

AFP urges parents and carers to be vigilant about online gaming



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The AFP is encouraging parents and carers to be involved in their children's online activities, specifically online gaming, warning that predators use chat functions in gaming platforms to contact children.

Acting Assistant Commissioner Hilda Sirec said many adults might not realise that offenders could use the chat functions to initiate conversations with their children through online games.

"These offenders may pretend to be young themselves or use details from the child's profile to portray themselves as a 'friend of their friends'," acting Assistant Commissioner Sirec said.

"In some cases, an offender will suggest they start conversing on a different platform or app that allows sharing of images and videos. This might be typically where an offender will start engaging in sexualised chat."

"As part of the grooming process, they may use coercion tactics to trick the child into providing them child abuse material or request to meet in-person."

"Offenders may also use game-based incentives, like in-game currency, to groom children into sending them child abuse material."

Acting Assistant Commissioner Sirec said while online games enabled children to play remotely with friends, parents and carers needed to be aware of the risks created by the internet connectivity.

“We are often asked by parents and carers, ‘what are the worst games?’. Our answer is that any game or app has the potential to be used for harm if it has online connectivity, especially chat functions,” acting Assistant Commissioner Sirec said.

“It is always recommended you do your own research before deciding whether an online game is suitable for your child.”

“Having an understanding of the features of the games your children are playing, particularly whether there is the ability to connect with other users, is important for keeping them safe.”

Online games which are specifically marketed at children are not necessarily ‘safer’ if they still have interactive online functions that can be misused and cause harm.

Tips for parents or carers on chat functions

- Check if the app or game your child is using has a direct message or chat function, and check if they are talking to offline friends they know and trust or also people they only know online.
- Consider disabling the chat if not necessary for the game or app, if this isn’t possible, ensure your child knows to keep the chat about the game only and to avoid answering any personal questions.
- Some apps or games have privacy settings that can be changed to limit who can contact your child. We recommend implementing this where possible, however keep in mind these can sometimes be changed, so we also suggest a regular privacy ‘check-up’ to make sure these are still in place.
- Encourage critical thinking skills with your child and explain to them that not everyone online is who they say they are.
- Someone asking your child to move to another platform or to add them as a ‘friend’ on another platform might be a sign that something isn’t right. Keep an eye out for suspicious activity and know how to block and report them.

For resources and guidance from the ACCCE and ThinkUKnow to help keep your child safer online, see the [‘Gaming, devices and what you need to know’](#) guide for parents and carers and the recently launched [‘Jack Changes the Game’](#) children’s book.

How to report online child sexual abuse

- If you believe a child is in imminent danger, call police Triple Zero (000) or visit your local police station.
- If your child is experiencing issues online, it is essential to collect evidence - taking screenshots or photos of the content. Once you have collected your evidence, block and report on the app, site or platform where the issue occurred.

Online child sexual exploitation can be reported to the ACCCE at <https://www.accce.gov.au/report> or to call Crime stoppers on 1800 333 000.

If you or someone you know are impacted by child sexual abuse and online exploitation there are support services available, visit to learn more www.accce.gov.au/support

Advice and support for parents and carers about how they can help protect children online can be found at ThinkUKnow, an AFP-led education program designed to prevent online child sexual exploitation: www.thinkuknow.org.au

Note to media:

Use of term 'CHILD ABUSE' MATERIAL NOT 'CHILD PORNOGRAPHY'

The correct legal term is Child Abuse Material – the move to this wording was among amendments to Commonwealth legislation in 2019 to more accurately reflect the gravity of the crimes and the harm inflicted on victims.

Use of the phrase "child pornography" is inaccurate and benefits child sex abusers because it:

- indicates legitimacy and compliance on the part of the victim and therefore legality on the part of the abuser; and
- conjures images of children posing in 'provocative' positions, rather than suffering horrific abuse.

Every photograph or video captures an actual situation where a child has been abused.

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