



Optus
Digital
Thumbprint



Online grooming and child safety

A guide for parents and carers

Online spaces are a normal part of life for children and young people. They use them to learn, play games, connect with friends and explore their interests. Most online experiences are positive.

Sometimes, however, unsafe contact can begin in ways that seem ordinary. It might start with a follow, friend request, game invite or message. Over time, a person may try to build trust, move conversations into private spaces, encourage secrecy or make a child feel responsible for maintaining the relationship. This behaviour is known as online grooming.

A young person may also be blackmailed, pressured or threatened over an intimate image or video. This is called sextortion. It often involves fake profiles, building trust quickly and creating pressure or panic to make a young person act without thinking. The image may be real, fake, altered or AI-generated.

The goal is not to scare children away from being online. It is to help them recognise unsafe behaviour early, make safe choices and know they can come to a trusted adult for help.



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Why children don't always speak up

Many young people do not report uncomfortable or unsafe online sexual interactions straight away. They may worry adults will blame them, or take away their device.

Remind your child that they can come to you, and you will support them.

A few simple steps can reduce risk:

- ✓ Set accounts to private and limit messages to "friends only".
- ✓ Turn off searchability, location sharing and activity status.
- ✓ Remove public photos that show school, uniform, home or location details.

How to spot the warning signs of grooming



Unsafe contact can sometimes be difficult to spot as warning signs can show up as changes in behaviour and or emotions. According to the [National Office for Child Safety](#), a victim of grooming may show all or some of the following signs:

- Developing an unusually close connection with an older person
- Having gifts or money from new friends or someone that they cannot account for
- Being very secretive about their phone, internet or social media use
- Going missing for long periods of time
- Appearing extremely tired, including at school
- Being dishonest about who they have been with and where they have been
- Substance misuse
- Assuming a new name, having false identification, a stolen passport or driver licence, or a new phone
- Being collected from school by an older or new friend.

What you can do

Stop, Check, Report

Stop, Check, Report is a simple three-step approach you can use to help your child recognise and respond to unsafe behaviour online.



1. Stop

Encourage your child to stop engaging if someone online is asking for images or personal information, money, or making them feel pressured, threatened or scared.

2. Check

Work through a few quick checks with your child:

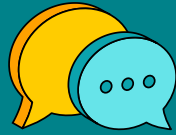
- Could this message, profile or request be fake?
- Is someone asking for secrecy, trying to build trust quickly or creating a sense of urgency?
- Save messages, usernames, screenshots and profile links as evidence.
- Have they contacted your child through other apps, games or accounts?

3. Report

Encourage and normalise seeking help from a trusted adult:

- Report the account or conversation through the app, game or platform.
- Block or restrict the person after evidence is saved.
- If money has been exchanged, contact your bank or payment provider.
- If other students are involved, seek support from the school.
- Consider reporting serious concerns to [eSafety](#), [ACCCE](#) or police.

Conversation starters



It's important to help your child to recognise the signs of unsafe contact and encourage them to talk with you if they experience these behaviours online.

- Being asked to move conversations to a private app or encourages secrecy
- Someone gives lots of attention, compliments, gifts or rewards to build trust
- Being asked personal questions or requests photos, videos or other personal information. And remember, requests for images can often start with simple things, like of pets, playing sports etc. Once trust has developed, requests for more intimate images can start.
- Frequent contact across different apps, games or messaging platforms

- Asking for information about their location, who is with them, or when they are alone
- Comments on their appearance, relationships or sexual experiences
- Uses pressure, guilt, threats or claims to have an image or video to get them to do something they do not want to do.

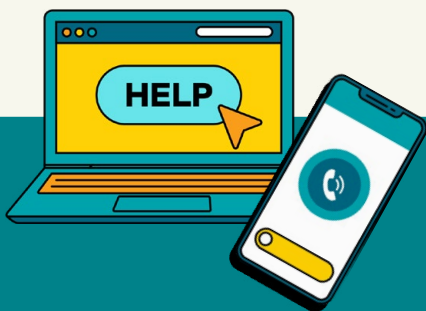
You can also use everyday opportunities such as driving to school, over dinner or watching TV together as moments to talk about consent, respect, and bodies to explain what safe behaviour is.

The National Office for Child Safety has conversation guides for [pre-school age children](#), [primary school age children](#), and [teenagers](#).

Where to get help

You can get support or report online grooming and sexual extortion to:

- [eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [ACCCE](#) — Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation
- Police — contact your local police station or call Triple Zero (000) if there is immediate danger.
- [Kids Helpline](#) on **1800 55 1800**
- [13 Yarn](#) on **13 92 76**
- [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14**



About Optus Digital Thumbprint

Through our Sustainability strategy, 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

