



Online safety

Online safety and COVID-19

Our day-to-day interactions have changed recently – we’re accessing the news, social situations, meetings, entertainment and education online.

Our children are too.

Since the start of the pandemic there has already been a surge in online abuse and cyber bullying. The potential for online grooming has also grown. The information that follows will help keep children safe.

Perpetrators exploit situations in the online environment to make connections and influence children.



Standard 8 of the Child Safe Standards says:

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur. In terms of children being online, this means:

- Risks in the online environment are identified and mitigated without compromising a child’s right to privacy and healthy development.
- The online environment is used in accordance with the organisation’s code of conduct and relevant policies.



Office of the
Children’s Guardian

Here are some tips to keep children safe:

Children and young people

- Only be in contact with adults like teachers, tutors, coaches, counsellors or Sunday school leaders at a time they're supposed to talk to you.
- Make video calls in the living room if you can. If you're in the bedroom, leave your door open. Make sure the clothing you're wearing is appropriate for interacting with an adult.
- Remember to be respectful and kind to people. Bullying is never OK, and just because you're online doesn't mean you can hurt people's feelings. Treat people with respect.
- Talk to a trusted adult if you feel concerned about anything you've seen or heard online.
- Talk to a trusted adult about how you feel being at home all the time or if you're worried about the virus.
- Find a good balance between schoolwork, exercise, meals, family life, time online with friends and sleep.
- It's a very difficult time at the moment, and while it's hard not being able to meet up with friends and do the things you're used to doing, this isn't forever. Find creative ways to get together with your friends online.

Parents and Carers

- Reach an agreement with your children about rules on using the internet at home – including whether you are intending to view their search histories.
- Be aware of what apps children are using to communicate with each other as some may be easier for predators to access.
- How is the school connecting with children – how do you know your child is safe?
- Encourage an open dialogue about online activity.
- Consider installing software to block access to certain sites.
- Where possible, don't allow devices in bedrooms.
- Make sure children understand that some sites are not appropriate for them and they should avoid them.
- Ask them how they know a person they're in contact with or a site they're visiting is 'safe'.
- Understand that children may be feeling isolated or worried. Encourage them to engage with family activities – or to talk to a professional if they feel they need to.

Educators, tutors, religious facilitators or coaches

- When interacting with children, do so in a group setting where possible.
- Only communicate with children at times you would normally be in contact with them.
- Let parents know how you will be interacting online with their children and what rules are in place for that interaction.
- Be aware of your organisation's Codes of Conduct and policies regarding interacting with children and young people online.
- Ensure children have a Code of Conduct for interacting with you online.
- Discuss with children what they're accessing, and remind them of the importance of telling a trusted adult if they've been contacted by someone they're suspicious of, or any adult they don't know.
- Listen to children's concerns as you would in your normal settings. Follow procedures in handling any suspicions of harm.

If you're the leader of an organisation

- Reinforce with your staff the need to comply with all Codes of Conduct, policies and procedures relating to online interactions between adults and children.
- Ensure staff understand that privately messaging children is not appropriate.
- Be aware of the increased risks that have arisen from staff having less supervision in their interactions with children.
- Following Codes of Conduct protects both children and your employees.
- Monitor what data your staff have access to and how it is being used.
- Ensure that when staff are interacting with children in group sessions that the children are located in appropriate places (ie. not bedrooms and bathrooms).
- Encourage staff to contact parents so they understand the expectations of children in terms of educational work they're doing, who they're expected to be in contact with (and how).
- Remind staff to encourage children to only access online material from appropriate sites.