

Fact sheet



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Sharing harmful or illegal content



This fact sheet includes information for parents and carers on what to do if your child has been involved with viewing, accessing or sharing harmful or illegal content.

Children and young people may share content for a variety of reasons, but it is important they are aware that the type of content they might be accessing or sharing can have a range of implications.

Parents and carers need to know how to respond and support their child should they become aware of their involvement in this activity.

Harmful content includes:

- sexually explicit material
- false or misleading information
- violence
- extremism or terrorism
- hateful or offensive material.

Illegal content includes:

- images and videos of child sexual abuse
- content that advocates terrorist acts
- content that promotes, incites or instructs in crime or violence
- footage of real violence, cruelty and criminal activity.

Young people should be aware that it is an offence to search for and access explicit sexual content involving people their own age, as this is considered child sexual exploitation and abuse material.

Self-generated sexual content and young people

Self-generated sexual content includes content of a sexual nature that is taken by a person of themselves. Self-generated sexual content can be sent via image, video and message through various chat apps, social media platforms and on any connected device.

This material is still considered child exploitation and abuse material, even if a young person has created content of themselves and shared it.



A note on storing content

Some apps have a disappearing content feature which allows users to send material to each other for a set time, after which it disappears from the device.

There are also vault apps which can allow for the secret storing of images. They may look like an ordinary app on a device such as a calculator, however they can only be accessed by entering a password. This feature is also being built into some video and image sharing apps.

What to do if your child...

Is in possession of illegal material, including child sexual exploitation and abuse material: If your child has been sent an image or video involving another person under the legal age they must not show, share or distribute further and report the incident to police. Police may advise the best course of action is to simply delete the content to ensure no further harm comes to the individuals involved.

Has distributed illegal material, including child sexual exploitation and abuse material: As the content was shared, police may get involved to determine whether the incident will be investigated. Using apps that contain a disappearing media function does not mean police cannot trace the content back to those who have distributed it further.

Has distributed material of themselves, considered to be child sexual exploitation and abuse material: Parents/carers should assess this situation using their own discretion. Important factors to consider are whether there are elements of coercion or grooming which may have contributed to the production of this material. Seek advice from police if any of these factors have been identified.

Is involved in non-consensual sharing of child sexual exploitation and abuse material: If your child is involved in any images or videos being circulated without consent, the most important thing to do is remain calm, support them and seek immediate help.

Additionally, contact your local police so they are able to assess the incident to determine the next step, as those who distributed it further can be held accountable and may face consequences. The young person involved may need to access support services to ensure their wellbeing moving forward (links to these services overleaf).

Sharing content without consent is considered image-based abuse, and can have its own legal implications.

In any situation requiring police involvement, evidence needs to be maintained until police have made an assessment.

If in doubt, contact police for advice on how to proceed.



What the law says

Content depicting a person under the legal age can be considered child sexual exploitation and abuse material, and is considered an offence to produce, store or distribute under your country's relevant legislation.

Police manage individual cases at their discretion and often take into account the motivations of those involved and if there was an element of coercion, threats or the absence of consent.



Where to start

- Use your judgement and discretion and try to find out as much about your child's experience or involvement as you can through open and non-judgemental conversations.
- Manage the issue rather than the technology. Children and young people may be reluctant to report and seek help in the future if they fear their devices may be taken away.
- Talk to your child about tactics they can use if they are pressured to share personal sexual content, including saying no, deflecting the conversation or explaining they aren't comfortable.
- It is essential that your child is supported, seek advice from wellbeing and support services to help manage any wellbeing impacts.

Did you know?

Research suggests that many parents/carers indicated they would respond negatively or in a way that would exacerbate the issue in the instance of online child sexual exploitation. It is important to remember that these situations can be complex and a child may be reluctant to seek help if they fear they may be in trouble for their actions.

Getting help

Online child sexual exploitation, including **grooming** and **extortion**, can be reported to **your local police**.

If a child is in immediate danger, call your local police emergency number.

If you become aware of explicit content that has been posted online, including child sexual abuse material, report the site to **your local police**.

Our partners



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