a safe online experience for your child.

Cyberbullying

When someone uses technology and digital platforms to insult, hurt or humiliate another person or group it constitutes online bullying or cyberbullying. Unfortunately, one in five children experiences cyberbullying each year.

Cyberbullying can take many forms including nasty or abusive text messages and sharing hurtful images or videos online via social media platforms or digital apps.

Is my child being cyberbullied?

Watch out for these signs that could mean your child is being cyberbullied. These include:

- Being upset after using their phone or going online
- A change in mood - becoming more withdrawn, quiet, anxious or sad
- Sudden changes in friendship groups
- Acting secretive about online activity, mobile phone use and social media posting
- Decline in schoolwork or sporting performance
- Changes in sleeping patterns





What should I do if my child is being cyberbullied?

Keeping the lines of communication open with your child is the key to getting on top of cyberbullying. Many children avoid telling their parents because they worry it will make the situation worse for them or fear their device will be confiscated.

Here are some steps you can take to address the issue:



Stay calm. Listen to your child and ask questions about what has been happening. This will help you understand the scale and severity of the situation.



Record the evidence. While it is tempting to simply block the cyberbully, it is a good idea to record the bullying should it continue. Take screenshots of abusive posts and record the date and time.



Think first. Before deciding on your next steps, take a moment to consider all options available to you - is this something you and your child can resolve together, or will you need additional support?



Report. If the cyberbullying continues, you may choose to report it. If they are a student at your child's school, you could notify the school, or if they are unknown to your child, raise the issue with bodies such as the Office of the eSafety Commissioner or report to the site or service via which the bullying is occurring.



Put the child first. If your child is in immediate danger, prioritise their safety and seek professional help.

Unwanted contact

While the internet offers many positive opportunities for children, parents should be aware of the darker aspects of technology.

Unwanted contact is any message received that makes your child feel uncomfortable or unsafe. These messages could be sent by someone your child knows, or originate from strangers, and could include inappropriate messages, online 'grooming' and sexualised messaging.

What is grooming?

Grooming is the process by which paedophiles and other predators build a relationship with a child in order to abuse them. Grooming is not only used on the child, it may also be used on parents and others in the child's immediate environment to gain access to the child. Building trust, isolating the child, using intimidation, and having rules of secrecy are all ways in which predators seek to gain influence over vulnerable children





How can I protect my child?



Communication. Encourage your child to tell you if they receive messages that are unwanted.



Face-to-face relationships. Ensure your child understands that not everyone online is who they say they are. A good rule of thumb is to only add people who you know in real life.



Privacy settings. Help your child to correctly set up their privacy settings on their device, but also at the app

level. Regularly check these settings to make sure they are up to date and set to the highest level possible.



Say no to meet ups. Predators will try to lure children to meet face to face, so make sure your child knows to refuse such requests and to alert you if they are asked to meet someone in person who has contacted them online. Blocking and reporting inappropriate requests is also a good safety practice.

Be involved. Taking an active role in your child's digital activities can increase your child's safety. Educate yourself about the apps and sites they use regularly and make the most of privacy and parental controls available at both the device and app level. It is important to report suspicious or concerning online behaviour to the eSafety Commissioner or the police. If your child is in immediate danger, call Triple-0.

Extra resources on the Life Education Podcast

Listen the Life Education Podcast with former detective specialising in child exploitation, Brett Lee, who offers some incredible insight into how predators identify and groom their child targets and shares the key things parents can do to keep kids safe online. Scan the QR code or visit the website link to listen.





More resources

Reporting online abuse

If you or your child has a negative experience online, you can report it to the eSafety Commissioner.

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner investigates and deals with three types of abuse: cyberbullying, image-based abuse and child sexual abuse material.

To report online abuse, visit: esafety.gov.au/report. The eSafety Commissioner also provides information about how they investigate and act on reports received.

For the latest list of popular apps, along with recommended age-of-use advice, go to the parent section of the eSafety website - esafety.gov.au

Where can I get counselling and support?

1. Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800

kidshelpline.com.au Kids Helpline offers a free and confidential 24-hour online and phone-based counselling service to children and young people.

2. Parentline (Qld) - 1300 30 1300

Parentline offers counselling, support and information for parents. Available in each state, Parentline also offers a referral service for additional support in your local area. Opening hours vary from state to state.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, call Triple-0.

Other resources

[Commonsensemedia.org](https://commonsensemedia.org) is a great resource for parents. It provides honest and balanced reviews and recommendations for age-appropriate games, apps and other media sources.



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