

Cyber resilience and internet safety

A Guide for parents and carers



Stop It Now!

SCOTLAND | ALBA

Helping prevent
child sexual abuse



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upstream
PROTECTING THE NEXT CHILD

Stop It Now! Scotland is a child protection charity that focuses on the prevention of child sexual abuse. We believe that, as a protective adult, it is vitally important that you are aware how your child uses the internet. That is the foundation for helping children across Scotland grow up to be digitally resilient young adults. It is also essential if you are to protect your child from being harmed online.

The internet is an amazing place and plays a vital role in many aspects of the lives of our children and young people. But children and young people can easily fall victim to experiences online that can cause them harm. That can mean many things, such as being sexually exploited or bullied online, or social media negatively impacting on emotional health and wellbeing. It can also mean seeing or sharing content which is not age appropriate (including sexual content that may not be legal).



About this guide

This guide provides advice and information on digital parenting. It will help you speak to your child about safety online in a positive way and point you towards resources that will help you manage and reduce risks online for your child. Learning to safely navigate the internet and online platforms is like learning to cycle or swim: children need adult support and supervision to learn to do this safely.

This guide was created to support online safety training for kinship carers in Scotland. However we believe it will be valued by all parents and carers across Scotland.

If you have any concerns about child sexual abuse and prevention, please contact us.

The confidential Stop It Now! helpline (0808 1000 900) is open Monday to Friday, and available for anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse. Callers do not need to give identifying information, so can remain anonymous. We speak to thousands of people every year, helping them take action to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.

You can also contact us at our Scottish Office on 0131 556 3535 or at scotland@stopitnow.org.uk if you have any questions raised by this handbook. We would love to hear from you.

Getting started

The internet has revolutionised many aspects of children and young people's lives. Learning, entertainment, relationships and creativity look radically different from even a generation ago.

Younger children and teenagers may use the internet for different reasons. Children of all ages love to watch videos and play games online. But older children may be more likely to socialise, create their own online content and livestream.

How can we help children and young people navigate this world?

Setting up parental controls can be important for younger children. Websites such as [internetmatters.org/parental-controls](https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls) can show you how to set up filters on your home internet. They also show how to set these up on smartphones, social media and search engines. This can help prevent children accessing age inappropriate content.

But none of these tools are 100% effective. Some inappropriate content may still get through. Children may go online at other people's houses, using different devices or being shown content by other children. Crucially, parental controls don't tackle the reasons why older children may seek inappropriate content online. This is why it's important to talk to your child about staying safe online. This includes talking about the apps, sites and games they're using, what they share online, who they follow and who they talk to.

For many parents and carers this feels difficult because they don't know enough about how young people use the internet. But you don't need to be an expert. You just need to take an interest in your child's online life in the same way you are interested in their offline life. Talking to them about their online life should be a regular activity, like talking to your child about their school day or about their friends and their social life.

So before getting started, try the following exercise:

What was life like for you when you were 14?

- Were your parents or carers aware of who you spent your time with?
- Were you made to check in every so often if you were out?
- Were you taking risks they didn't know about?

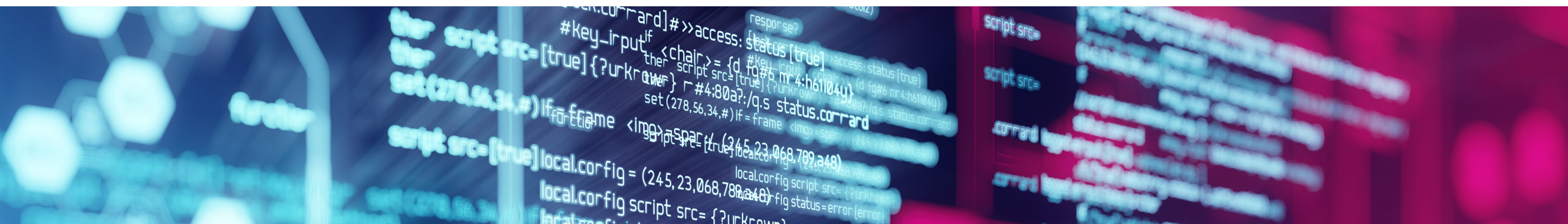
Most of us as children at some point took risks. We have put ourselves in situations that those who care for us may not have deemed safe. How different is now to then? Is a young person online in their bedroom safer than being out on the streets?

Think about what safety plans were put in place for you as a teenager. Did you have check ins? Did you need to tell those who cared for you where you were going, who you were with and what you were up to? And how do we begin to apply similar principles to keeping our children safe online?

It is also important to think about the response they had to mistakes you made. Did they get mad, shout, punish or restrict you? And did that make it easier or more difficult for you to ask them for help when you needed it? Or did it mean that you put more effort into hiding what you did and what you got up to?

The key to speaking about risk and online safety is to encourage open conversation

Make it clear that we all did things in our youth that we regret and reinforce the message that adults can help make things better when mistakes are made or when things are at risk of going wrong. It's our job as adults to keep children safe.





Conversations with your child

The earlier we introduce devices to young children, the more direct we have to be about online safety.

For younger children we need to be sure of what they are watching. We want to prevent interactions with people who you have not approved for them to speak to. Adults should take responsibility for approving apps, and applying filters and controls. There should be an expectation that adults will know passwords and will check devices regularly.

For teenagers the balance between privacy and control is more difficult. We need to talk about the responsibilities that come with being online. They may require advice and guidance about privacy, sharing, online consent and boundaries. Depending on their age and maturity, we also need to respect their right to privacy. Having regular conversations with young people about their online lives allows us to get that balance right.

Make it clear to young people that if they find themselves in a situation that doesn't feel right or has gone too far, you are always available. Make it clear that you will listen and help, without judgement.

Taking opportunities to talk regularly and trusting them to come to you if they need help, will build the foundations for safe and healthy internet use.

It's also important to recognise that teenagers have grown up in a time where they have always had the internet. They are more likely to keep up with changing trends quicker than we can as parents and carers. Your focus in these conversations is to help young people develop the skills and understanding to assess for themselves whether things are safe. And that will mean they need to be able to come to you for advice and information without fear of being punished.

Here are some questions that you could try to use to start a conversation

- What do you enjoy doing online? What apps do you use? Can you show me some of them so I can understand them better?
- Can you teach me how to play your favourite online game?
- Who is your favourite person you follow on social media? Why?
- What's the funniest thing you've seen online? (or, here's a funny thing I've seen online)
- What's the most interesting thing you've learned online?
- What's the best and the worst things about being online?
- What is a good friend online? Do you make friends online? How do you do that?
- Have you ever fallen out with someone online? What happened? What would you do differently next time?
- What kind of balance do you have between online and offline friendships? Is your offline life as active as your online life?
- Which people online make you feel good about yourself? Does anyone or anything make you feel bad about yourself? Why?
- What platforms or channel do you trust for news and information about the wider world? Why do you trust them?
- Does social media and the internet help or hinder school or social activities?
- How does it affect your concentration?
- What do you do to stay safe online without adult supervision? And what does online safety mean for you?

Apps

Adults can sometimes be anxious about the apps children use. It can feel impossible to keep up to date with what apps young people are using. Whilst we can provide information on some of the apps that are popular today, no doubt it will change tomorrow! Young people are much more on the ball when it comes to online content, which is why we need to speak to them about what apps they use.

Below are a few apps that are circulating at the time of writing (June 2020). Up to date information about apps and their safety implications can be found at net-aware.org.uk.

Instagram

Instagram is a social media app for sharing images and videos, livestreaming, buying goods and following influencers. You can message friends in the app, including sending images or videos that disappear after being viewed.

Concern has been raised about the impact of Instagram on emotional wellbeing. Young people might count the number of 'likes' they receive as a measure of self-esteem. Instagram has been criticised for promoting negative or unrealistic body image standards. This includes users "photoshopping" (changing photos) or adding inappropriate filters to others' images. However, there are also positive influences on Instagram, e.g. body-positive content. So, it's important for young people to think carefully about who they choose to follow.

Young people may have public profiles, which means anyone can look and follow them. Some young people create a second ('Finsta') private account. This is where they post images and information to share with a small group of friends.

WhatsApp

This is widely used encrypted messaging app. This app is hugely popular and is particularly used for group chats. You can also share images, videos and audio as well as voice and video chat. Particular risks include being bullied online. If photographs are shared (legal or otherwise) they can be stored on your device (and perhaps also backed up online) automatically, although this function can be disabled in the WhatsApp settings. The minimum age for a WhatsApp account is 16.



Snapchat

This is an image-sharing app based on sharing an image (a 'snap') which disappears after a set period of time. You can also share videos and audio, make voice and video calls (including group chat), watch shows, play games and follow other people's content. Particular risks include sending inappropriate images. Although an image 'disappears' after a few seconds, it can still be saved by the receiver. The app also allows a user to password-protect images that they want to store privately. Snapmaps is a feature that allows users to see where their friends are. This feature can be turned off using Ghost Mode or by restricting access to location in the phone's permissions settings. Snapchat has a feature called snapstreaks, in which two users send each other a snap every day. The snapstreak is a counter of how many days they have continuously messaged each other. Some young people feel under pressure to maintain the streak, which resets to 0 if a single day is missed.

TikTok

This is a social media app for sharing short-form videos (up to 60 seconds). The diverse content includes music clips, dancing, pranks, funny videos etc. Users can create and share their own videos. They can also duet with others on videos and chat with friends in the app.



Twitch

This is an entertainment platform, primarily associated with gaming and esports. You can watch livestreams and videos of gamers but also other forms of entertainment. Users can livestream and chat with others.

Discord

This is an app for voice and text chat. It is often used by gamers to overlap onto a game so they can chat whilst playing together. Users can also video call, share screen and livestream.

Live.me

This is a social media app for watching and broadcasting livestreams. Users can also chat.

Yubo

This is a social network. New friend suggestions are based on location. The user can swipe right on someone's profile picture to 'like' them (similar to dating apps). Users can also direct message, video chat and livestream.

YouTube

Platform for watching videos and livestreams. Users who are 13+ can create their own channel. This enables them to create their own videos, comment and share videos with others, livestream and chat with friends.

Facebook

Many adults use Facebook to share our lives with family and friends. This may include oversharing information or images of our children. It is worth discussing the nature of "friends" with young people, and what they are sharing and with whom. For some young people, collecting "friends" is a measure of their self-worth and they will accept "friend requests" from people they don't know. As with other apps, consider Facebook's privacy settings, including location, regularly. Most young people have Facebook to communicate with family. Facebook is not the preferred platform for teenagers, with Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, YouTube and TikTok being more popular.

Livestreaming

Many of the above apps allow livestreaming allowing users to share what they are doing via live video. Before going live, it is important for a young person to think about the information they could share inadvertently. This could include:

- **What and who is in the background when they livestream**
- **Disclosing any personal information that could identify them**
- **Having consent from the other people in the video before sharing**
- **Considering who can see it – do they have a private page or is it for public view?**
- **Any content that may impact on them in the future.**
- **Being prepared for responding to live comments, questions or suggestions.**

As teenagers can be quite impulsive – it is worth discussing with them what they are sharing and why. Some teenagers take streaming "requests" from others. These can quickly become sexualised or otherwise inappropriate, and livestreaming can make it difficult for parents and carers - and police to gather information and evidence - if abuse occurs.

Remember: Always make sure you update apps and software on devices as these include security updates to stop devices being exposed to malware. And always use passwords online when accessing sites or email that are secure. A good way to create a strong and memorable password is to use three random words. Numbers and symbols can still be used if needed, for example: 3redhousemonkeys27.

The adolescent brain

Adolescence is another word for our teenage years and the experience of being a young adult. Puberty usually starts between the ages of 10 and 12 and the brain continues to develop until the age of 25. It's really important to understand that the adolescent brain is very different to that of a child or an adult.

This is a time that the brain joins up the reward system linking the parts of the brain that house memory and emotions with the area that is responsible for self-control, critical thinking, reasoning and long term planning. The brain essentially re-wires itself, making new superfast connections between the parts that are most frequently used and the reward centre.

After a period of reorganisation and integration the adolescent brain prunes back unused connections leaving the most strongly developed pathways which are created by repeated habits. This explains how adolescents can quickly become really good at things they enjoy (for example, gaming online) as it offers excitement and achievement while learning new skills. If a young person spends most of their time socialising online or mixing with others, studying, gaming in a healthy way, the most used neural pathways become a superfast highway for healthy development by the time they reach adulthood. However if a young person spends all their time alone (online or offline) without the ability to develop important social skills, then social interactions might be something that they struggle with in early adulthood and beyond.

During our teenage years the desire for thrills and excitement often peaks. Adolescent brains produce more dopamine (a hormone that makes us feel good) and their brains are more sensitive to it. This can lead them into seeking risks and rewards to get more of this feel good feeling.

Examples of thrill-seeking behaviour include:

- **tolerance for gory, shocking, action packed movies and online content**
- **more risk taking online and offline**
- **experimentation with drugs and alcohol**
- **sexual risk-taking behaviour**
- **violence or risk of violence**

Risky behaviour

As adults we know that many of these activities can be dangerous. But for teenagers the thrill or buzz of the rewards is stronger than the consequences. The bits of the brain that act as the brakes on the risky behaviour are not fully developed. As adults we need to be able to support teenagers to develop these braking skills – both online and offline - and develop an understanding of limits, boundaries, personal awareness and potential risks.

The effect of trauma

Some children may have been affected by trauma in early childhood, through neglect or abuse or other adverse experiences. In these situations the brain develops while trying to manage high levels of stress. The parts of the brain controlling fear and anxiety can end up working too hard to protect the child when there is no real danger, while the parts controlling logical or more critical thinking may shrink. This means that even when the child is safe, the coping mechanisms used to survive traumatic experiences remain—resulting in unexpected or uncontrollable reactions to certain triggers or making it difficult for the child to seek out nurture and support because of the absence of dependable help in the past. This in turn can impact on the child's online and offline relationships, and influence their capacity to recognise warning signs and dangers online.

Every child is unique, and you will need to tailor your style and approach to supporting their online lives according to their individual needs.



Digital footprints and social media

Most of us have a digital footprint. Even many babies will have one, thanks to proud parents and grandparents sharing pictures online. What does your digital footprint look like? And what will that digital footprint look like in ten years' time?

Our digital footprint can follow us around forever. In simpler times you could just destroy a photo or burn a diary. But now what we put online will stay around long after our opinions, likes and dislikes have changed.

It's helpful for all of us to agree with family, friends and colleagues what we are happy for them to share about us online, and the other way around. It can also be useful to talk about digital footprints with young people to help them think about privacy and what they share.

An easy way to do this is to look at celebrity accounts together on sites like Instagram

- Discuss how the celebrities are sharing aspects of their life but not oversharing too much personal details
- Think about how they promote their 'brand' image
- Discuss why celebrities are often careful about what they post online. This could be in terms of comments/likes or affiliations that may be harmful to their online reputation
- Discuss with your teenager why it's important that they consider what they post online now. Talk about how it might affect their choices in the future. If your teenager was 'a brand', how might they protect that brand and what values would they want to communicate?

Social media and mental health

There are many benefits associated with using social media for teenagers, including:

- Keeping in touch with friends
- Finding out about the world
- Providing a social space where they can begin to explore their identity and how they want to be seen by others

Studies have shown that over use of social media is correlated with:

- Sleep problems
- Anxiety
- Lowered self esteem

Talking with your teenager about their online life can be a stepping stone to discussing whether any measures are needed to help them manage social media. This can help ensure they experience a rounded view of the world and be less likely to online abuse and exploitation.

Things to explore could include:

Impact on emotional wellbeing:

- Chat about what they post and why. When we're in a good mood we're more likely to post highlights, and when we're not we're likely to post less and passively scroll through social media. This can create a difference between positives we see from other people and negatives that we're feeling.
- Chat about how they think social media affects them. Does it making us more self-critical of our appearance and our lives? For some people, comparing their lives with what they see on social media can affect self-esteem, and lead to anxiety, poor body image and poor mental health. It might open them up more to negative rather than positive comments. But there are ways round this, for example pruning who you follow on social media to include people you genuinely want to be friends with.

Impact on sleep:

- **The blue light radiated from the phone interacts with sleep chemicals in our brains - using nightshift or dark modes on phones can help lessen the impact.**
- **We can advise young people to turn off notifications at night so their sleep is not disturbed. Consider buying an alarm clock for a young person so they do not need their device in their room at night.**

Bullying that occurs online and trolling:

- **Ask whether any content they have seen has worried them or made them feel anxious.**
- **Ask whether trolling has happened to them or someone they know. We can ensure they know what to do in the event of being bullied online, including how to report abuse and block users.**
- **Get across the message that online bullying is just as serious as offline bullying, and can lead to serious depression and self harm.**

Online sexual behaviour. Should I be worried?

What is 'normal' teenage behaviour and when should we be worried?

It is often a shock when adults realise that the child they have known from their early years has turned into a hormone-infused teenager. That can involve recognising that your teenager has sexual thoughts and feelings; the arrival of sex hormones at puberty starts a process of intense curiosity about sex for most adolescents from early teenage years onwards. It can feel uncomfortable to know that this can then influence what your teenager look at online. Even if we take all the possible safety measures, it's still possible that children and young people will access things that we think are inappropriate for them.

You may be worried about what they have seen and the impact it will have. It might mean having difficult conversations much earlier than you thought.

If they've accessed pornography or are having risky conversations online, it's key that you keep your cool. A knee-jerk reaction, taking away devices, or switching off the internet will keep them safe for an hour or two. But it will not help them build skills about safety and cyber resilience for the longer term.

They may have questions, and be seeking out answers online. They may have been shown or sent something by a friend and be confused or upset by what they saw.

It is difficult to say clearly "what next" as each child is an individual and each situation is different. Nevertheless, it is important to remain calm and talk to your child. If your child is purposefully accessing pornography it is important to remember that many young people access adult pornography at some point out of curiosity or to meet sexual needs. For most young people, it is unlikely to have an adverse impact upon their development in the long term.

However, there is increasing ease with which more extreme images can be accessed, so parents and carers need to be extra vigilant. It's also important to know the law around accessing and sharing sexual material online. More information can be found by searching for: **Upstream children and young people online.**

We all make mistakes, online and offline. The key to helping children overcome these mistakes is open communication.

When coming to terms with this behaviour, it will be important that you:

- **talk to your child about what they have seen**
- **let them know why you are concerned about their access to such material at their age**
- **try not to make them feel bad or ashamed about what has happened.**
- **consider their motivations – do they want to learn about sex and relationships, for example? If so, can you provide useful sources of information?**

You may need to acknowledge to your teenager that this is a difficult conversation to have - for you as well as for them - but by doing this you are trying to make sure your relationship is open and honest. It will encourage them to talk to you if they have problems in the future or any questions they want answered.

After speaking to them and assessing the levels of concern, you may need to consider whether further actions that can be taken:

- **Developing a digital safety plan, and reviewing it regularly. Agree as a family how and when you all use technology, and the kinds of content that it is OK to access. Depending on their age, you could ask them to write down what they think the safety plan should include. You don't need to agree with what they propose, but it's important that you find a collaborative solution**
- **Set parental controls on all devices and regularly review privacy settings.**
- **Explore what they might want to learn on the internet, and help them navigate to safe spaces.**



More information can be found at stopitnow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Scotland-Whats-the-Problem.pdf

Safe spaces online

There are a range of great resources that parents and carers – and young people – can access to get more advice and information.

[Stopitnow.org.uk](https://stopitnow.org.uk) has advice for parents of young people who have got into trouble online. Our confidential helpline can give support and advice to parents and carers.

Theupstreamproject.org.uk is a one stop resource for anyone in Scotland who wants information on the prevention of child sexual abuse. This includes prevention of online exploitation.

Thinkuknow.org is the Child Exploitation & Online Protection website. It offers helpful information, advice, videos and links for young people, parents and carers.

Childnet.com online safety agreements, information for Foster and Kinship carers.

Internetmatters.org has information and advice and safety tips for all things internet related.

Bishuk.com is an information and advice site targeted at 14 about sex, healthy relationships and online safety.

Brook.org.uk provides and confidential sexual health and wellbeing advice.

The National Cyber Security Centre nsc.gov.uk and Get Safe Online getsafeonline.org provide excellent general advice for families on cyber security.

What other help is there out there?

We've made ten mini modules specifically for kinship carers to help build online resilience.

These modules can be accessed at stopitnow.org.uk/stop-it-now-scotland/kinship-cyber-resilience-training

They include:

1. Digital footprints
2. Social media, brain development and the impact on mental health
3. Privacy and security online
4. Bullying online
5. Grooming
6. Sexual exploitation
7. Online harmful sexual behaviour
8. Addictions/gaming/gambling/pornography
9. Communicating safely online
10. Apps, social media and safe navigation

If you are unsure or worried about any issues relating to child sexual abuse, our experienced helpline advisors will talk over your worries with you and can offer confidential advice on what steps you could take.

Call the confidential Stop It Now! helpline:
0808 1000 900

To send the helpline a confidential message visit:
contactus.stopitnow.org.uk

stopitnow.org.uk/stop-it-now-scotland

theupstreamproject.org.uk

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Scotland National Office

Call the Scotland office direct on **0131 556 3535**

Call our helpline on **0808 1000 900**

Visit stopitnow.org.uk/scotland

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