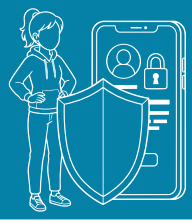
Tip sheet 7:
Talking about staying safer online



7.1 Why this matters

- Young people spend a large part of their lives online for friends, learning and fun.
- Almost 3 in 4 children have seen or heard harmful content online.
- Common risks include unwanted contact, sexual content and being targeted.
- Negative impacts like grooming, image-based abuse and child sexual exploitation are increasing online.
- New risks like doxxing (sharing private information to harm someone) and swatting (making false police reports) are becoming more common.
- Sextortion is a serious crime where someone blackmails a young person using sexual images. It affects 1 in 10 young people. Boys are targeted most often.
- Online harm can move fast and create deep shame, fear or confusion.
- Supportive, calm, adult responses make it easier for a young person to seek help.

7.2 What you might notice

Young people facing online pressure may:

- hide or delete accounts and messages quickly
- switch screen tabs when an adult walks into the room
- appear anxious or jumpy when they get notifications
- withdraw from friends or stop playing their favourite games
- show sudden changes in their digital mood (anger or anxiety during/after gaming or social media)
- use vague terms like online drama, weird messages or creepy direct messages (DM).

7.3 What helps

Normalising online challenges	You can say: *'Most people deal with tricky online situations.'* Use real examples young people recognise (e.g. gaming chats, group chats, DMs, friend requests, trends).
Reinforcing boundaries	Remind them: *'You never owe anyone photos or replies.'*
Building digital skills	• Review privacy settings together. • Practise blocking, muting and reporting. • Talk about 'safe people' and 'safe spaces' online. • Discuss signs of online grooming. • Explain the law (in WA, it is illegal to send or possess intimate images of anyone under 18). See Supporting digital literacy for under-16s on the eSafety Commissioner website.
Encouraging critical thinking	Ask: *'Does this feel respectful and safe?'*
Modelling healthy behaviour	Show them how you take breaks and set your own online boundaries.

For more information, see **Support services for adults** from the Trusted Adult Guide.

7.4 What to avoid

Confiscating devices (unless needed for immediate safety)	Fear of losing their phone can stop young people from speaking up.
Reacting with shock	Panic can shut down the conversation. Stay calm and supportive.
Blaming and shaming	Avoid saying: *'You should have known better.'* Technology changes fast, and even tech-savvy young people can be targeted.
Minimising	Avoid *'It's just online.'* Online harm is real harm.
Lecturing	Focus on safety and support. Avoid judging their choices.
Promising to keep secrets	If a young person is at risk, taking action is the best way to keep them safe. Let them know you need to involve a professional to stop the harm.

7.5 Quick responses

These are suggestions. Use your own words and adapt them to suit you and the young person.

If the young person says…	You can say or do…
'I think I messed up.'	*'Everyone makes mistakes online. What matters now is your safety.'*
'They told me not to tell.'	*'Keeping secrets is a red flag. Safe adults don't ask you to keep secrets. I'm glad you told me.'*
'Someone asked me for photos.'	*'You never have to send images. Your body and your choices matter.'*
'Someone messaged me and it felt weird.'	*'Your gut feeling is usually right. Let's look at it together. We can decide if we should block them.'*
'I saw something online that upset me.'	*'It's OK to feel that way. A lot of things online aren't real life. We can talk about it.'*
'I'm being sextorted.'	*'Stop all contact and don't pay. We can report this to eSafety and the ACCCE together when you're ready.'*

If the young person shares something that feels unsafe, stay calm and follow the steps in **How to respond: The 6-step-framework**. If you're unsure what to do, check in with another trusted adult or a professional. You don't have to make decisions alone.

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(unless Excluded Material)