Unwanted sexual contact

Teenagers

Some adults befriend children online for sexual purposes. This is called grooming. It is illegal and should be reported to police. In many cases police can prosecute adults seeking children for sexual purposes even if they haven't made face to face contact with a child.

Many teens use sites that allow them to directly interact with people they don't know offline. There is a risk that the individuals teens connect with may not be who they claim to be, or that they intend to establish a sexual relationship with your teen. The following tips can help guide your teen's behaviour and help keep them safe from unwanted sexual contact.

- Stay involved in your teen's use of new technologies—keep up to date with the websites they are visiting and explore them with your teen if possible. In general it is useful to consider whether you are comfortable with the content of the sites and the potential for contact with others including adults.
- Remind your teen to create screen names or IDs that do not indicate gender, age, name or location and are not sexually provocative.
- Guide your teen to use their privacy settings to restrict their online information to viewing by known friends only.
- Encourage your teen to keep their online friends online. If they want to meet someone that they haven't met in person encourage them to ask a parent or another trusted adult to go with them and always meet in public places, preferably during the day.
- Encourage your teen to be alert to people online who make them feel uncomfortable and to block them. They should report inappropriate contact to the website administrators.
- Some teens feel worried about their parents' reaction to things they may have said or done online, especially if they think they encouraged online sexual contact. This can prevent them reporting concerns about online contacts. Perpetrators play on this worry and shame to isolate teens from family and friends and encourage teens to trust and confide in them.
- To overcome this risk reassure your teen that you will always support them and not block their internet access if they report that they are uncomfortable or worried about what somebody has been saying online.
- Be alert to changes in your teen's behaviour or mood that are concerning including increased or decreased sexualised behaviours and/or apparent confidence, clinginess or withdrawal, anxiety or sadness and changed interactions with friends. Explore your concerns with them and if necessary seek professional support including through the Cybersmart Online Helpline at www.cybersmart.gov.au/report.aspx. The Cybersmart Online Helpline provides free, confidential online counselling for children and young people. Your child's school may also be able to provide guidance and support.

- If there is a threat to your child's safety the police can help. In a life threatening and time critical situation call Triple Zero (000).

More information

The Cybersmart program provides a range of cybersafety materials for parents and their children. For more information, resources, advice and tips, visit the Cybersmart website at www.cybersmart.gov.au. Encourage your children and teens to take a look around the website. If you have young children, you may like to explore it together to help them understand how to protect themselves against online risks and make the most of their experiences online.