

Empowering young people with additional learning needs to connect safely online.

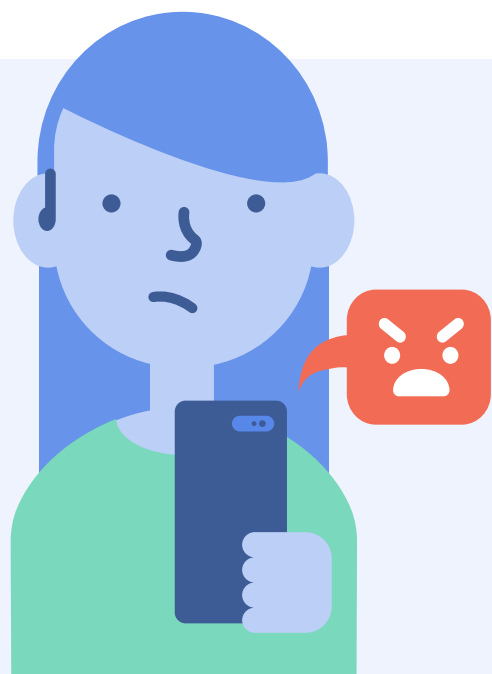
Conversations to have

Here are some simple things you can do to have meaningful conversations with your child about what they do online to give them the support they need.

Staying safe and avoiding risky situations

The way adults and children understand risks can be very different, and it is important to think about the right way to talk to a child with vulnerabilities about harm.

- **Reassure them** - together you can work together to ensure any risk they face does not turn into a harmful situation
- **What they may see** - they may stumble across sexual, violent, racist, discriminatory content or comments which they may find upsetting. Talk about the fact that the internet is full of content and comments that are created by individuals, and unfortunately, not all people create appropriate content.
- Agree that if **they see anything upsetting online** they will come and share it with you so you can help them decide what to do about it.



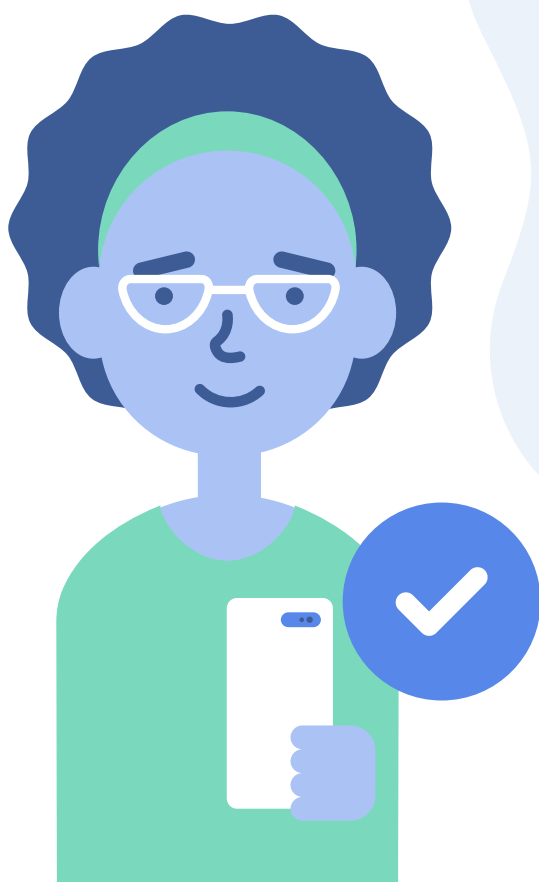
Children with vulnerabilities are more likely to experience both bullying by their peer group and abuse or hate from strangers online. You can find more help about how to prevent and deal with these issues [here](#).

- Who they talk to - people may want to contact them for simple mischief-making, or worse, sexual grooming, stalking, blackmail and extortion or identity theft. Sometimes, they might even pretend to be someone that they are not to gain their trust. Explain that being online allows them to connect with anyone in the world, and while most people are great, a small number are not. Encourage them to connect only with people they know in real life and to follow any agreements you make about responding to friend requests.

Children with vulnerabilities are more likely to experience coercion online. You can find more information about how to prevent and deal with this issue [here](#).

- **What they share** - they should think carefully about sharing personal information with anyone - this includes their password, school, home address, phone number and email. Talk about the fact that it is difficult to 'control' images and posts once they have been shared online, and they should never send sexual or naked images of any parts of their body to anyone.

Children with vulnerabilities are more likely to overshare personal or inappropriate information about themselves online. You can find more information about how to prevent and deal with this issue [here](#).



How will you be involved?

An increased level of parental engagement and supervision may be needed for children who struggle with being able to assess and make good judgments about what they see and also what they share online.

Depending on their age and ability, your child has a right to some privacy and as they mature into adulthood, it's important to encourage independence. It is really important you tell your child how you plan to stay involved and support them in their digital life.

Some parents:

- **check phones daily**, some less frequently
- use **monitoring applications**
- have **passwords or pin codes** or
- **access** their child's accounts

Whatever you choose to do, make sure your child knows you are doing it and why. There are also some apps that can help your child to make choices about what they post online.

Online reputation and being a good digital citizen

Have a conversation with your child about how their online activity creates a 'digital footprint' that potentially lasts forever.

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Tips:

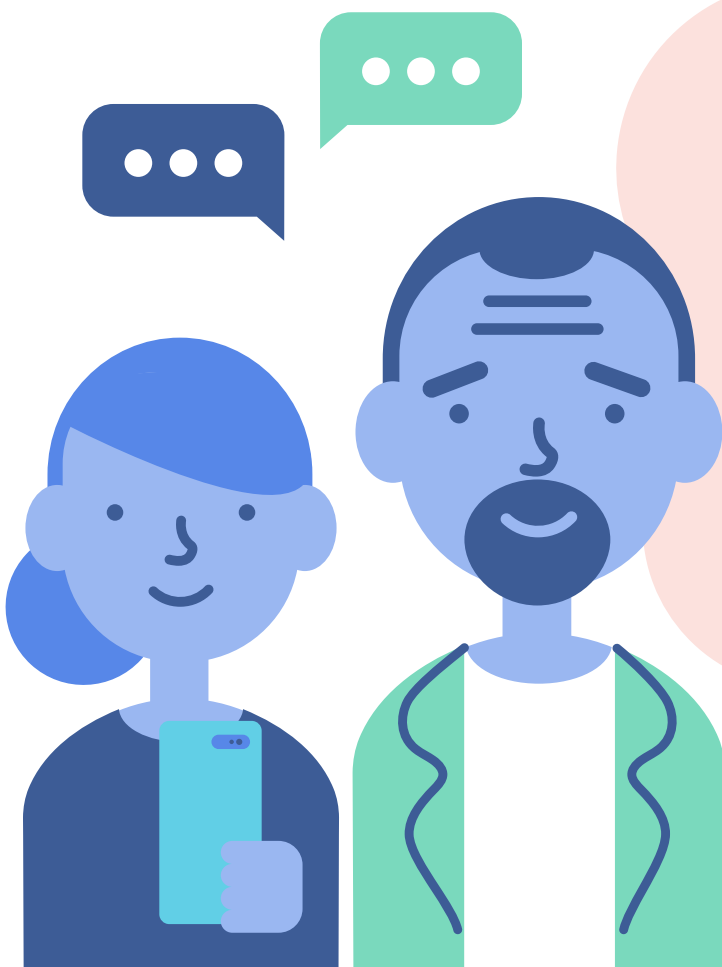
- **Remind them to be a good digital citizen** and treat others as they would like to be treated.
- **Children with communication difficulties** - talk about how words can be interpreted online, for example, capital letters often imply shouting. Emojis are also a common way to convey a range of emotions. A list of emoji meanings can be found [here](#).
- **Children use text slang** as part of their communications online. You can find a list of the text slang [here](#).
- **Talk about the unintended consequences** of any actions online, for example sharing a picture that makes fun of someone else.
- **Help them understand** how to be a good friend online.



Critical thinking about what they see online

Critical thinking is something that all children find challenging, and for children with additional needs, this can often be even more challenging.

Encourage your child to come and ask you if they are finding a situation difficult or need any help in expressing themselves in the right way.



Resolving online issues that might come up

All children respond to having a set of rules that they have helped to develop, so make sure that you come together to agree on strategies for any situations that might come up. Here are some examples:

- **Friend requests** - you may feel the need to approve all their friend requests or agree that you will look through their friends list together every now and again
- **Responding to unsolicited messages** - If they receive an unsolicited message you might ask them to simply block that user or come and share them with you to agree on how to respond if at all
- **People being mean** - if they feel anything is upsetting as well as using tools like filtering comments, mute, block and report make sure they come to talk to you or a trusted adult in their education setting.
- **Requests for images** - ensure they know to say 'no' to any request for an image and then tell you about the request so you can establish if it is something to worry about

- **Request to meet** - ensure they know never to meet up with anyone they have only met online, and again come to you or another trusted adult to tell them about it

It can be tempting if an issue comes up to simply remove devices, however, for all children, this can be a counter-intuitive response. Many children get great support from their peer network and even more so for children with vulnerabilities who often derive enormous benefits from connecting with the wider world in the digital environment.

Make sure that you are familiar with when, where and how to report issues that your child could face online. You can find help [here](#).



Setting up for success

Setting up a family agreement can be a great way of thinking through how your child will connect with people online and is a great document to refer to in order to reinforce the behaviour you are trying to encourage. Things you will want to consider are:

- **Devices.** Which devices are they allowed to use and how long for? Are there any apps and services they are not allowed to use? When is it OK to download files, games or apps?
- **Sharing.** What information is it OK to share online? Who can I post images and videos of online? Will my account be set up to be private? How will I respond to requests?
- **Working together.** When I will ask for help? Who can I ask for help?

You can find a suggested family agreement [here](#).

