



Optus
Digital
Thumbprint

5 Key Conversations to support digital safety



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Not an expert at technology? Don't worry. [Research](#) shows that when parents actively engage in their children's digital use, children are more likely to develop healthier digital habits.

Having open, regular conversations, can help your child to make safer decisions, be aware of hidden intentions from others, and be more responsible online.

This guide provides practical tips and conversation starters:

- ✓ **Have** better conversations with your child about digital issues
- ✓ **Help** your child engage with the digital world safely and productively
- ✓ **Encourage** ongoing discussions with your child throughout different stages
- ✓ **Help** you stay informed about emojis and online slang

How to set your conversation up for success

Listen, don't lecture

No one enjoys a lecture. Let your child share their thoughts and experiences first. Ask follow-up questions that show you're engaged and interested. This helps create a safe space for your child to work with you and contribute without feeling judged.

Keep it open

Encourage your child to think critically by asking "why" and "how." Instead of just providing answers, ask questions that help them reflect on their digital choices. This will support a deeper understanding and help them engage with technology more thoughtfully.

Start early (and often)

Start the conversation early and make it a regular part of your routine. The more frequently you check in, the more natural these discussions will become. Regular, open conversations ensure your child feels comfortable approaching you with any concerns, big or small.

Pro tip

Talking [when driving to and from school or activities](#) is a great place to start as non-direct conversation can help your child feel less embarrassed and keep the conversation going.

Alternatively, avoid starting a conversation when a tight timeline is looming (for example, in the dentist's waiting room!).



Pick your place

Create the right environment for meaningful conversations. Choose a time and place to focus without distractions during a car ride, at the dinner table, or during downtime. A relaxed setting makes it easier to have honest, open discussions.

Stay curious

Approach your child's digital world with curiosity, not judgment. Ask about their favourite games, apps, and social platforms to show you're interested in what they enjoy. This helps you stay informed and keep the lines of communication open.

Why conversations are a must



Just over half of parents and carers talk to their children regularly about online safety, yet almost all children regularly use technology.

5 conversations that matter

Research indicates that while overuse of devices and social media are a top concern for parents, many struggle with how to monitor, negotiate and discuss these issues with their children. At the same time, use of digital devices and online activities are a significant source of conflict within Australian families. Starting with a conversation on digital boundaries is key to steering your child through their digital journey. Check out how to start below:



1: First phones and smart watches

Setting the stage

Introducing your child to their first device is an exciting milestone! It's a big step, and as their guide, you can help them make the most of technology's benefits while keeping them safe.

Further reading link:
[First phone readiness guide](#)

Conversation starters

- What do you think would be helpful about having your own device?
- How should we use our devices at home?
- What rules should we set for using your device?

Follow-up family actions

- ✓ Create a family tech agreement that sets rules about how to use smart watches, first phones and other devices in the home. Setting up guidelines about screen time for tablets and TV is a great place to start. For example: Family Link (Android) and Screen Time (iOS).
- ✓ Use devices together in shared spaces to model positive digital habits and talk about the content.



2: Navigating hidden influences



Setting the stage

Social media platforms use algorithms to influence what your child sees. Helping your child unpack how these algorithms work allows them to make more informed choices and avoid being influenced by harmful or misleading content.

Did You Know?

YouTube's recommendation algorithm drives 70% of what your child watches on the platform. This means that what your child sees online is largely shaped by their past views, likes, and interactions.

Further reading link:
[Gen AI Parent Guide](#)

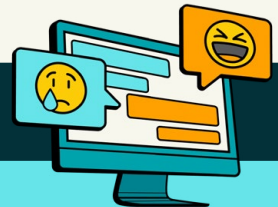
Conversation starters

- Have you noticed that the same videos or posts keep showing up? Why do you think that happens?
- How do you know if something you see online is real or not?
- Do you think it's useful when apps show you content based on what you've liked?

Follow-up family actions

- ✓ Explore different online sources of information together to compare perspectives.
- ✓ Use safe browsing tools, like Google Safe Search, to block harmful content.
- ✓ Consider using ad blockers to reduce exposure to targeted ads.
- ✓ Monitor your child's watch history and set up parental controls to filter content like inappropriate videos.

3: Respectful relationships



Setting the stage

Online spaces are a key part of your child's life, offering a space for connection and self-expression. But with cyberbullying up 450% in the past five years, online spaces come with serious challenges. It is crucial to help your child feel confident to navigate interactions and build respectful relationships online.

Further reading links:
[Cyberbullying guide](#)

Conversation starters

- How do you feel when someone leaves a kind comment on your post or message?
- How do you feel when someone leaves a mean comment on your post or message?
- What's the best way to handle disagreements with someone online?

Follow-up family actions

- ✓ Teach your child how to report inappropriate behaviour on online spaces and gaming platforms.
- ✓ Help your child review their followers or friends in online spaces and remove or block anyone they don't know.

4: Gaming and online play



Setting the stage

Research indicates that most young gamers (58%) think their parents and carers have negative perceptions about gaming. It's important to approach conversations about online play with curiosity and an open mind, rather than judgment.

Further reading link:

[Safeguarding your child's privacy](#)

Conversation starters

- Do you prefer playing games online with friends or in person?
- Can you teach me how to play your favourite game?
- How do you decide which online friends are trustworthy?

Follow-up family actions

- ✓ Research has found that many children (52%) and teens (27%) want their parents and carers to play online games with them. Playing alongside your child can help you monitor their interactions.
- ✓ Set some family rules about around when to switch off. For example, set up a timer that signals game time is nearly over.

5: Ensuring privacy and safety



Setting the stage

With online scams and identity theft on the rise, it is even more important to teach your child how to keep their personal information private and stay safe online.

It's not just children who need to be cautious—adults do too. When you share photos of your child in school or sports uniforms, these images can be collected by AI systems. This can lead to personal information being gathered, making children vulnerable to identity theft or exploitation.

Further reading links:

[Safeguarding your child's privacy](#), [Protecting your identity](#), [Sharenting is becoming a common practice](#).

Conversation starters

- What information should you keep private online?
- How do you decide who it's okay to share personal information with?
- How can we make sure your online accounts are safe?

Follow-up family actions

- ✓ Set up Multi-factor Authentication (MFA) on your family's devices.
- ✓ Consider creating private social media groups to share photos with just close friends and family.
- ✓ Teach your child to create strong passwords and passphrases and avoid clicking on suspicious links or messages.
- ✓ Adjust privacy settings on social media accounts to limit what information is collected and, if suitable, chat functions.

Pro tip



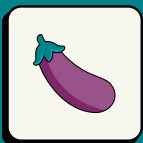
We've developed a list of emojis and acronyms that are currently in use. Our sources include [The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation \(ACCE\)](#), [ThinkUKnow](#), and research from [Moonshot](#). While it doesn't cover everything, and urban or online slang evolves daily, this provides a broad overview.

Decoding emojis, phrases and acronyms is key to understanding how young people communicate online. Since these symbols can have different meanings depending on the context, it's important to stay informed.

Sexual or flirtatious meanings



Noodles: "Nudes" - explicit or intimate photos or videos..



Eggplant: Male penis, flirtatious contexts.



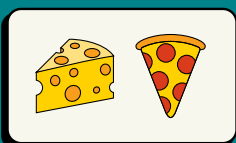
Horny Devil: Flirtatious, playful or cheeky.



Pizza: Like, love you.



Corn: Pornography.



Child pornography: Or content involving the sexual exploitation of children.

Radical beliefs and harmful meanings

- **Incel:** Involuntary celibacy.
- **Black pill:** Incels who believe in black pill think they are genetically inferior, have low sexual attractiveness and will not have romantic success.
- **Red pill:** Incels who believe that women are not oppressed, they are better off than men and would prefer traditional gender roles.
- **PUA:** Pick up artist. Is related to red pill theory and refers to gaming or manipulating another person to have sex.
-  **Kidney Beans:** aligns with the "[incel](#)" movement, often signalling support for misogynistic ideas and harmful views.
-  **100:** Related to the "80/20 rule," which suggests 80% of women are attracted to 20% of men. This idea reinforces harmful views about relationships, especially within "incel" communities.
-  **Dynamite:** Can represent an explosive or extreme opinion, often tied to radical or misogynistic beliefs. It can also signal a desire for violent change or rebellion.
- **JFL:** Just f**ing laugh out loud, can be used in celebrating violence or harm.
- **KYS:** Kill yourself
- **Rope or roping:** Associated with suicide and self-harm.

Heart emojis



Purple heart:
Intense physical attraction.



Yellow heart:
Friendship or platonic affection.



Green heart:
Envy, jealousy, or an interest in nature/ environmental causes.



Red heart:
Love, deep affection, and romantic feelings.



What to do if your child needs more help

- [eSafety Commissioner](#) to report cyberbullying, image-based abuse, and illegal and restricted content
- [Australian Cyber Security Centre](#) to report a cybercrime, cyber security incident or vulnerability.
- The Police if your child is in immediate danger or facing online harm.
- Contact your child's school to discuss the issue.

If your child needs to talk to someone about their feelings or worries, they can contact any of these free, private, 24/7 services:

- [Kids Helpline](#) on **1800 55 1800**
- [1300 Yarn](#) on **12 92 76**
- [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14**

About Optus Digital Thumbprint

Through our Digital Empowerment strategy and programs, Optus is enabling all Australians to achieve, thrive and belong in a digital world.

Optus Digital Thumbprint supports digital safety and wellbeing for young people and families. Find out more at www.digitalthumbprint.com.au

