To children, online friends are real friends. Online life is real life. There's no distinction.

This guide can help you understand your child's life online, and keep them safe.

For advice and support on setting up parental controls, adjusting privacy settings, understanding social networks and more, visit **nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety** or call **0808 800 5002**

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Your child's online world

A guide for parents

O2 NSPCC

Let's keep kids safe online

This booklet offers some simple guidance about the risks your child might face online, some advice about what you can do to keep them safe, and where you can go for more help and support.

What's inside

Keep your children safe online 03

Staying safe together 04

- Talk to them 04
- Work together 05

Understanding their world online

- What children see 06
- Who they meet and interact with 08
- Why they could be at risk 12
- How we can help 14

If your child is worried 15

Keep your children safe online

To children, online friends are real friends. Online life is real life. There's no distinction.

Children are going online earlier, sometimes at a very young age. They love using new technology and see the online world as creative, fun and exciting.

Keeping up to date with changing technology can be a challenge and helping your children stay safe online can sometimes seem even harder. But it's important to take on this challenge and treat it like any other parenting task. It's OK to be worried about your child's online safety – help is at hand.

You don't need to be an expert on the internet. Talking to your child regularly, and being a part of their online world, will help you set and develop boundaries from an early age, meaning you can identify risks before they become issues.

It's our goal to get every family in the UK to chat about, and understand, their kids' online world, just as they would about their day at school.

O2 and NSPCC. Working together with families to help keep kids safe online.

Children's online world – in numbers*

- 90% of children aged 5-15 are online
- 40% of 5-15 year olds have their own tablet (15% 3 – 4 year olds)
- 76% 12-15 year olds have a social networking profile (23% of 8-11 year olds).

*Ofcom (2015), Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes

Staying safe together

Talk to them

Children and young people go online to connect with friends, and make new ones; to browse the internet for information, especially if they need help with homework; to chat with others and play games. It's also a great way to express themselves creatively, by sharing images or videos. However, as well as these positive online experiences, there can also be risks.

If you want to know what your child is doing online, the best thing you can do is talk to them about it. Ask your child to show you their favourite things to do online, and take an interest in what they do – just like you would offline. This will give you a way to support and encourage them while learning what they know, and exploring the online world together.

Remember that children develop at different rates, and what they get up to online will vary with age and maturity. So the risks they face are constantly changing – keep talking to them so that you can keep up to date with:

- what they see
- who they meet and interact with
- the things they do.

Insider info

To find out more about the most popular social networks, sites and apps children are using, visit 'Net Aware' – the O2 and NSPCC's no-nonsense guide for parents. It covers over 50 of the apps and sites most commonly used by young people, and has links to information that will help you and your child, including how to remove content on different apps and sites, block people and report abuse.

Visit **net-aware.org.uk**

Work together

If you want your family to stay safe online then you have to work together. There are things that you can do as a parent, but your children can also take responsibility for their own safety, and together you should use the technological tools that are available to help.

What you can do

- Explore the online world with your children.
- Talk about what they do online – early and often.
- Set and agree boundaries.

Do your children ...

- Understand what they are doing online and the risks there might be?
- Know how to stay safe and where to go if they're worried?
- Know how to use privacy settings and reporting tools?

Making use of technology

- Parental controls on the home Wi-Fi, devices and search engines can filter and block content.
- Privacy settings on websites and apps restrict information that can be shared.
- Time settings control how long and when children are online.

Don't forget

There are also other adults who are part of the family like grandparents, uncles, and aunts. Include them in your conversations about staying safe online. Sometimes children prefer to talk to a trusted adult who isn't their parent, so it's important they share your knowledge and approach, and understand how they can help and support your child.

Understanding their online world

What children see

It can be difficult to keep track of what your child is seeing online, and make sure they don't see anything that's distressing or not age-appropriate.

Inappropriate content

It might be violence; racial hatred; dangerous advice encouraging things like eating disorders or self-harm; gambling or pornographic sites.

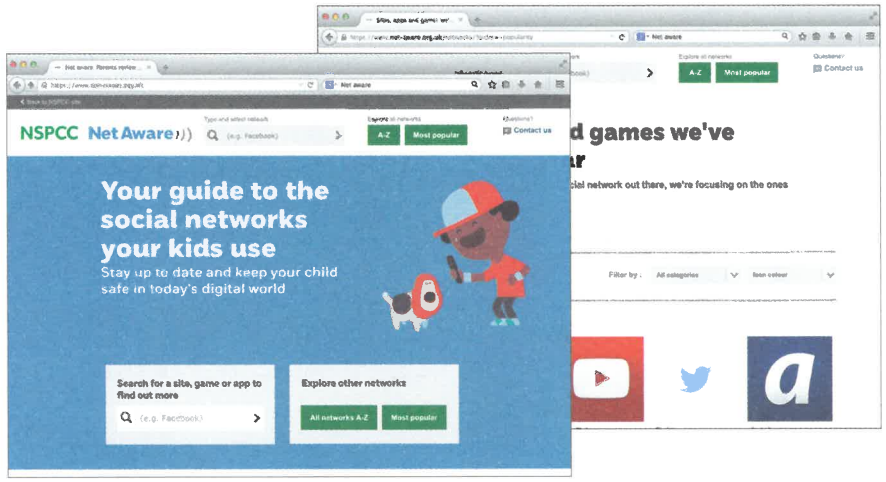
Children may come across this content by mistake, or they may look for it because they're curious. Promises of special offers or prizes can also draw young people in. Whatever the scenario, you'll want to decide how best to protect them from accessing this type of content and reassure them if they're upset or worried by something they see online.

Try to strike the right balance between keeping an eye on your child and giving them the independence and freedom to explore. Simply sheltering them from the online world might not help in the long run. They need a chance to learn how to behave online, and find out what's out there.

"I'm quite tech savvy but there are so many different sites that young people use."

What you can do

- **Check out the apps and sites they're using.** You know your child best, so check that the websites, social networks and games they're using are suitable for them. You can also find out more at **net-aware.org.uk**
- **Talk about age ratings.** Online games, movies and some websites will have an age rating or minimum age to sign up. Age limits are there to keep children safe. So you shouldn't feel pressured into letting your child sign up or use websites that you feel they're too young for even if there's peer group pressure to play games and use websites and apps with older ratings. Talk to your children about the purpose of age limits and any concerns you might have, and agree together the websites, apps and games they can use.
- **Set up parental controls.** These can help you filter or restrict content on your home Wi-Fi, as well as phones, tablets and games consoles. To find out more visit **internetmatters.org** You can also set filters on search engines or use websites' privacy settings to prevent children seeing unsuitable content or advertising. Make sure they know how to use these tools to report abuse. Remember that older children may find loopholes to get past these controls, so it's important to remind them the controls are there to keep them safe.



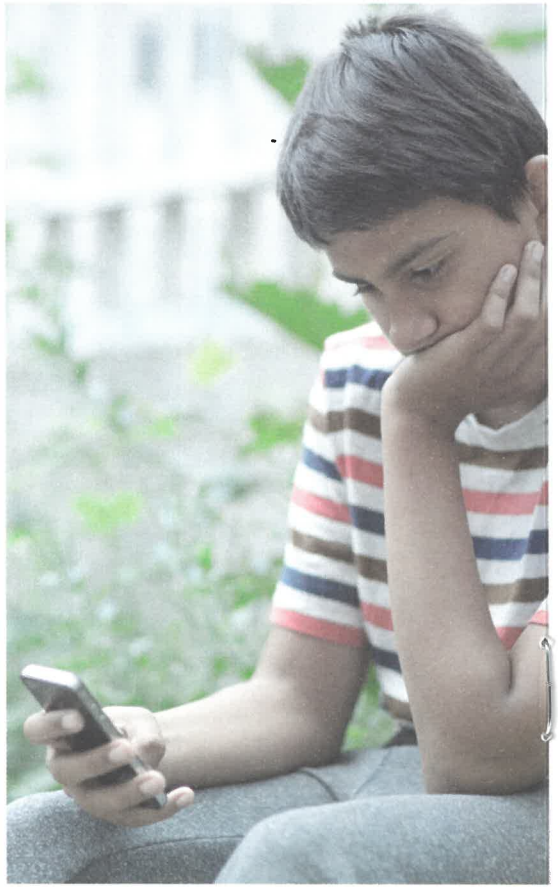
Who they meet and interact with

Children don't think of people they've met online through social networking and online games as strangers, they're just online friends. This can make them vulnerable to bullying, inappropriate friendships and grooming.

Online bullying

Unfortunately, bullying can happen anywhere – even online, and it can take many different forms. Children could receive unpleasant emails or text messages, and people may say mean or offensive things to them or post cruel comments or pictures on social networks. Bullying can also involve being purposefully blocked, ignored or excluded from games or social media sites. Often children won't know who the comments are from, as users can post things anonymously. The online bully may be someone they know, or they could be a stranger.

Anonymous websites, texting, sharing services and apps are on the increase. These services can appeal to young people as it lets them explore issues anonymously and ask difficult questions. However, anonymity can make the risk of being bullied or contacted by strangers worse.



What you can do

- **Be proactive.** Use opportunities such as news events or television storylines to start conversations about what your child would do if they were being bullied or what they think should or shouldn't be said online. Remind them that their behaviour online should reflect their offline behaviour. Encourage them to think before they post or share information on anonymous sites. If your child is being bullied online, talk to their teacher about it.
- **Block and report.** Encourage your child not to respond or retaliate to any form of bullying. Instead, help them to block and report the bullies and keep any evidence. You might want to contact their school or youth club to let them know about the incident, if you think it's appropriate. Let your child know you're always there for them, but if they feel too embarrassed or scared to talk, you could suggest they talk to a teacher or call Childline on **0800 1111**.

What if my child is bullying someone?

Find out whether other children were involved and what part your child played. They may not have realised that what happened was bullying.
Tell them explicitly that this behaviour isn't acceptable and the fact it's online doesn't mean it's not upsetting.
Help them understand how what they've done feels. You could ask them how they think the other child felt, or how they feel when someone says unkind things to them.
Explain that leaving someone out of an online discussion or group can be just as bad as attacking them directly.
Encourage them to apologise to the person involved and help them to remove the content.

"My children are at that turning point where socialising online is becoming a daily occurrence."

Inappropriate friendships and grooming

Children and young people may chat or become 'friends' with people on social networks or online games, even if they don't know them or have never met them in person.

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation. This can be easier online because people hide their age, gender and identity. Children are often unaware they're being groomed, and think they're simply talking to a child of the same age.

But remember, children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know, as well as from strangers.

Parents often fear that their children will be encouraged to meet up with online 'friends' and be abused. But children can also be exploited and abused online, by being persuaded or forced to:

- have sexual conversations by text or online
- send or post sexually explicit images
- take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone.

What you can do

- **Talk about healthy friendships.** Discuss who they're friends with online, how they choose their friends and what information they share. Recognise that many children enjoy chatting online, but remind them to be careful because people aren't always who they say they are. Talk to them about healthy relationships and the difference between 'good' and 'bad' secrets. Encourage them to think about what sites they visit and the types of images and comments they share.
- **Encourage them to tell someone.** Let your child know that they can talk to you or another adult they trust if something online makes them worried. It might be anything – sexual chat, being asked to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable, or someone insisting on meeting up.
- **Report it.** The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) helps keep children safe from online grooming and sexual exploitation. The 'report abuse button' can be found on many websites or you can go to: **ceop.police.uk/safety-centre**

If you're concerned about someone's behaviour towards your child, you can report this directly to CEOP or, in an emergency, dial 999.

Talking to teens

Teenagers may be defensive about their online network and are more likely to be talking to people they don't know. You should talk to them about what they're doing online without intruding too much. Talk about peer pressure, especially when it comes to behaving in a sexual way. Remind them that any images or videos they share are out of their control once they send them. If they want to meet an 'online friend' in person, ask them to tell you, or another trusted adult and agree a safe way to do this the first time they plan to meet. Make sure they know where to go if they're worried.

"It's inevitable that my kids are going to get their own social media accounts, but it's about how I manage that and how I prepare them."

Why they could be at risk

Children can put themselves at risk through their own behaviour. They can overshare personal information, spend too much time online or even run up large debts by not realising they were spending money.

Oversharing personal information or pictures

Many children use social networking sites – they put up profiles, share pictures and content, make comments, and find friends. Privacy controls can limit who can see their details. But when they connect to someone as a 'friend', that person may have access to their personal information. They can also reveal their location by tagging photos, which means that people can find out where they live, socialise or go to school. They might accidentally reveal personal details like their address or telephone number, and there's also a risk that their identity could be stolen.

What you can do

- **Be Share Aware.** The NSPCC has developed 'Share Aware' to help parents make informed choices about the social networking sites and apps their children use. Alongside the information on their website, you can download a guide with top tips on how to be Share Aware and talk to your child about staying safe online. Visit **nspcc.org.uk/shareaware**.

"I talk to my daughter all the time about the importance of staying safe online and the importance of privacy settings, not sharing her location and personal details."

Overuse

There's continuing concern that children are spending too much time online, especially if they have a mobile device. Although the online world can be good for children's social lives, it can also stop them from talking to people face to face, make them overly attached to their device, and develop unhealthy attachments to the online world. There are concerns about how this affects children's concentration and sleep patterns, and the impact the online world is having on general health and wellbeing.

What you can do

- **Agree rules and boundaries.** The important thing is to get the balance of activities right. Agree what times your child can go online, and explain that you think it's important they do a variety of activities. You can also use technical tools to help you reinforce online times. Many sites have timers that you can set, or you can set it up on the computer, mobile or tablet.
- **Be a good role model.** Don't forget to think about your own online behaviour to help set a good example. It might not always feel like it, but your child does notice how you act and follow your lead. Discuss your family agreement, stick to it, and remind everyone why it's important.

Running up debts

Many online games are free but offer the chance to buy items such as extra lives or new levels. Some apps charge you to open new levels, get more accessories or in-app currency, like gems. Gambling sites have strict measures to make sure their users are adults, but young people could be enticed by offers and prizes on gaming sites, and run up big bills without realising it.

What you can do

- **Know their limits.** Understanding the price of digital content, downloads and app purchases is an important part of managing technology use. Make sure your child knows the limits on their credit or their mobile package and they understand about extra charges. Make them aware that some apps offer to sell extras, such as access to new gaming levels or accessories, especially apps that were free to download.
- **Password protect.** You can control spending on in-app purchases by turning them off completely or by asking for a password to be entered every time. This will mean that younger children won't be able to download apps without your permission. There are also tools to help monitor and keep track of in app purchases. Your provider will be able to help you with this and in some cases will refund parents when things go wrong.

How we can help

O2 and NSPCC want to help your family enjoy the best of the digital world safely and confidently. To help, we've put lots of useful information on our website **o2.co.uk/nspcc**. Or if you would prefer to speak to someone, call our Online Safety Helpline on **0808 800 5002**. Lines are open from 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 6pm on weekends and will be free of charge.

NSPCC Net Aware has information about the most commonly used apps by young people. **net-aware.org.uk**

NSPCC Share Aware has ideas on conversation starters you can use with your children and advice about staying safe online. **nspcc.org.uk/shareaware**

ThinkuKnow for parents – advice for parents from CEOP's ThinkuKnow education programme. **thinkuknow.co.uk/parents**

UK Safer Internet Centre has further advice and guidance for young people and parents about staying safe online are available from. **saferinternet.org**

The NSPCC helpline is open 24 hours a day, ready to give support and advice to any adult who's worried about a child. Call **0800 800 5000**, visit **nspcc.org.uk/help** email **help@nspcc.org.uk**

If your child is worried

Talk to your child about what to do if they see content that worries or upsets them. Let them know they can talk to you, or another trusted adult, without getting in trouble if they do come across something that worries them.

If your child does see or do something, or meet someone online that worries them, they will be looking for your support. Try not to overreact if they tell you about something that has happened to them.

- Emphasise they have made a good decision by sharing their concerns.
- Allow them share what they want with you. Try to listen rather than ask lots of questions to begin with.
- Offer emotional support, and let them know you'll help.
- Let them know the next steps you'll be taking, such as reporting, accessing help and support, and calling the NSPCC helpline for further advice.

Whatever the worry
Childline is here for children 24/7. They can call **0800 1111** or visit **Childline.org.uk**