



Online contact and staying safe

Video streaming and chatting online can be really exciting, but do you know how to protect your child from adult content and contact? Find out how to help them stay safe from abuse.

What might they encounter?

Chatting and meeting new people on the internet can be fun and appealing for children. There are lots of online apps and communities that can be educational and supportive for them, however there are opportunities online for adults to contact children.

No matter how young your child is, if they are using a device that has the internet- it is important to talk to them about people who contact them online.

We understand that you can't always be there with them, although if they are 11 and under we would always recommend that their device is used in a public space, making it all the more important that your child knows that they can come to you if someone online says or does something that makes them uncomfortable, worried or upset.

Sexualised chat and images

It is a criminal offence for an adult to send a sexual message to a child or incite them to perform sexual acts. This could include;

- An adult exposing themselves on webcam
- Engaging a child in chat about sexual acts and fantasies
- Telling a child to watch pornographic images/videos
- Telling a child to perform a sexual act or expose themselves

“Children have told us that they send out friend requests to increase their friend count, and are worried that if they have talked to people they don't

know and something goes wrong or upsets them, their parent or carer will over react and take their technology away from them.”

If your child is engaged in sexualised contact they might react in many different ways from excitement to distress, but they may also feel guilty. It can be helpful for your child to know who to talk to if something does go wrong, and it can help to suggest taking a break from an app for a period of time. This can help them learn from what happened, rather than banning them from the internet all together.

Why might a child engage in sexual chat or talk to adults online?

It is never a child’s fault if they have been engaged in sexual chat by an adult, however it might seem difficult to understand how this could happen even if conversations about safety and not talking to strangers online have happened.

It is important not to blame your child if this does happen , but also to try and understand what sort of things could influence a child’s behaviour.

Developmental stage: Children’s brains are still developing so it is hard for them to distinguish between fantasy and reality. When they are online they feel invisible and more confident to engage in behaviour that they would not do in ‘real life’. They need support from adults to make good decisions and use the internet safely.

Sexual exploration: It’s natural for children to start exploring their sexual feelings, and talking to people online can feel exciting. Adults can exploit this natural curiosity by talking about sex and introducing new things that might be inappropriate. Direct your child to age appropriate information about sex and relationships at [Childline](#) or [Brook](#).

Fear: Adults can pressure, intimidate and coerce children into doing things that they are not ready for. Therefore it is important that a child knows that they are not to blame and that reporting to CEOP or in the app can help protect them and others in the future.

How to protect children from inappropriate contact

Look out for your child moving to new platforms to chat. Offenders sometimes encourage young people to move from a public forum, to a game, or more private chat apps or sites. Here, they are able to have private conversations that are likely to be less moderated. It’s always a good idea to remind your child to be wary of people who want them to chat privately. Have conversations with your child about the new apps they are using and who they may be talking to. You can also find information on [parental controls](#) to help you to [keep track of the apps](#) your child may be installing and ways you can keep them safe.

Use webcam and devices in public spaces. As young people develop, they often seek more privacy and autonomy in both their online and offline world. However, it’s important to consider whether your child is developmentally ready to be left unsupervised whilst gaming

or chatting. In particular, younger children can struggle to identify risks they may face whilst online and require supervision to learn these skills. Encourage young people to use their **devices in spaces where some level of supervision** is possible, for example, a family room or living room.

Encourage your child to identify safe and trusted adults. In their offline world, children are often taught to do as they are told and follow adult instruction. From teachers to parents, most young people are socialised to accept adults authority. Some offenders rely on this acceptance and use young people's trust in adults to harm them. Help your child to identify adults that are there to help them from ones who they do not know. Encourage their digital literacy by helping them to identify sources on the internet that they can trust and places they should be more cautious. Reinforce the idea that on the internet, adults should not be giving young people instructions or telling them what to do. Young people should ask someone they trust if they are unsure. Visit **Thinkuknow** for information on how to help develop your child's digital resilience.

Make sure your child knows where to go for support. Children can sometimes feel partly to blame if something goes wrong online. Remind your child that they can always speak to an adult they trust if they are worried no matter what may have happened. Take time to know **how to report on social media sites and apps** to prevent offenders continuing to harm.