



Inappropriate Content

Young people have access to a virtually limitless world so parents should be aware of the risks.

What is inappropriate content?

The internet offers the chance to explore a virtually limitless world without the constraints of the ‘real’ world. Content on the internet is not broken into age or developmentally appropriate areas. Without supervision and guidance, a young child can either unintentionally or purposely find content that is disturbing, explicit or inappropriate.

Just as you would ensure that the books you read to your child are age appropriate and the TV shows they watch are suitably rated, you should monitor what your child is doing, and where they are going, online.

Most internet users will at some stage come across confronting content online and in the majority of cases this will not cause long-term harm. Problems can arise when this exposure is constant and is not discussed with a parent who can provide a balanced view.

Some specific examples of potentially damaging content for children and teenagers include sites which encourage eating disorders or self-harm. For young people with mental health issues such as depression or an eating disorder, these sites can be damaging as they create an environment where users may normalise behaviour which is harmful (for example encouraging self-harm, or extreme calorie restrictions). Be aware that young people looking for these websites will find them.

Many disturbing websites are not ‘illegal’ which means that it is up to a parent to monitor and manage. You would not feel safe allowing your child to wander aimlessly through a large city, alone and in the middle of the night. The internet is like a large city, full of good and bad and a place that a child needs to be supervised.

The issues of curiosity and exploration are the same for every generation, but the internet means there is far more information which is far more easily accessible. Parents may once have looked up a ‘rude’ word in a dictionary—children today will Google the word instead. Rather than looking up pictures of nude bodies in a biology textbook at the library, today kids can get videos rolling online very quickly.

What can I do to protect my child online?

The most important thing you can do is engage in open and honest communication. Use the internet together and make it part of your family’s activities. You do many other activities with your child: walking the dog, going to the movies, and playing in the park—so spend some time online as well. The more you explore together, the more you will learn about their online behaviours and interests.

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More options include:

- **Have a home-based 'Acceptable Use Agreement'**. You have rules in the real world about what your expectations are, you can have similar rules and consequences for the internet.
- **Use an internet filter**. These can be downloaded for free, or purchased from an IT retailer. Remember that sometimes filters fail, and they can be bypassed—for example, by using the neighbour's unsecured Wi-Fi.
- **Use parental controls**. You may not be aware that most computers, net browsers, tablets, smartphones and gaming consoles have some level of parental control—for example, the ability to block access to certain categories of websites. These are not the default settings, so you must activate them yourself.

Talk with your child

Ensure that you regularly talk with your children about their online experiences. Ask them what they have seen or done, and if they have had any problems. If you hear about a site which concerns you, have a look for yourself.

Make sure that you continually reinforce to your children that nothing is so bad that they can't talk to you about it. Let them know that they should come and tell you when they have any problems online, see something that they know is wrong, or anything that upsets them.

Children often fear telling a parent about an online issue as they think this will result in blocking their access to the computer and internet. Don't threaten to disconnect your child—this will only cause them to keep online problems hidden from you.

