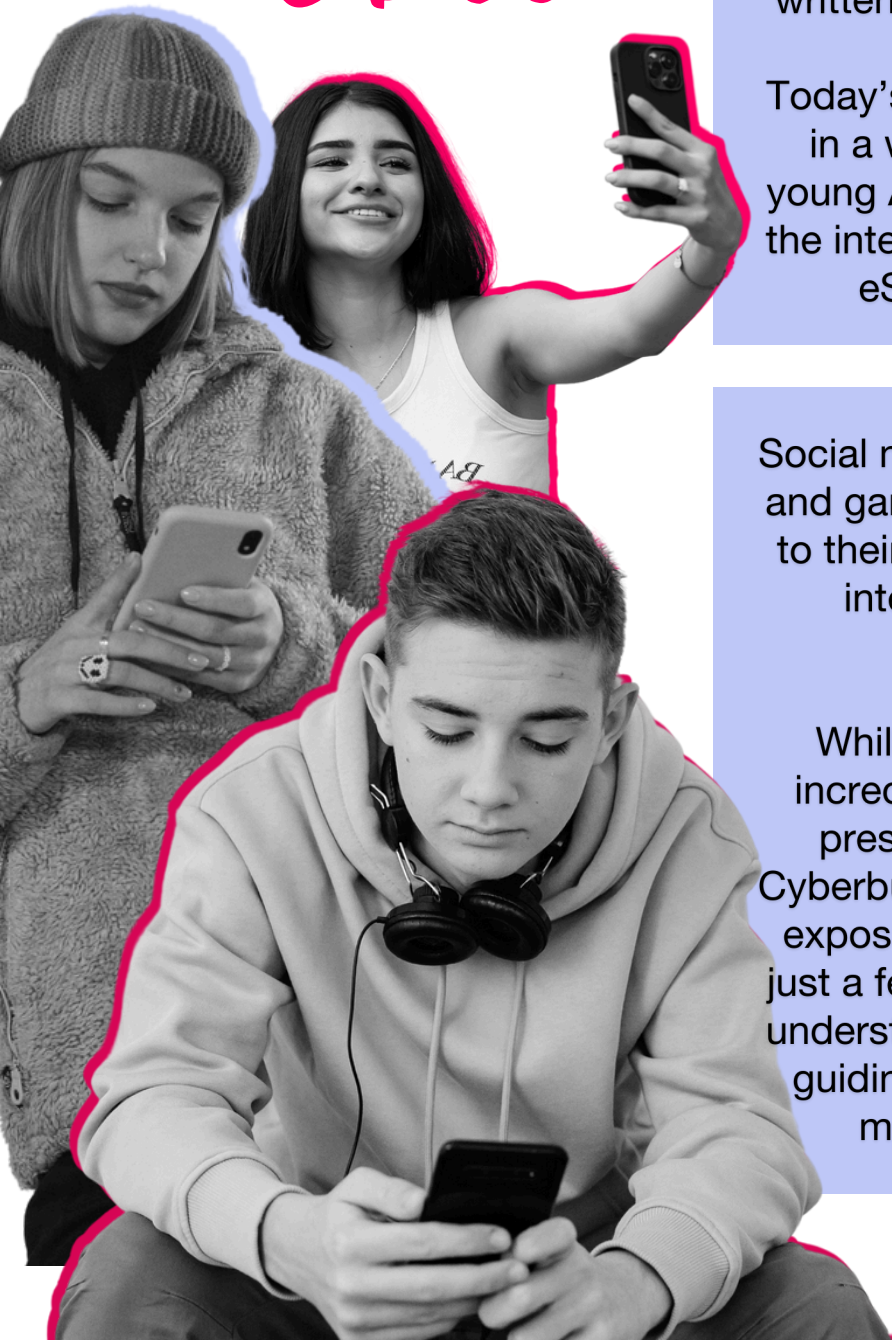# HELPING YOUR TEEN SAFELY NAVIGATE THEIR
ONLINE WORLD

The digital world is a far cry from the days of landlines and hand-written notes in the 80s and 90s.

Today's teenagers are growing up in a world where over 90% of young Australians aged 12-17 use the internet daily, according to the eSafety Commissioner.

Social media, streaming platforms, and gaming have become integral to their lives, shaping their social interactions, identity, and worldview.

While the online world offers incredible opportunities, it also presents unique challenges. Cyberbullying, misinformation, and exposure to harmful content are just a few of the risks. As parents, understanding this landscape and guiding your teens through it is more crucial than ever.

- In 2024, the average Australian internet user spent approximately 5 hours and 51 minutes online daily

- Almost all young people (98%) regularly use at least one social media platform

- Most Australian children surpass recommended screen time limits

- Nearly half of Australian children aged 10-15 spend over two hours daily on TikTok

- 86% of young Australians used Instagram, and 76% used Snapchat

- 70% of parents and carers who rated young people's social media use as a top issue

- 60% of Australian parents are worried about the impact of social media on their teenagers' mental health and well-being

- The average age at which young people are first exposed to porn is 13

- 84% of young people agree that porn pushes stereotypes of what is expected of men and women in sex

- Of young men who watch porn, over 50% watch at least once a week

Now let's explore some practical, research-backed strategies to help your teens thrive online while staying safe.

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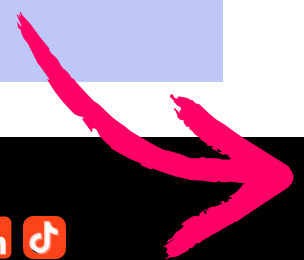
1 LEARN ABOUT THEIR WORLD

Being interested in your teen's online world builds trust and opens communication.

- Ask your teen to show you their favorite apps, YouTube channels, or social media accounts.
- Find out what they enjoy and why—this helps you understand their interests and values.
- Set aside time to explore new platforms together and ask open-ended questions.

! WATCH FOR: SUDDEN CHANGES IN THEIR ONLINE HABITS, SECRETIVE BEHAVIOR ABOUT CERTAIN APPS OR WEBSITES.

ENCOURAGE 2 CRITICAL THINKING

Teaching teens to evaluate content helps them avoid falling prey to misinformation.

- Watch videos or read articles together and discuss their credibility.
- Teach them to question the source: Who created it? What's their agenda?
- Encourage them to fact-check using trusted sources like government websites.

! WATCH FOR: SHARING OF MISLEADING/SENSATIONALISED CONTENT. EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO QUESTIONABLE NEWS OR SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS.

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3 TALK ABOUT TOUGH TOPICS

Ignoring negative or harmful content sends a message of indifference.

- When you see offensive or harmful posts, use it as an opportunity to discuss values and empathy.
- Ask your teen how they feel about what they see online.
- Provide guidance on how to respond to or report harmful content.

! WATCH FOR: HESITATION TO DISCUSS ONLINE EXPERIENCES. CHANGES IN MOOD AFTER BEING ONLINE.

MODEL HEALTHY 4 ONLINE BEHAVIORS

Teens are more likely to follow rules when they see parents practicing them.

- Establish screen-free family time, such as during meals.
- Set a household rule: no devices in bedrooms overnight.
- Show them how you balance online and offline activities.

! WATCH FOR: OVER-RELIANCE ON DEVICES FOR ENTERTAINMENT. DIFFICULTY DISCONNECTING FROM SCREENS.

5 PROMOTE A BALANCED "DIGITAL DIET"

Just like physical health, mental health depends on a healthy balance.

- Encourage teens to consume a mix of content: educational, creative, and social.
- Set limits on screen time and encourage offline hobbies.
- Discuss the impact of excessive screen time on mental health.

! WATCH FOR: FREQUENT COMPLAINTS OF FEELING OVERWHELMED OR ANXIOUS. RELUCTANCE TO ENGAGE IN REAL-WORLD ACTIVITIES.

HELP THEM SET BOUNDARIES 6

Clear boundaries reduce stress and help teens build self-discipline.

- Teach them how to block or mute accounts that make them uncomfortable.
- Encourage them to use privacy settings to control who sees their content.
- Discuss the importance of saying no to online interactions that don't feel right.

! WATCH FOR: EXCESSIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS. FEELINGS OF PRESSURE TO CONFORM TO ONLINE TRENDS.

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7 STAY UPDATED

The online world changes rapidly, and staying informed keeps you prepared.

- Follow trusted resources like the eSafety Commissioner or ACCC's Scamwatch.
- Join parent forums or online groups to learn from others.
- Stay aware of emerging trends, apps, and potential risks.

! WATCH FOR: SUDDEN INTEREST IN NEW APPS OR PLATFORMS. ENGAGING WITH RISKY ONLINE CHALLENGES.

FOSTER OPEN COMMUNICATION 8

Teens are more likely to come to you if they trust you won't overreact.

- Create a judgment-free space for your teen to share their experiences.
- Show empathy and understanding, even when discussing mistakes.
- Let them know they can come to you with any online issue.

! WATCH FOR: AVOIDANCE OF CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ONLINE ACTIVITIES. SEEKING ADVICE FROM PEERS RATHER THAN PARENTS.

HELPING YOUR TEEN SAFELY NAVIGATE THEIR ONLINE WORLD

Parenting in the digital age is a journey of learning and adapting. By staying curious, modelling positive behaviours, and fostering open dialogue, you can help your teen navigate the online world with confidence and resilience. Remember, you don't have to do it alone—many resources are available to support you every step of the way.

RESOURCES

- Respect.gov.au supports you to better understand current experiences of disrespect, reflect upon your own actions as a role model, and have proactive, positive convos about respect.
- eSafety Commissioner's Guide to Popular Apps provides an overview of apps teens use and potential risks.
- The Australian Media Literacy Alliance offers tools to improve critical media skills.
- ReachOut Australia's Online Safety Tips provide advice on discussing tricky issues.
- Raising Children Network's Screen Time Guidelines help families set balanced limits.
- Headspace's Mental Health Toolkit includes tips on managing screen time.
- eSafety Commissioner's Cyberbullying Help explains how to take action.
- Scamwatch provides alerts on online scams targeting teens and families.
- Parentline offers confidential advice for navigating tricky conversations.