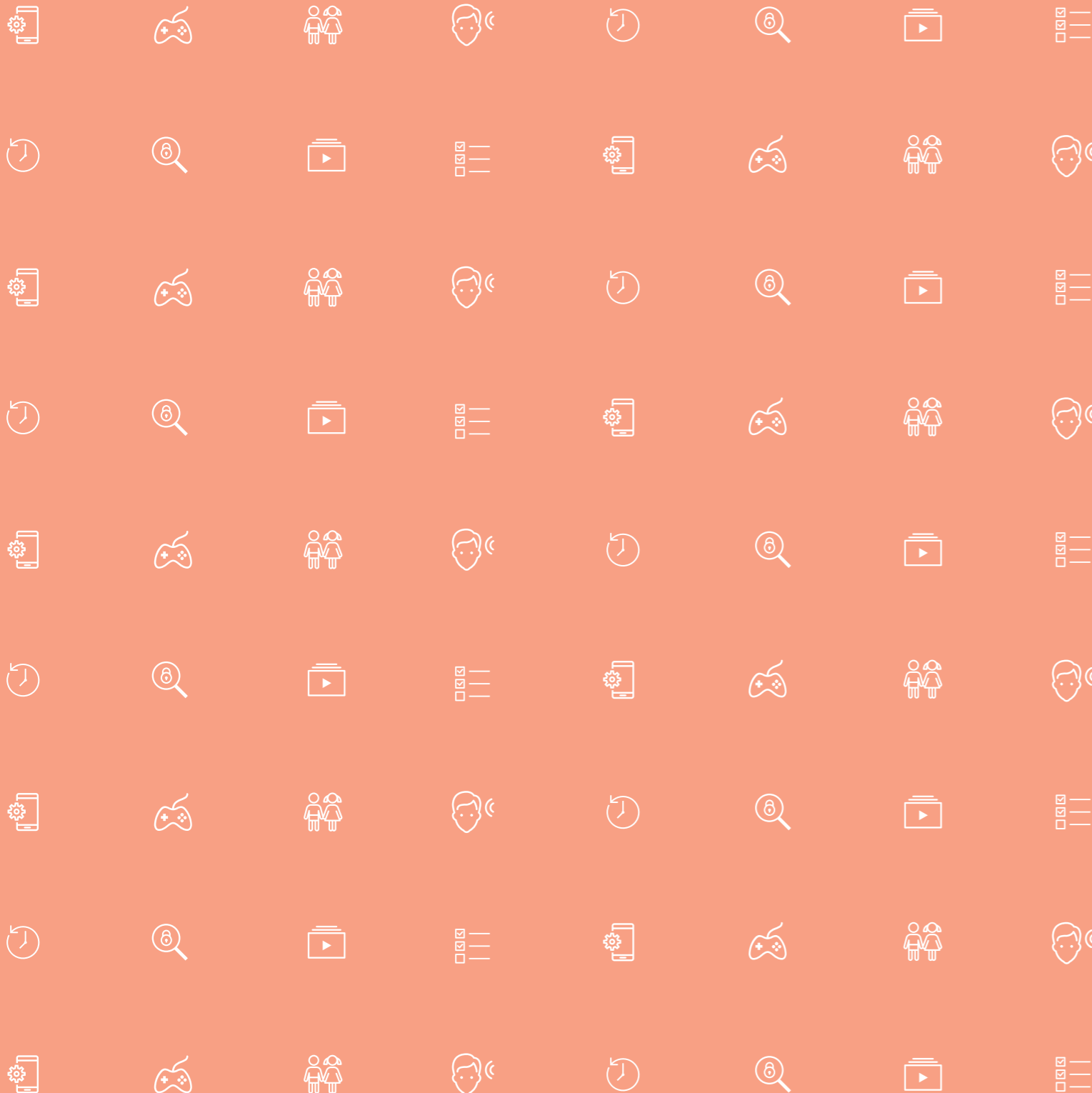


Online safety for the early years





Introduction

This guide is designed for parents and carers of children under 8 years old. For older children, please request the **Keeping children safe online - advice for parents and carers** booklet from the Online Safety Commission at onlinesafetycommission.com

As parents and carers of young children, online safety begins with you. Young children often use digital devices from the first years of their lives. They play with connected toys, tap and swipe touch screens, choose programs to watch on streaming services, play games, join in video calls and share photos with their family and friends.

Being online can have many benefits for young children. It gives them opportunities to explore their creativity, improve their language skills, solve problems, think critically and build relationships.

Even when they are not using digital technologies, children are watching the adults in their lives and learning about technology use. This is why it is important to set a positive example by modelling good habits.

Parents and carers also need to be aware that there may be risks for young children when they use connected devices.

There are four main types of risk to keep in mind:

- **Contact risks** — your child may talk or play online with someone they do not know. Also, their data may be collected while they are online, revealing personal information like their name, age and location.
- **Conduct risks** — photos, videos or stories you share about your child now on social media can contribute to your child's permanent 'digital footprint'. Later in life they may prefer these were not public. Your child may also start to experience or display negative behaviours if they are left alone online or not supported to develop good online skills.
- **Content risks** — your child could watch poor quality shows or play games unsuitable for their age. They may accidentally view age-inappropriate content, like violence or pornography.
- **Contract risks** — with more transactions taking place and information being exchanged online, your child could sign up to unfair contracts that harm or exploit them. These could involve scams, identity theft or targeted advertising.¹

Rather than keeping your children offline, it is important to give them the benefits that the online world has to offer. This booklet provides advice to help you manage these risks and support your child to be safe online.

Your guidance can give your child the confidence to be safe, be kind, ask for help when they need it, and make good choices online.



This booklet has been developed in partnership by the Fiji Online Safety Commission and the Australian eSafety Commissioner. Copyright:



¹ https://core-evidence.eu/updates/the-4cs-of-online-risk/?dm_i=6RH4,668V,20UD5T,PQGY,1



Talk about online safety early

Talking about online safety from a very early age encourages habits that will help your child as they explore, learn, create and connect with others online.

You can begin by talking about what you are doing on your screen as you search for an address, send a text or post a picture on social media. Encourage your child to ask questions and help them to understand what you are doing and why.

These four key messages will help children relate online behaviour and practices with real world experiences.



Be safe

- Talk about how technologies and devices can be connected to one another, and that is what makes them useful. It can also be a way for unknown people to contact them, so they should only talk and share with people they know.
- Make sure your child knows what their 'personal information' is: their full name, date of birth, address. Talk about why they should not share this information with everyone.



Be kind

- Show how to be kind and respectful online. When children are babies, you can model polite online and offline communication, like saying 'please', 'thank you', 'hello' and 'goodbye'. As they get older, prompt and praise kind behaviour and let them know you are there to help if someone is mean to them online.
- When it is possible, ask your child if they would like to be in a photo before you take it. Try to do the same before you share a photo or video or write something about them on social media. It is important to model consent and respectful data sharing practices from an early age.



Ask for help

- Make sure your child knows to ask for permission to use a device. It is important you know when they use devices, so you can supervise them appropriately.
- Talk to your child about what they can do if they see or hear something on a device that makes them feel sad, scared or worried. Make sure they know you will not be angry if they ask you for help about anything online.
- Make sure your child knows the other trusted adults they can go to about anything online.



Make good choices

- Take the time to play together with devices and ask questions that help your child think about what is good and bad about the content they watch and games they play.
- Build good habits together. Create some family rules for digital technology and managing time online.





Set up devices safely

Before young children begin to explore online, it is important to activate safety features, filters and parental controls on all devices they use. No parental control or safe search filter is 100% effective. Helping your child build good online safety habits is just as important.

Here are some tips for setting up devices safely.

- 1 Password protect devices** with a code that only you know. Fingerprint or face authentication is useful if you find that your child works out your code. It is important that you have direct access to all devices that your child uses and can supervise their access.
- 2 Use parental controls** to supervise and limit what your child sees and does online. You can:
 - block access to specific websites, apps or functions (for example the device's camera or shopping apps with saved credit card details)
 - filter inappropriate content that shows adult or sexual conduct or promotes violence, self-harm, eating disorders, drug use, racism or terrorism
 - supervise your child's use of connected devices or apps by checking reports about the content they access and the sites they visit, including how often and for how long.



Set up devices safely



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- 3 Set up shared accounts** if multiple members of your family share a device, app or service. By doing this, you may be able to change the filters or privacy settings to suit each user's age and skills.
- 4 Activate safe search** on any search engine and device your child uses to filter out inappropriate content. There are a number of child-friendly search engines, including Google Safe Search and Kiddle.
- 5 Use screen time monitors** to set time limits that block your child's access to a device, app or online service after a set period. This could be on the device (Apple and Android devices include screen time monitors as part of their operating systems) or using third-party apps and software. Alarm clocks, kitchen timers and stop watches work just as well!
- 6 Set up bookmarks** in the web browser for your child and ensure your child knows these are the sites they are allowed use. This may help minimise the risk of them opening inappropriate websites and content.
- 7 Set up a folder** on shared devices that include the apps or programs that your child is allowed to use.
- 8 Turn on 'airplane mode' or 'flight mode'** on a mobile device to restrict access to online services, or turn off the data connection.

Guides and useful website:

- **Setting up devices safely:** esafety.gov.au/parents/skills-advice/taming-technology
- **Google Safe Search:** safesearchkids.com/
- **Kiddle Safe Search:** kiddle.co/



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Show how to explore safely

It is important for parents and carers to model safe, positive online habits. This means setting a good example, so your child sees how they should use digital technologies.

Here are some tips for helping children to explore safely:

- 1 Ensure parental controls and filters are active on any device a child is using.
- 2 Keep digital technologies in shared family spaces. Devices should not be allowed in bedrooms.
- 3 Explore activities together. Sit with your child and play together, especially for all new games, apps, websites and programs.
- 4 Ask questions like ‘I wonder what will happen when we tap here?’ and describe what you are thinking and doing.
- 5 Practice taking turns with your child to help build good habits and prepare them to use devices with others.
- 6 Supervise activities when your child is playing with familiar games or content. Your child can hold the device, but make sure you can still see the screen at all times. Encourage your child to tell you about what is happening so you can stay involved.
- 7 Check in regularly with your child if they are using a device on their own. Independent activities should only include games, apps, websites and programs you and your child know well. You should still be nearby in the same room.
- 8 Make sure your child knows they can come to you if they are unsure about anything or they see or experience something that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- 9 Focus on health and wellbeing by balancing ‘sitting’ online activities with ‘active’ online activities. For example, children can use screens to learn dances, practice yoga and sing and move along with songs — they can even use devices to create their own games or activities.
- 10 Keep sleep time separate from screen time. It is best to put away digital devices two hours before children (and adults) go to bed, so they can settle and sleep without being distracted.

It is important to remember that every time you pick up a phone or another device and focus on it, your child is watching and learning from you. Even very young babies are aware of screens and the amount of time and attention their parents give to them. Demonstrating that you can put down your own device and concentrate on your child gives them an important example — at any age.





Find good content

Choosing good quality content for your child to watch and interesting activities for them to do can shape their future online choices.

- ‘Good quality’ content means different things to different people, so decide what is important to you and your family.
- Encourage your child to make good choices by talking to them about what they like and what else they might enjoy – you could add more suggestions to their bookmarks or folder.
- You could show your child how to select different content or help them type different search terms.

What to look for

There are some signs of good quality shows, games and apps:

- They show people or characters who are kind and friendly.
- They help children learn about sounds, numbers and letters.
- They encourage children to create and explore, instead of just watching.
- They encourage children to use a variety of actions instead of just repeating actions.
- They include a balance of female and male characters and people from other countries and cultures.





Where to check for good content

Movies and online games are often given an age rating to show if the content is suitable for young children. Common Sense Media provides age-based reviews of apps, games, websites, movies, TV shows, online channels and streaming services. You can see these reviews at commonsensemedia.org/

You can find good content for young children at these providers:

- **Fiji TV kids** — fijione.tv/kids
- **ABC Kids** — abc.net.au/abckids
- **CBeebies** — cbeebies.com
- **PBS Kids** — pbskids.org
- **Sesame street** — sesamestreet.org
- **Bluey on Disney+** — disneyplus.com/en-gb/series/bluey/1xy9TAOQ0M3r



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