Keeping children safer online

A guide for parents and caregivers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Being online can help tamariki and rangatahi learn, play and stay connected. Parents do not need to know every app to provide support. Regular conversations, thoughtful settings and a clear plan for getting help can make a difference. Adults share responsibility for children's safety; a child is never to blame for being targeted or abused.

If a child is in immediate danger, call Police on 111.

Start with connection

Ask your child to show you what they enjoy online. Talk about who they play or chat with, what feels good and what can be difficult. Try "What would you do if someone asked you to keep a chat secret?" Adapt conversations to their language, development and communication needs.

Let them know they can ask for help even if they have broken a rule, replied to someone or shared an image. You could say: "Thank you for telling me. We can work through this together." Avoid making loss of their device the automatic response to asking for help.

Set up devices and accounts together

- Check the service's current age requirements and whether it suits your child's readiness. Read the safety information before allowing a new app, game or account.
- Use the available child accounts, parental controls and content filters. Review who can message them, join their games, see their posts or access their location. Recheck after updates.
- Use strong, unique passwords and extra sign-in protection where available. Teach children not to share passwords or verification codes with friends or online contacts.
- Agree on purchases, downloads and contact with people they only know online. Show them how to leave a chat, mute, block and report.

Filters and controls reduce some risks, but cannot prevent every harmful experience. Keep talking and check in as your child becomes more independent.

Match support to your child

For younger children, choose content together and stay nearby while they play or watch. As children grow, practise privacy and reporting skills together. With teenagers, agree on boundaries and explain what supervision you use and why, while respecting their growing need for privacy.

Build routines that protect sleep, learning, movement and time with others. Notice how online activity affects your child, and revisit your plan when their needs change. Include the adults caring for them across different households.

Recognise pressure and unsafe contact

Online identities can be misleading. Grooming can begin with friendly attention, shared interests or gifts and move into secrecy, private chats or sexual requests. Harm can also come from someone a child already knows. Take pressure, threats and repeated boundary crossing seriously, even when your child sees the person as a friend.

Explain that no one is entitled to sexual pictures, videos or conversations. They can stop responding and ask for help at any time. Any plan to meet an online contact needs adult involvement and careful safety planning; children should not arrange to go alone.

Talk about images and privacy

Discuss what information posts and photos reveal, including names, school uniforms, routines and locations. Check your own sharing too, and ask before posting about your child. A private account does not guarantee that content will stay private.

Teach children to respect other people's images and never pass on intimate content. If an image of a child is shared or threatened, seek help promptly. Harm can also involve a fake or altered image; it still deserves a serious response.

Respond to bullying and upsetting content

If your child is excluded, humiliated or repeatedly targeted online, listen and make a plan together. Avoid retaliation. Report the behaviour to the service and use blocking or muting tools. Contact their school or kura if other students are involved, and ask Netsafe for advice.

If they see pornography, violence or other distressing material, help them step away and talk about it without shame. They may have encountered it unexpectedly. Explain that pornography is not a reliable guide to bodies, consent or respectful relationships. Get support if distress continues.

Include AI in the conversation

Ask about chatbots and AI features in the apps your child uses. Explain that a chatbot can sound caring or confident while giving inaccurate or unsuitable answers. It is not a person and should not replace trusted adults or professional help. Avoid sharing private information with it, and check concerning advice with a trusted person.

If someone threatens to share images

This is often called sextortion: someone demands money, more images or other actions by threatening to share intimate material, including fabricated images. Reassure your child that being targeted is not their fault. Do not pay, send more content or negotiate. Stop contact, report the account and block it. Seek help from Police and Netsafe promptly, even if money or images have already been sent.

Record account names, links, dates and threats where safe. Do not screenshot, download, copy or forward sexual images of children. Avoid deleting accounts or conversations before getting advice about evidence. You do not need to investigate the person yourself.

When your child needs help

Stay calm and focus on what they need now. Listen without interrogating, thank them for telling you and explain what you will do next. Do not promise secrecy. Involve them in decisions where possible, while taking the action needed to protect them.

Stay connected after the first conversation. Check how they are coping with school, sleep and friendships, and arrange further support if needed. You can get advice even when you are unsure how serious the situation is.

Where to turn in New Zealand

Police

Call 111 for immediate danger. For non-emergency reports of suspected grooming, sexual exploitation, threats or other offending, call 105 or use the Police online reporting service.

Police | Report online abuse and cyber incidents

Netsafe

For free advice about online bullying, unwanted contact, scams and other online harm, call 0508 638 723 or text NETSAFE to 4282. The helpline currently operates Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. An online report can be submitted outside those hours; it is not an emergency service.

Netsafe | Get help and contact details

Department of Internal Affairs

Report suspected online child sexual abuse material to Te Tari Taiwhenua Department of Internal Affairs using its reporting page. You do not need to search for more material. Follow the reporting instructions rather than sending images to friends, school staff or CAPS.

DIA | Report online child exploitation material

CAPS Hauraki and other support

For support and help finding the next step, contact CAPS on 07 868 8644 or reception@capshauraki.co.nz. For free, confidential sexual harm support at any time, call Safe to talk on 0800 044 334 or text 4334. If you are concerned about a child's safety, Oranga Tamariki is available on 0508 326 459, 24 hours a day.

Resources to use together

Netsafe Digital Guardian Guide | Practical tools for whānau

Keep It Real Online | Parent and caregiver advice

Netsafe | Sextortion advice and next steps

Safe to talk | Contact and support options

Oranga Tamariki | Worried about a child

Guidance, links and contacts checked October 2026. Platform settings and service details can change; follow the current guidance on the linked websites.