

TikTok graphic videos can spread like wildfire in a matter of hours. This is how to talk to your kids about it

By [Kelsie Iorio](#) and [Nicholas McElroy](#)

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The Video app TikTok has hundreds of millions of users worldwide.

Parents, carers and teachers have been warned to be wary of their kids' social media use after a horrific video recently went viral.

The video was originally livestreamed on Facebook but was also shared on Twitter and Instagram before it was reported and removed.

The video [also found its way to TikTok](#), which is popular with children and teenagers.

Despite social media giants having moderation strategies in place, disturbing content can still filter through, and it's not always easy to keep kids protected as more and more of their lives transition online.

We asked the experts how best to communicate with kids about this latest incident.

This is their advice.

What's all of this about?



The distressing content has even drawn to the attention of Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who says it is the responsibility of TikTok to block the graphic footage. *(Supplied: Ann Elizabeth Mather)*

[The extremely graphic video that has emerged over the past week](#) is being shared both overtly and surreptitiously on social media platforms.

It is being hidden inside benign, child-friendly videos that start normally but then switch scenes on the unsuspecting viewer and show the graphic content.

eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant released a statement confirming contact had been made with social media companies to remove the video.

"This is yet another example of social media platforms struggling to incorporate safety protections at the core of their product offerings," she said.

"To prevent this from happening in the first place, they need clear processes and procedures, including the technology tools to detect and remove harmful content much more quickly.

"In situations like this, it becomes even clearer that safety by design and cross-platform sharing of hashes of harmful content is critical."

It's even been drawn to the attention of Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who also said it's the responsibility of TikTok to block the graphic footage.

"No child should be exposed to horrifying content like this and platforms like TikTok need to put in more resources to detect and tear down this sort of harmful content," he said.

Adjunct Professor Alexandra Martiniuk from the University of Sydney says this latest video is sadly not the first of its kind.

"Suicides, suicide tips and tips for other types of self-harm are on most types of social media," she says.

"Sometimes these are spliced and embedded into other seemingly safe videos. Therefore this is something we always need to be aware of."

If you or anyone you know needs help:

- [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14
- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800
- [MensLine Australia](#) on 1300 789 978
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) on 1300 659 467
- [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636
- [Headspace](#) on 1800 650 890
- [ReachOut](#) at au.reachout.com
- [Care Leavers Australasia Network \(CLAN\)](#) on 1800 008 774

What impact can this content have on kids?

Professor Martiniuk says witnessing something like a suicide on social media can have negative effects on kids, adolescents and adults.

"Research has shown that exposure to self-harm and suicide on social media can prospectively predict self-harm and suicide," she says.

"This 'suicide contagion', so to speak, has been previously known even prior to the invention of social media.

"Graphic videos like this one are not good at all obviously, but we do need to talk about suicide so we don't miss the chance to help those who are suffering.

"We cannot fully turn away from social media as it can also be helpful for those seeking help."

Ms Grant encouraged parents, teachers and carers not to draw attention to the latest horrific video "so as not to peak curiosity".

"Once you see this horrific content, it's impossible to unsee," she said in the statement.

"Instead, keep an eye on those who are more vulnerable and at-risk, and check in with them about their interactions on and offline, help them build their digital resilience and let them know they can come to you for help if they see graphic or distressing content online."

How can adults protect kids from distressing content online?

Professor Martiniuk says the four "D's" can be helpful to parents as their kids navigate social media:

- **Delay** and **Decrease** access to social media platforms as long as you can as a parent, and together as a community (at school, sleepovers etc)
- **Discuss** early — discuss online safety (suicide and self-harm, cyberbullying, sexting, video content, porn etc)
- **Devices** in communal areas of the house — as long as a parent can

The [Australian Government's eSafety Commissioner](#) also recommends these tips for making sure children are safe online:

- **Engage** in your child's online activities — ask what apps, sites and games they're using and make sure they're age appropriate
- Use **parental controls** on devices to help limit what your child is exposed to
- Help them **report and block** upsetting content they see on social media sites or apps
- Let them know they can **come to you about anything upsetting they see** online

Professor Martiniuk says while some researchers and companies are analysing social media interactions in attempts to prevent suicides and other negative effects, more needs to be done.

"We need more research to better understand how to support children and adolescents regarding this use of social media," she says.

"Mostly importantly, we must ensure social media platforms remove this kind of content rapidly and that our national and international policies ensure they need to."

Your kids came across a graphic video — how do you talk to them about it?



Parents should ask questions of their child to determine how they might be processing any confronting content they might have seen online, or even in traditional media.(AAP: *Dan Peled*)

Don't panic. This is an opportunity to open up lines of communication, according to Professor Lelia Green, a communications expert from Edith Cowan University.

"The most important thing is to keep talking about it," Professor Green says.

She says parents should ask questions of their child to determine how they are might be processing any confronting content they might have seen online, or even in traditional media.

"Parents need to put it in a broader context, what you have to understand is that children have seen extraordinary storytelling in not only fictional films, even if you're talking about Lord of the Rings, but they also might have seen [confronting] things on the news which can be shown in family time," she says.

Rather than interrogating the child, she says parents should ask their children about what they might have seen, whether their friends have seen it or if they have been able to speak with anyone else about the issue.

"Parents can try not to panic themselves and instead see this as an opportunity to open the channels of communication," Professor Green says.

She says it can also be a time to affirm coping strategies and online practices.

"Because if they say they turned it off, swiped away or reported [distressing content] then you can say that's a really responsible thing to do because it's important people don't come across this stuff," she says.

She says it is also important to note that confronting content, especially when it is not expected, can be especially distressing.

"The issue is that a number of children seeing it aren't intending to see it and it is confronting and that can be particularly distressing," she says.

"There is some evidence to believe that if children go looking for it then it's much easier for them to handle confronting stuff they come across rather than a total shock."

She says if a child is upset by what they might have seen then they can contact the [Kids Helpline](#), while parents can contact the [Parent Helpline](#).