

10TH EDITION



**Protecting Children and Young People
from Sexual Abuse:**

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Empowering parents and carers to start and maintain conversations that can help prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Bravehearts
bravehearts.org.au

Bravehearts dedicates this resource to all survivors of child sexual abuse and their supporting families, carers and friends.

Permission to duplicate for educational purposes
© 2025 Bravehearts Foundation Ltd
VERSION 10 UPDATED NOVEMBER 2025

Citation: Hermans, Z (ed) (2024), Gold Coast [Queensland], Bravehearts Foundation Ltd.

Acknowledgements: AFP-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation – Prevention and Engagement Team (consultation); Jo Compagne (proofing).



Bravehearts acknowledges the traditional custodians of Australian land and waters, and recognises their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present and extend respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We hope and believe we can move together to a place of equity, justice and partnership. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.



TRIGGER WARNING: This booklet contains information about child sexual abuse and may be triggering for survivors of this crime. If you or someone else is in need of information or support, please contact Bravehearts on freecall 1800 272 831 (Mon-Fri, 8:30am-4:30pm AEST).



Bravehearts' education and training programs are endorsed by the eSafety Commissioner as a Trusted eSafety Provider. To learn more visit esafety.gov.au/trusted-providers. The eSafety website provides a range of information and resources for various audiences.



Bravehearts is an LGBTQIA+ safe service provider and an equal opportunity employer.



Bravehearts Foundation Ltd - PO Box 575 Arundel BC QLD 4214
P 07 5552 3000 - F 07 5552 3088 - ABN 41 496 913 890 - ACN 607 315 917

Connect with us!



[braveheartsprotectkids](https://braveheartsprotectkids.org.au)



[bravehearts-inc](https://bravehearts-inc.org.au)

About Bravehearts

Bravehearts is an Australian child protection organisation dedicated to the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse.

Our Mission is to provide a coordinated and holistic approach to the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse.

Our Vision is a world where people, communities and systems all work together to protect children from sexual abuse.

Bravehearts pursues its **Mission and Vision** through:

- **Personal Safety Education:** Preventing child sexual abuse by educating children about personal safety, including body ownership, cyber-safety and consent.
- **Counselling and Support:** Treating child sexual abuse through the provision of affordable counselling and support for children (and their non-offending family members) affected by this crime, a national Information and Support Line (1800 272 831), case management for adult survivors seeking Redress, and therapeutic intervention for children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours.
- **Child Protection Training:** Preventing child sexual abuse through online child protection training courses for individuals and organisations.
- **Research and Reform:** Preventing and treating child sexual abuse through current, evidence-based research and legislative reform that works in the best interests of children, young people and survivors of child sexual abuse.

Please support
the work of
Bravehearts
by making a
donation today.



bravehearts.org.au
All donations over \$2
are tax-deductible



Table of contents

5	How to use this guide
6	About child sexual abuse
9	Understanding and responding to sexual behaviours in children
10	Harmful sexual behaviour and peer-instigated sexual abuse
11	Effects and indicators of child sexual abuse
13	Recognising and responding to grooming
15	Responding to disclosures of abuse
16	Prevention through personal safety education
19	Activity: Ditto's 3 Rules for Keeping Safe
23	Activity: My Safety Team
25	eSafety for children and young people
28	Children, young people and pornography
31	Respectful relationships and consent education
33	Sextortion
34	Child Protection Services and useful websites
35	Personal safety learning resources
36	Ditto's 3 Rules for Keeping Safe poster
37	Sam's SMART eSafety Rules poster
38	National support lines
39	My Emergency Contacts



How to use this guide

As protectors, we want to shield our children from harm, but the reality is that we cannot be with them 24/7. What we can do is build resiliency in our children, which includes teaching them how to identify and respond to unsafe situations.

This guide aims to equip you with knowledge on what to look for and what to do when it comes to protecting children and young people from sexual abuse.

It's vital that you know the indicators of abuse so you can identify potential early signs that may indicate harm has occurred or is occurring. These indicators may present themselves through the things children say or do, as well as physical signs.

When harm (or the risk of harm) has been identified, it's vital that you respond effectively. Understanding how to respond to a child or young person who discloses harm, as well as who you can go to with your concerns, can improve the long term outcomes for a child or young person at risk.

As well as equipping you with the knowledge you need to help keep your children and young people safe, this guide will help empower you to have conversations with your children and young people about personal safety, online safety, consent and more.

These conversations should not be one-off talks. They should happen often and from a young age, so children can learn the right language to speak up if they ever find themselves in an unsafe situation.

WE WOULD LOVE YOUR FEEDBACK

We hope this guide proves to be a useful tool and we welcome any feedback you may wish to provide to help us continually improve on this resource. To provide feedback, please contact us at comms@bravehearts.org.au.



About child sexual abuse

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any act of exposing or subjecting a child (under the age of 18) to sexual activity, contact or behaviour by an adult or other young person for the purposes of gratification (sexual or otherwise).

Dove and Miller (2007) identifies child sexual abuse as: 'Any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other; forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act. It also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism and communication in a sexual manner by phone or internet.'

Child sexual abuse is a global problem that knows no physical, financial, socioeconomic, geographic, cultural or gender boundaries. All forms of child sexual abuse are a profound violation of the human rights of the child and a crime under law. The impacts of this crime are far-reaching for children, families and communities.

Children who have been sexually abused can suffer a range of psychological and behavioural effects, ranging from mild to severe, both in the short and long-term. Effects of the abuse can vary; however, children who are believed when they first disclose and are given the right type of therapeutic support, are less likely to endure long term negative impacts.

Child sexual abuse topline statistics



More than **1 in 4 Australians (28.5%)** have experienced child sexual abuse.¹



79% of child sexual abuse survivors knew their abuser.⁵



More than **1 in 3 Australian girls and almost 1 in 5 boys** experience child sexual abuse².



In **more than half of cases (approximately 52%)**, the onset of child sexual abuse is from **0 to 8 years**⁶.



Among Australian children who have been sexually abused, for **more than 78%**, it happened more than once³.



1 in 8 children has sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they first met online⁷.



1 in 12 Australian young people were **raped in childhood**⁴.



Approximately **1 in 3 cases** of child sexual abuse are instigated by other young people⁸.

1-4) Haslam D, Mathews B, Pacella R, Scott JG, Finkelhor D, Higgins DJ, Meinck F, Erskine HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence D, Malacova E. (2023). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology. 5) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019, as cited in National Office for Child Safety, 2021 6) McElvaney et al., 2020 7) Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2022. 8) Der Bedrosian, 2018; McKibbin, 2017; Finkelhor, Omrod & Chaffin, 2009.

Common myths about child sexual abuse

MYTH Parents are at fault for not protecting their child.

TRUTH Parents often blame themselves for not protecting their child, however, this attitude shifts blame and enables offenders to avoid responsibility for their actions.

The offender is always the person who is responsible for the sexual abuse. It also discounts how effective offenders can be during the grooming process, often grooming the parents/ carers as well as the child. This is why being informed about potential signs of grooming is so essential (see page 13).

MYTH The stranger is the danger.

TRUTH In an Australian study of people who experienced child sexual abuse, 79% were abused by a relative, friend, acquaintance or neighbour.¹

MYTH Children who are being sexually abused will tell someone immediately.

TRUTH There can be many barriers to a child disclosing sexual abuse. Perpetrators work hard at ensuring their victims remain silent, using many different tactics.

The result is that a child who is being sexually abused may experience fear, confusion, guilt, and shame, making it difficult for them to disclose. Indeed, many adult survivors of child sexual abuse do not disclose until decades after the abuse occurred.

MYTH Only children from low socio-economic backgrounds or broken families are at risk of sexual abuse.

TRUTH All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse, regardless of their background or family circumstances.

‘...a child who is being sexually abused may experience fear, confusion, guilt, and shame, making it difficult for them to disclose.’

MYTH Children and young people lie about sexual abuse.

TRUTH Although a child may retract their report, this can be due to shame, confusion, fear of consequences or other threats that occur after the initial disclosure has been made.

Pressure is mounted on a child following disclosure. Consequences of disclosures can include family breakdown, parental distress, and other effects. Retracting a statement may be a child's attempt to return their situation to normal, rather than an indication that they were lying. This is why it is so important that a child is supported and believed after a disclosure is made.

MYTH Children can misinterpret and wrongly accuse an adult of sexual abuse.

TRUTH Children often disclose long after the abuse has started. The offender often uses behaviours such as ‘accidental touching’ or tickling to minimise their behaviour and blame the child. A child's disclosure should always be acknowledged and believed.

MYTH All child sex offenders are male.

TRUTH It is important to be aware there are both male and female child sex offenders. Although prevalence rates are variable, 2% to 12% of child sexual abuse crimes are committed by women².

MYTH Children and young people cannot be sexually harmed by other children or young people.

TRUTH Australian studies find that 30-60% of child sexual abuse is carried out by other children and young people³. This is known as peer-on-peer abuse or peer-instigated abuse. Preventing child sexual abuse requires us to acknowledge this uncomfortable truth and be aware that it is not only adults who can sexually harm children. (See page 9 for more information about understanding and responding to sexual behaviours in children).

MYTH A child or young person can 'invite' sexual contact by acting seductively.

TRUTH No child or young person wants to be sexually abused. Adults have power over those under the age of 18, and they must not manipulate this power.

MYTH Some children enjoy sexual attention from adults.

TRUTH Children who experience sexual abuse can have feelings of guilt, shame and confusion. Survivors sometimes describe feeling as though their bodies were 'betraying' them during the abuse, as their physical responses conflicted directly with how they felt emotionally.

Moreover, because many abusers are known and loved by their victims (for example, they may be the child's parent, grandparent, teacher or close family friend), the child may seem to enjoy the special attention they receive, making the trauma they experience even more complex.

No matter how much a child may love their abuser or seem to 'enjoy' the attention, the abuse is never ok. A child cannot consent, and sexual abuse is a profound violation of a child's human rights, and a crime under the law.

MYTH The child or young person did not say no or try to stop the sexual abuse, so the child or young person is partly to blame.

TRUTH Adult offenders are always to blame, as children are unable to consent.

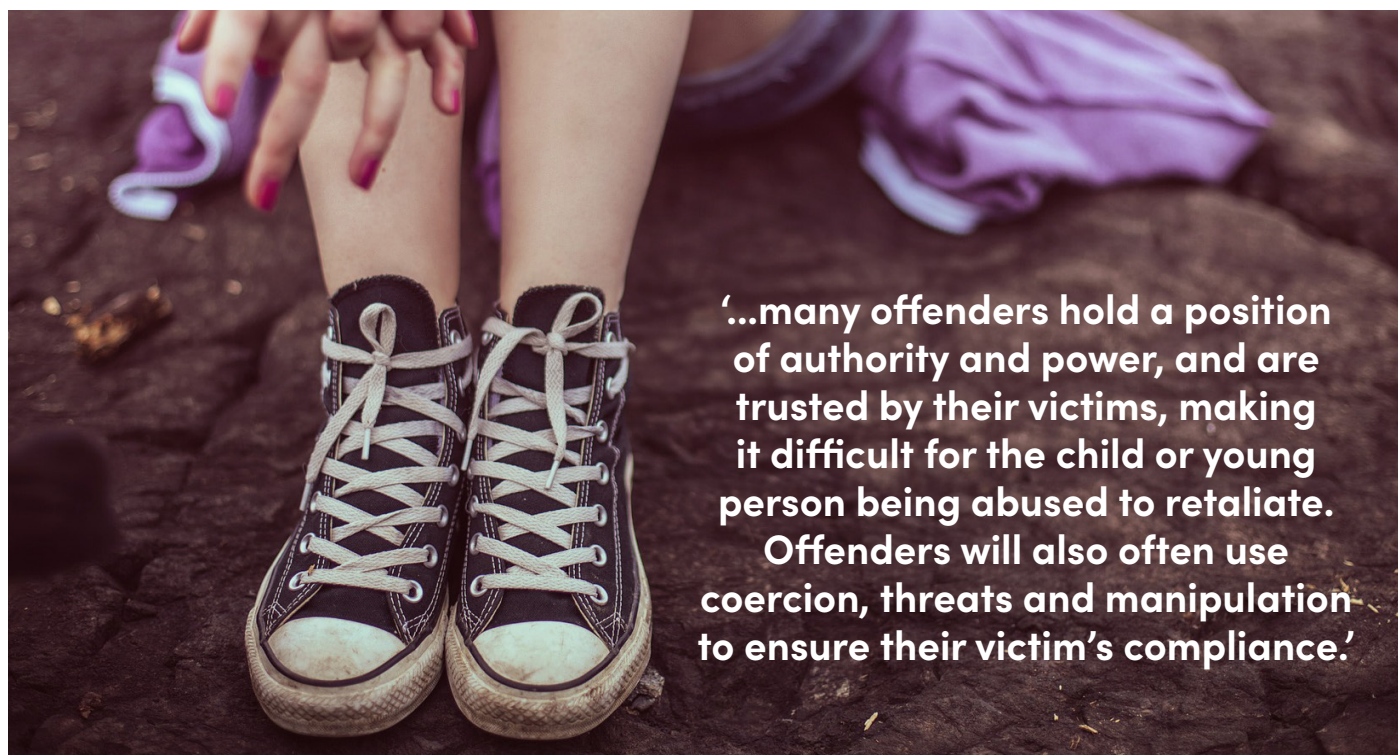
A common stress response is to freeze, and this may prevent a child from responding or saying 'no.' Furthermore, many offenders hold a position of authority and power, and are trusted by their victims, making it difficult for the child or young person being abused to retaliate. Offenders will also often use coercion, threats and manipulation to ensure their victim's compliance.

MYTH Children who are sexually abused will hate the perpetrator, so it will be easy to recognise if the child is being harmed.

TRUTH If a child is being sexually abused by a parent, loved-one or caregiver, they will often be confused by the behaviour and struggle with conflicting emotions.

A child may still view the perpetrator as a beloved friend or family-member and may not outwardly show any anger or resentment towards them.

1) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019, as cited in National Office for Child Safety, 2021. 2) Christensen, L.S., & Jansen, K. (2019). 3) Der Bedrosian, 2018; McKibbin, 2017; Finkelhor, Omrod & Chaffin, 2009.



'...many offenders hold a position of authority and power, and are trusted by their victims, making it difficult for the child or young person being abused to retaliate.

Offenders will also often use coercion, threats and manipulation to ensure their victim's compliance.'

Understanding and responding to sexual behaviours in children

Children go through a number of different stages of sexual development, most of which are a natural and healthy part of growing up and learning about their bodies and their world.

Just as language acquisition, motor and cognitive development are a natural part of growth and learning in children, so too is sexual development. However, sometimes children may display behaviours that appear unusual or concerning. It is important to consider these behaviours within a developmental and social context. The following provides a useful guide, but when in doubt, talk to your health professional or contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831.

Healthy sexual behaviours in children

Sexual behaviours in children may be considered healthy and part of typical development when:

- the sexual exploration is an information-gathering process where children explore the human body and/or gender roles, and;
- this exploration is with children of a similar age, developmental status and participation is voluntary.

Additionally, sexual behaviours in children may be considered typical when:

- their curiosity about sex and sexuality is balanced with curiosity about other aspects of their life;
- they do not feel shame, fear, anxiety or anger during healthy sexual exploration, and/or;
- the child is able to stop the behaviour when instructed to.

Common sexual behaviours in children

- Trying to look at people who are nude.
- Touches own genitals in private.
- Interested in other children's genitals.

Uncommon sexual behaviours in children

- Masturbation with an object or placing objects in the anus or vagina.
- Specific knowledge of sexual intercourse or attempting to have sexual intercourse.
- Touching animal's genitals.
- Drawing pictures of genitals.
- Asking others to perform sexual acts.

Responding to uncommon sexual behaviours in children

If you notice your child engaging in uncommon or concerning sexual behaviours:

- do not shame your child or call them names;
- communicate calmly that you want them to stop what they are doing, and that they are not in trouble, and;
- be consistent in your requests for them to stop.

Reducing uncommon sexual behaviours in children

- Address the behaviour in a short, direct, calm way (e.g., "Hands out of your pants").
- Redirect the behaviour (e.g., "Would you like to play with your doll or your blocks?").
- Praise for good behaviour – praise your child when they are NOT displaying the unwanted behaviours so they also receive attention for good behaviour.

If your child's behaviour escalates, or you have any concerns and wish to talk with one of our trained staff, contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831.



Harmful sexual behaviour and peer-instigated sexual abuse

What is harmful sexual behaviour and peer-instigated sexual abuse

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people that is harmful to themselves or to others.¹

Peer-instigated sexual abuse is when a child or young person has engaged in harmful sexual behaviour toward another child or young person.

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (2023) found that disclosures of sibling and peer-instigated sexual harm are increasing. The study also found that 13% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by young people aged under 18 who are known to the victim, making this cohort of offender the largest, followed by parents/caregivers at 8%.²

Harmful sexual behaviour: Risk factors and protective factors

The Australian Childhood Foundation website explains that whilst the interplay of individual, family, social and environmental risk factors is complex, dominant risk factors for engaging in harmful sexual behaviour include exposure and/or witness to family and domestic violence, history of sexual victimisation, long-term neglect and being inappropriately exposed to sexual activity or pornography.

Protective factors, i.e., things that may help prevent a child or young person from engaging in harmful sexual behaviour, are similar to those that can help in the prevention of child sexual abuse in general, such as family and social connectedness, environmental stability, and personal safety skills and knowledge.

What to do if your child is engaging in harmful sexual behaviour

If your child has engaged in harmful sexual behaviour toward another child, know that help is available.

Bravehearts' trained staff are here to support you. Contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831 or email us at bisl@bravehearts.org.au.

What to do if your child has been harmed by another child or young person

If your child discloses they have been sexually harmed by another child or young person, firstly, try to remain calm. The child or young person who caused the harm may be a sibling, friend or relative and therefore, it was likely difficult for your child to speak up about the abuse.

Getting upset, angry or making threats toward the perpetrator may scare your child and prevent them from talking about it any further. Instead, try as best as you can to follow these steps:

1. **Listen:** Pay attention to what they are saying. Allow them to share what they are comfortable with in their own words. Try not to ask leading questions or force them to talk.
2. **Affirm:** Tell them you believe them and it's not their fault.
3. **Support:** Help them to cope with their feelings. Do what you can to reassure them, but do not make promises that you may not be able to keep.
4. **Safety:** Let them know you will do all you can to help, including telling someone who can help. Though this may upset them, it is very important that you act in the child's best interest.
5. **Document:** Write down as much as you can of what they told you, using their own words as best as you can.
6. **Report:** Report their disclosure as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities. If you feel unsure about making a report because the child or young person who caused the harm is a family member or friend, you can reach out to Bravehearts for guidance.

REMEMBER you are not alone – Bravehearts is here to help. If you are unsure about what to do, contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831 or email us at bisl@bravehearts.org.au.

1) Hackett, S. (2014) Children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours. London: Research in Practice. 2) Haslam, D.M., Mathews, B., Pacella, R.E., Scott, J.G., Finkelhor, D., Higgins, D.J., Meinck, F., Erskine, H.E., Thomas, H.J., Lawrence, D., & Malacova, E. (2023). The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from a national survey: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology

Effects and indicators of child sexual abuse

Potential effects of child sexual abuse

Children and young people who have been sexually abused can suffer a range of short and long term psychological and behavioural effects, ranging from mild to severe. These effects vary depending upon the circumstances of the abuse and the child's developmental stage.

Depending on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, and the duration of the sexual abuse, subsequent relational trauma could affect the victim's ability to connect with others and themselves. Their personality and behaviours might change markedly from what they were prior to the sexual abuse.

The manipulative nature of grooming that many perpetrators use to get close to their victims can cause ongoing thought distortions, self-identity issues, relational harm and isolation of the child.

Potential short-term effects

- Increased illness, body aches or other physical complaints
- Poor attendance or performance at school
- Difficulty concentrating or memory loss
- Mood changes
- Regressive behaviours
- Sleeping and eating disorders
- Lack of self-esteem
- Nightmares
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Self-hatred
- Disinhibited behaviour
- Zoning out or not listening

Potential long-term effects

- Suicidal ideation
- Post-traumatic stress
- Sexual difficulties
- Inability to form lasting relationships
- Identity difficulties
- Relationship problems
- Parenting difficulties
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- The development of violent behaviour
- The development of criminal behaviour

A parent or carer's belief, support and actions to stop the harm after a child's disclosure have an impact on the child's resilience and recovery from

the sexual abuse. If a child is not believed and supported appropriately after a disclosure, it can lead to a higher level of relational trauma for the child leading to significantly more negative health and mental health outcomes in the long term.

A systematic meta-review of problems reported by survivors of child sexual abuse found that abuse is associated with many different problems across five primary domains: medical, psychological, sexual, repeated (self-)harm, and other problems.¹

Adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse may experience sexual disturbance or dysfunction, depression and anxiety. Anxiety, fear, and suicidal ideas and behaviours are more likely in instances where the perpetrator used force and/or threat of force.

The age of onset of the abuse, duration and outcome is characteristic of higher trauma symptom levels. Longer duration of abuse is associated with a greater impact on the child's identity, and increased survival mechanisms and the use of force or threat of force are associated with greater harm.



1. Nagtegaal & Boonmann, 2021

Potential indicators of child sexual abuse

Children and young people who have been sexually abused can display a range of signs and symptoms. The signs of sexual abuse can vary depending on the child's developmental stage, and the circumstances of the abuse, such as how frequent the abuse is, who is inflicting the abuse and what kind of abuse is happening.

When a child is sexually abused, they might not tell anyone about the abuse, for a variety of reasons. Whilst there may be indicators that sexual abuse has occurred, it is important to note that this does not confirm the child has been sexually abused. It is also important to note that some children may show many of the signs and others may show few or none at all.

The experience of child sexual abuse can change the way children and young people understand their world, the people in it and where they belong. After sexual abuse, a child or young person's understanding of themselves and the world can become distorted, and create mistrust, fear, and betrayal. Their personality and behaviours may change noticeably from what they were prior to the sexual abuse.

'After sexual abuse, a child or young person's understanding of themselves and the world can become distorted.'

Potential indicators

- The child is quieter or more distant than usual;
- The child is clingier than usual;
- Unusual or new fears, sometimes around touch, being alone, being with a particular person or in a particular place;
- Difficulty concentrating or with memory, zoning out, seeming distracted or not listening;
- Eating, sleeping or hygiene changes;
- Regressive behaviours such as bed-wetting or soiling after being toilet trained, acting or wanting to be treated like a baby/younger child again;
- Showing knowledge of sexual behaviour beyond their developmental age;
- Sexual themes in artwork, stories, play etc.;
- 'Acting out' behaviours (aggression, destructive behaviours, truanting behaviour);
- 'Acting in' behaviours (withdrawal from friends and family, depression);
- Problems with friends and schoolwork/attendance;
- Vague symptoms of illness such as headache or tummy ache;
- Self-harm (cutting, risky behaviour);
- Asking vague questions or making vague statements about topics such as secrets, unusual 'games', or adult behaviours.

It is important to pay attention to behavioural changes in your children and take them seriously if they disclose. If you require support or guidance, contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831 or bisl@bravehearts.org.au.



Recognising and responding to grooming

What is grooming?

Grooming describes the preparatory stage of child sexual abuse, often undertaken to gain the trust and compliance of the child or young person and to establish secrecy and silence to avoid disclosure.

The child's parents/carers or other significant adults (including organisations) may also be groomed by someone intending to sexually harm the child. Grooming can occur in person or online.

Being aware of the signs of grooming better equips us to understand the steps we can take to keep children safe.

The manipulative nature of grooming that perpetrators use to get close to their victims can cause ongoing thought distortions, self-identity issues, relational harm and isolation of the child.

Grooming may cause a child to:

- feel as though they have an important and special relationship with the person who is harming them;
- experience confusion over the nature of their relationship;
- internalise the abuse as their fault, feeling responsibility for any harm experienced and fearing they will be blamed, punished, or not believed;
- fear that they will be separated from their family or home if they speak out; and/or
- believe that disclosure will cause harm to someone or something they love and care for, such as family members or pets.

Grooming includes a range of behaviours and/or verbal or written communications, with the child, or with significant adults, with the intention of facilitating sexual contact with the child and preventing disclosure.

Online grooming can take place through phones and on interactive platforms including chat and instant messaging apps, social media, and gaming. Perpetrators use interactive platforms as a gateway to initiate contact with a child.

'The child's parents may also be groomed by someone intending to sexually harm the child.'

Grooming can take a number of forms:

- **Building the child's trust:** Using presents, special attention, treats, spending time together and playing games with non-sexual physical contact.
- **Favouritism:** The offender treats the child as an adult; treating them differently and making them feel like a unique friend, making the child feel more special than others.
- **Gaining the trust of the child's carer/s:** Careful to be 'seen' as a close, caring and reliable relative or friend of the family.
- **Isolation (from family, friends):** To ensure secrecy and lessen chances of disclosure or belief.
- **Intimidation and secrecy:** The offender may use coercion e.g., threatening looks and body language, glares, stalking and rules of secrecy.
- **'Testing the waters' or boundary violation:** 'Innocent' touching, gradually developing into 'accidental' sexual contact.
- **Shaping the child's perceptions:** The child is often confused as to what is acceptable and can take on self-blame for the situation, as his/her viewpoint can become totally distorted.

It may be challenging to establish if a child is being groomed until after sexual abuse has occurred, as perpetrators often display similarities of genuine caring behaviour. If you have any concerns and wish to talk with one of our trained staff, contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831 or bisl@bravehearts.org.au.



'Red Flag' grooming behaviours

It can be difficult to detect sexual grooming because many grooming behaviours resemble normal adult-child interactions. However, there are common patterns of behaviour among offenders that may help us recognise when a child is potentially being groomed.

While red flags may not necessarily mean a child is being groomed, being aware of these 'red flag' behaviours can help parents, caretakers and organisations interrupt and even prevent the grooming process.

The below list (adapted from the Sexual Grooming Model, Winters & Jeglic, 2022) identifies the five stages of sexual grooming and the associated characteristics and behaviours or 'red flags'. Note that this list is not exhaustive, and these stages and behaviours relate to contact (in-person) grooming.

5 stages of sexual grooming

1. Perpetrators may seek out children who are:

Victim Selection

- Compliant and trusting of adults
- Unconfident and lacking in self-esteem
- Lonely, isolated and/or lacking in adult supervision
- Have an intellectual impairment or personal care needs

It is important to understand that ALL CHILDREN are at risk of being groomed or sexually abused, no matter their family circumstances, or cultural or socio-economic background.

2. Perpetrators may:

Gaining Access and Isolation

- Be involved in youth-serving organisations
- Engage in activities alone with children and exclude adults
- Encourage and engage in overnight stays and/or outings with the child perhaps under the guise of helping families out

3. Perpetrators may:

Trust Development

- Be charming/nice/likeable; have 'insider' status/good reputation
- Be affectionate, loving and give compliments
- Give the child special attention; show favouritism
- Spend time with child/communicate often
- Engage in childlike activities (e.g., stories, games, sports, music)
- Give rewards/privileges (e.g., gifts, toys, treats, money, trips)

4. Perpetrators may:

Desensitisation to Sexual Content and Physical Contact

- Use inappropriate sexual language/tell dirty jokes
- Teach the child sexual 'education'
- 'Accidentally' touch the child; use 'innocent'/non-sexual contact
- Watch the child undressing; expose their naked body to the child
- Show the child pornography

5. Perpetrators may:

Post-Abuse Maintenance

- Tell the child not to tell anyone what happened and encourage secrets
- Say things such as, "I love you/you're special"
- Use rewards/bribes/threats of punishment or harm
- Persuade the child it was acceptable/normal behaviour
- Make the child feel responsible
- Use threats of abandonment/rejection/family breaking up

Responding to disclosures of abuse

Your response to any disclosure of abuse may be the first step in stopping the harm and protecting the child from further harm. Whilst an initial response may vary depending on circumstances, **it is important that when a child or young person makes a disclosure of sexual abuse, they are believed.**

Believing the child is an essential step towards helping them feel safe. Actions thereafter may include implementing immediate protective strategies, engaging in appropriate support services, and making reports to relevant authorities.

When a child or young person makes a disclosure of sexual abuse it is important to acknowledge that they have acted with bravery, as disclosure can be very difficult for victims. Whilst making a disclosure, a child may feel scared, guilty, ashamed, angry, confused, or powerless. These emotions are normal and should be validated.

Barriers to disclosure

Offenders put a great deal of time and effort ensuring the child or young person remains silent. Some of the reasons a child or young person may have trouble disclosing include:

- The offender has told them not to tell, often with accompanying threats such as, “they will take you away from your family if you tell”.
- The child thinks they will get in trouble.
- They feel ashamed or guilty.
- They feel that no one will believe them.



If you think your child (or a child you know) is being groomed or abused, please report to Police on 000 or child protection services (details on page 34 of this booklet). You may also wish to contact Bravehearts on 1800 272 831 or bisl@bravehearts.org.au if you are unsure or want advice.

What to do if a child or young person discloses to you

If a child or young person discloses abuse to you, try to follow these steps:



1. **Listen:** Pay attention to what they are saying. Allow the child to share what they are comfortable with in their own words. Try not to ask leading questions or force the child to talk.



2. **Affirm:** Tell them you believe them and it's not their fault.



3. **Support:** Help the child to cope with their feelings. Do what you can to help them feel safe, but do not make promises to the child that you may not be able to keep.



4. **Safety:** Let them know you will do all you can to help, and that this includes telling someone who can keep them safe. Though this may upset the child, it is very important that you act in the child's best interest.



5. **Document:** Write down everything the child told you and use their exact words as best as you can.



6. **Report:** Report the child's disclosure as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities.

What to do if you suspect a child or young person is being harmed

Sometimes a child or young person's behaviour may lead you to suspect the child is unsafe or being harmed. In this situation, it is important that you:

- Do not frighten the child by getting emotional or angry.
- Do not ask confronting or leading questions of the child.
- Let the child know that you are there for them if they ever need to talk.
- Record your concerns including any behavioural observations or conversations you may have had with the child.
- Report as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities.

Prevention through personal safety education

What is personal safety?

One of the most important things we can do as parents and carers is help our children understand and identify when something doesn't feel right or safe, and that they can talk to a trusted adult about this without fear of consequences. This is what personal safety is all about.

Personal safety is a vital extension of the safety rules and concepts we teach our children, such as road safety, fire safety and sun safety. The concepts that underpin personal safety promote safety of self against all forms of child abuse, in particular, child sexual abuse.

Personal safety:

- empowers children by giving them age-appropriate information and skills that increase confidence, resilience and self-esteem;
- teaches children that their body belongs only to them and nobody has the right to touch them in a way they don't like or understand;
- helps children better understand their emotions and accompanying physiological reactions to identify when they are feeling unsure or unsafe;
- teaches empathy and assertiveness, helping children to stand up for their rights without violating the rights of others;
- builds the support system of each child, including the family, school, community, and friends.

Why teach your child personal safety?

The benefits of personal safety education include:

- Reduces the likelihood of your child entering into or remaining in an unsafe situation.
- Demonstrates clearly to your child how to respond to an unsafe situation.
- Increases your child's confidence and resilience, which may reduce the likelihood of child abuse, online exploitation and bullying.
- Increases your child's knowledge of their own body and their personal rights.
- Increases the likelihood that your child will tell a trusted adult if they feel unsafe about something or someone.
- May interrupt or prevent grooming.

How to talk to your child about personal safety

Take it one talk at a time. Talking to your child about personal safety should not be a one-off conversation. Rather, create opportunities that allow talking about personal safety to be part of an ongoing dialogue between you and your child. Always let your child know you are there for them, and that keeping them safe is your number one priority.

Speak calmly and confidently, keeping a neutral tone, ensuring that you allow time for your child to process the information and ask questions. Never make them feel ashamed or embarrassed for asking questions about sexual behaviour or body parts.

When can I start teaching my child about personal safety?

It's never too early (or too late!) to begin talking to your child about personal safety. Children below the age of three may not be able to retain or fully understand the concepts, however the gradual introduction of personal safety-themed storybooks, visual aides (such as posters), and songs can begin when children are as young as one.

If your child is a teenager or pre-teen, do not let this discourage you. The following few pages discuss personal safety education as it relates to children under the age of eight, however, you will find advice around talking to older children and teenagers about personal safety (known as respectful relationships education, which includes topics like consent, sexting and pornography) later in this guide.

Is this sex education?

No. Personal safety education is not the same thing as sex education. Personal safety education does include helping children identify body parts using correct anatomical names, and understanding body ownership and personal boundaries, but it does not include concepts around sex or sexuality. These are concepts that are explored in respectful relationships and consent education for older children and young people (see page 31).

The principles of personal safety



Feelings

Understanding the concept of 'yes' and 'no' feelings and how to respond to such feelings. 'Yes' feelings include happy or excited and are associated with being safe. 'No' feelings include feeling unsure or scared and are linked to feeling unsafe.



Warning signs

Recognising when their bodies are giving them a 'warning sign', which could indicate they are feeling unsafe. Common warning signs include a fast-beating heart, shaky legs, sweaty palms, feet feeling stuck or other physiological symptoms they may associate with anxiety or fear.



Private parts

Discussing private parts assists children to take ownership of their own bodies and reiterates the importance of respecting their own and others' bodies. The use of nicknames for these areas of the body are not appropriate as the use of such names may negatively impact a child's ability to disclose or report harm. Bravehearts refers to 'mouth', 'chest', 'between our legs' and 'bottom' as private parts. We also support the use of anatomical names (penis, scrotum, vagina, vulva, anus).



Touching

Differentiating between safe and unsafe touching can be difficult for young children to comprehend, so it is important to establish rules about touching. For example, it may be considered appropriate for a doctor to touch private parts during a medical examination and when accompanied by a trusted adult.



Boundaries

Understanding their own and others' personal boundaries. Children are naturally inquisitive and sex offenders take advantage of this. Through grooming, offenders skillfully erode their victim's personal boundaries. Children with high levels of knowledge relating to personal boundaries can interrupt the grooming process, and this can reduce the risk of harm.



Secrets

Knowing what to do if they are faced with a secret that makes them feel unsafe or unsure is a vital part of personal safety, as secrecy enables perpetrators to offend. As it is difficult for children to identify whether a secret is good or bad, the overarching message is that there is no secret so 'yucky' that they cannot tell someone about it.



Trust and safety teams

Identifying safe, trusted adults in their personal networks (safety team). It is important to reinforce with children that their safety team needs to contain people that can take action to keep them safe. It is also important to explore options of safe adults within the home and outside the home such as, school and the community.

Bravehearts' personal safety education program, Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure is underpinned by these personal safety principles. The program is aimed at children aged 3 to 8, however, there are some basic personal safety lessons you can begin practising with your child even earlier.

On the following pages, we have provided two key personal safety activities, which have been taken directly from [Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Program](#). Bravehearts also has a variety of resources available to [purchase on our website](#) that can assist with extending your child's personal safety knowledge and skills.

Ditto's 3 Rules for Keeping Safe

From an early age, parents can instill in their children three key personal safety rules. These three rules form an important part of Bravehearts' personal safety program for young children, Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure.

Repetition helps young children when they are learning something new. Regularly going over 'Ditto's 3 Rules' together with your child will make it easier for your child to learn and retain the information.



1. We all have the right to feel safe with people

Children have the right to feel safe where they live, play, and learn, and no one has the right to make them do something that makes them feel unsafe.



2. It's OK to say 'NO' if you feel unsafe or unsure

It is OK for children to stand up for themselves and be assertive if something doesn't feel right.



3. Nothing is so yucky that you can't tell someone about it

One of the reasons children fail to disclose harm is because they are afraid of getting into trouble. Children should be encouraged to speak to a trusted adult, even if something seems scary or terrible.

Ditto's 3 Rules and My Safety Team

We have provided each of Ditto's 3 Rules to colour in (pages 20–22) and a Ditto's 3 Rules Poster (page 36).

Additional resources are available to purchase from bravehearts.org.au that will assist with teaching your children personal safety.

Reflected in Ditto's Rule 3 and explored throughout the Ditto program, is the important personal safety concept of identifying trusted adults – people the child feels safe to talk to if they ever feel unsafe or unsure.

We have provided the My Safety Team activity for you to work through with your child (see page 23). This will help them identify several trusted adults they can talk to.

Revisiting Ditto's Rules and My Safety Team will provide opportunities for you to have discussions with your child around keeping safe.

Regularly checking in and asking how your child is feeling and what is going on, helps to keep open lines of communication, reinforcing that you are there for your child no matter how yucky something may seem.

It is also a great opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have including any changes in their behaviour you may have noticed.

Learn more about Bravehearts' Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure program and resources!

To learn more about Bravehearts' personal safety program and resources for young children, Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure, please scan the QR code below to go to the Education section of the Bravehearts website.



ACTIVITY: Ditto's 3 Rules for Keeping Safe

Work with your child while they colour in the pictures and trace the words on the activity worksheets on the following pages. As your child works, recap Ditto's 3 Rules, using the conversation guide below to help you.

Once coloured, display the rules in a place at home where they can be seen by the whole family and recalled together.

RULE 1 We all have the right to feel safe with people.

- **Explain:** We all have the right to feel safe where we live, play, and learn.
- **Ask:** Can you name some people who make you feel safe?

RULE 2 It's OK to say 'NO' if you feel unsafe or unsure.

- **Explain:** Even though it can sometimes be hard to stand up for ourselves, it's always OK to speak up and say 'NO' if someone is making you feel unsafe or unsure, or something doesn't feel right.
- **Ask:** Can you think of a time when you stood up for yourself, even though it was hard?

RULE 3 Nothing is so yucky that you can't tell someone about it.

- **Explain:** No secret is ever so terrible or yucky that you can't tell someone about it.
- **Ask:** If someone asked you to keep a secret that made you feel yucky, who are two safe adults you could tell?



QUICK TIPS

- If you have personally experienced child sexual abuse this may be triggering. The best thing you can do for your child and yourself is to talk to someone who can help. Please call Bravehearts' Support Line on 1800 272 831 for information and advice. You will also find a list of national support lines on page 38.
- We never want to scare or alarm children. Speak calmly and confidently, keeping a neutral, natural tone, ensuring that you allow ample time for your child to process the information and ask questions.
- Never make a child feel ashamed or embarrassed about sexual behaviour or body parts.
- Speaking with your child about personal safety should not be a one-off conversation. Create opportunities that allow talking about personal safety to be an ongoing dialogue. Always let your child know you are there for them and keeping them safe and protecting them is your number one priority.
- Remember that most adults are safe. Talking to children about personal safety is about empowering them to be safe, not scaring them.



'Speaking with your child about personal safety should not be a one-off conversation.'



Ditto's Rule 1

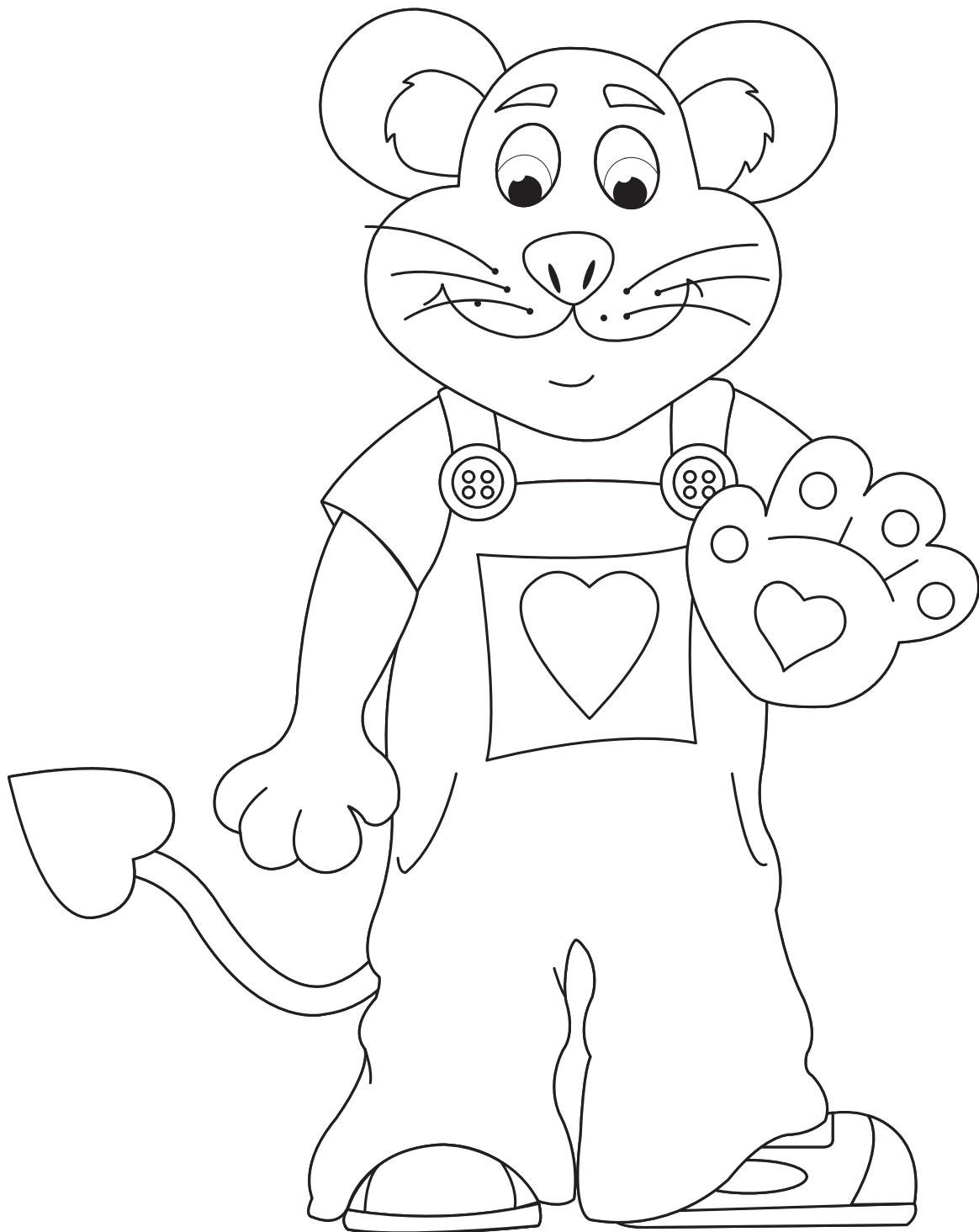
We all have the right
to feel safe with people.





Ditto's Rule 2

It's ok to say 'NO'
if you feel unsafe or unsure.





Ditto's Rule 3

Nothing is so yucky that
you can't tell someone
about it.



ACTIVITY: My Safety Team

My Safety Team is an activity sheet (on the next page) to work through with your child to help them identify their support network. This activity should be revisited regularly in case a person on the plan has a change of circumstance. In addition, it is a good idea to revisit the details to help your child remember.

Safety Teams are important to establish who the child feels comfortable with, trusts, and is happy to speak to, and it also provides contacts for organisations that can help.

Children need time to speak about 'trust' and who they trust with their special or private information. In our education program, we have used the following definition for trust as an example:

Trust is something we feel when we feel safe. It is when we know somebody will do the right thing

to protect us. They will listen to us, believe us and want to help us.

During this activity, allow your child time to think about who they would like to put on their Safety Team. Help them identify five trusted adults and then write those adult's names in the space provided on the worksheet.

It's a good idea for your child to have a range of people on their Safety Team, both inside and outside of their family. Your child can then draw a picture of themselves in the middle of the hand.

Below is Ditto's Safety Team. Show this to your child as an example (they can colour in the pictures too).

Find a visible place to keep your child's Safety Team when it's complete and be sure to review it with your child every few months.





My Safety Team



Bravehearts
1800 272 831

Kids Helpline
1800 551 800

Emergency
000

eSafety for children and young people

A survey published by the eSafety Commissioner (2022) of children aged 8 to 17 years and their parents, found that:

- **6 in 10 children** have communicated with someone they first met online;
- **1 in 8 children** have sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they first met online;
- **1 in 8 children** have met someone face-to-face after first getting to know them online;
- **7 in 10 young people** aged 14 to 17 have seen sexual images online in the past year; and
- **Close to half** have received sexual messages from someone online in the past year.

Australian Federal Police-led, Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE), has seen an increase in reports of 'self-produced child exploitation material'. In some instances, children are willingly sharing photos of themselves, including inappropriate or naked pictures on social media.

In other cases, sex offenders are reaching out to children through social media platforms and coercing them into sharing inappropriate or naked pictures of themselves, which are secretly captured and shared in the darkest corners of the internet¹. With this in mind, it is just as important to talk about online personal safety with your children as it is personal safety in the offline world.



1. Alarming rise in 'self-produced child abuse material' sparks online safety warnings, abc.net.au, 2017.

Quick tips for parents and carers

- **Educate yourself:** Check out different sites, games and apps for yourself. The more familiar you are with them, the easier it is for you to talk to your children. Check privacy settings and recommended age restrictions.
- **Talk with your children:** Have conversations with them about the importance of eSafety and show them what that means. For example, let them know you have been hearing about online safety and ask what they think the risks are and what they can do to keep safe. Encourage an ongoing open dialogue with your child, not just a one-off chat.
- **Teach your children to think about online behaviour:** How much should they be sharing online and what happens to information once shared? Talk about respectful interactions and responsible behaviour, and encourage them to critically think about what they read and see online (remind them that not everything they read may be true, and not everyone is who they say they are online).
- **Make all devices safer for your children:** Familiarise yourself with all sites, games and apps your children use and check the privacy setting on these. Install safety and security software and keep it updated; use internet and spam filters and a pop-up stopper, install monitoring software and monitor downloads to your computer, enable internet browser security and regularly check the internet usage history.
- **Come up with a plan around safety:** Talk about ways to not only stay safe but also how to respond to anything that happens that may concern them. Let them know they can talk to you or another adult they can trust. The Sam's SMART Rules poster on page 37 can help guide your discussion around online safety with your child.
- **Monitor:** Ensure that your child is using their device in an open area of the house where you can keep a close eye on them. Do not assume though, that this alone is a sufficient protective measure – be vigilant and monitor your child's activity.



Advice by age group

Pre-school aged children

This age group is just beginning to learn how devices work and the joy they can bring. This includes visiting children's websites and helping them compose emails to family and friends.

Sit with your child during this learning stage when they are on a device and choose websites, games and apps that are suitable for their age group - even games and apps that are designed for young children can have features that enable communication with strangers.

Primary school aged children

Children of this age may want to engage in online gaming, buy products online, and may try to search for prohibited material.

Ensure devices are used in a common area in the home where you can keep an eye on your child. Have a plan of action if they stumble across something inappropriate (e.g., turn the device face down and tell a trusted adult). Similarly, have an agreed plan with your child if a stranger tries to communicate with them online, and remind your child repeatedly and often that not everyone is who they say they are online.

Young people

Their use of social media will grow at this age, as will their network of online 'friends'. This age group will likely explore prohibited material, and while it is more difficult to keep tight supervision on what teenagers are doing online, it is vital that you talk often about eSafety, the risks and how to avoid them.

Tips to share with your children and young people

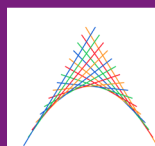
Reinforce regularly with your children Sam's SMART eSafety Rules (page 37) and reiterate the following safety tips:

You should NEVER:

- Tell anyone your full name, address, phone number or school.
- Send a photo of yourself to anyone you don't know, especially one that identifies where you live, your name or where you go to school (including your school uniform).
- Tell anyone credit or bank details (or any other personal details).
- 'Friend' or talk to someone online who you do not know in real life.
- Make plans to meet anyone you met online in real life.
- Talk to anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable.

You should ALWAYS:

- Know it's okay to block and report anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable online.
- Leave conversations that make you feel unsafe or unsure.
- Question things. People are not always WHO or WHAT they seem online.
- Tell a trusted adult if someone says something to you online that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.



Australian
Centre to Counter
Child Exploitation



Reporting harmful or criminal online activity: How and what to report

The Australian Federal Police-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) website provides vital information about how to report inappropriate, harmful or criminal activities against children and young people online. Use the QR code above or visit accce.gov.au

Children and social media

As a parent, it is important for you to have current information about the types of social media platforms that your children and young people may using.

Although from December 2025, age-restricted social media platforms will legally have to take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under the age of 16 from creating or keeping an account, this is not a fail-safe solution to keeping children safe online. Parents need to remain vigilant and informed.

As of December 2025, age-restricted social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, YouTube, Kick and Reddit, however this list may continue to grow.

To learn more about these new restrictions, and for the most up-to-date information about eSafety, please see the **eSafety Commissioner website** (you'll find a QR code link to this site on this page).

Online gaming

89% of Australian children (8-17 years) have played online games.¹

Research by the eSafety Commissioner (2024) shows that online gaming brings kids happiness, social connection and opportunities for learning, however, 2 in 5 young gamers report they've had negative experiences while gaming, including bullying, grieving/trolling, sexual solicitation and hate speech.¹

It is vital for parents to place safeguards around their children and young people when it comes to online gaming and educate them about interacting safely online.

For the most up-to-date information for parents about online gaming and keeping children and young people safe, please refer to the **eSafety Commissioner website**.



eSafety
Commissioner

The eSafety Commissioner website **esafety.gov.au** is an invaluable resource for parents and carers and includes the most current information about keeping children safe online.

You can also find information about reporting illegal and suspicious online behaviour on the eSafety Commissioner website here: **esafety.gov.au/report/what-you-can-report-to-esafety**



1. eSafety Commissioner, 2024.

Children, young people and pornography

Children and young people are accessing pornography from a younger age and more frequently than we may like to think. Teens (and pre-teens) are being exposed to, and seeking out porn online and mostly through their friends and their own phones.

In this section you will learn:

- what does the instant accessibility of porn mean for our children and young people;
- how is their exposure to this content affecting them; and
- how can parents and caregivers talk to their children about the misconceptions that porn presents about sexual safety and consent?

Sex education by porn

We know that children as young as eight are accessing pornography and one of the reasons why is to learn more about sex. But what are our children and young people learning?

Pornography often portrays sexual violence (particularly against women) and unrealistic notions of sexual relationships. It often depicts and teaches that aggressive and non-consensual sex is acceptable and that it is what everyone wants. One study found high levels of aggression in pornography in both verbal and physical forms:

'88.2% (of scenes) contained physical aggression, principally spanking, gagging, and slapping, while 48.7% of scenes contained verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Perpetrators of aggression were usually male, whereas targets of aggression were overwhelmingly female¹.'

Pornography also presents unrealistic images of both the male and female body, as many porn actors have surgically enhanced bodies including augmented breasts, vaginas and penises. Additionally, drugs are sometimes used by the actors to help them maintain erections for abnormally long durations, which may skew a young person's expectations of performance during sex in real life.

On a purely practical level, important lessons about sexual safety, such as consent and using protection, are mostly absent.

The 'lesson' that porn is teaching young people about sex, relationships and sexuality are highly problematic. There is a risk the messages could harm a young person's sense of self, damage relationships, affect their psychological wellbeing and cause dangerous experimentation that could lead to health risks or even injury.

Talking to our children and young people about porn vs reality

As tempting as it may be to ban our children from viewing content that we don't approve of or know to be dangerous, this will do little to help them. The prevalence of online porn in our society means unfortunately your curious pre-teen or teen is likely to seek it out or stumble across it at some stage. Whilst advising our children not to watch porn is a good start, we need to go further and help them understand WHY.

We need to start conversations that will help our children understand that what we see in porn rarely represents real life. These conversations need to navigate through topics such as consent, safety and respect, and ideally should start happening before they hit their teens.

As parents and caregivers, it is our responsibility to talk to our children about sex in developmentally-appropriate ways. Over the page are some tips to help parents and carers get these conversations started.



1. Bridges et. al., 2010

Talking with pre-teens (8 to 12 years) about pornography

Children entering puberty may be curious about sex and sexuality. Changes in the brain and body combined with other hormonal changes can increase your child's interest in this area. They may hear things from their friends and they might want to know more, but asking parents about sex can be embarrassing. This may lead to children in this age group to seek out information online or from their friends, which could lead to them accessing or being shown porn.

BEFORE YOU START: If your child is over the age of eight, you may have already talked to them about things like puberty, gender, body image, sex, body ownership and personal safety. Extending these conversations to include a discussion about pornography should not be too much of a stretch if done in context and using our tips below. If you haven't yet started talking to your child about these things, now is a good time.

1) BUILD TRUST: It's almost impossible to have influence when there is no trust. Investing time in your relationship with your child helps them feel loved and accepted. Discussions about sexual matters will be more effective when you have a trusting relationship with your child.

2) PREPARE: Work out what you want to say and how you want to say it. Sometimes discussions about sexual topics can be more difficult for parents than for children. Plan ahead and make a discussion outline for what you want to talk about so when the time comes, you don't get flustered and forget what you wanted to say. There are many online resources and books that you can read to help get your head around how to talk to your children about sex and pornography.

3) TAKE THE TIME: These discussions are best held in a one-on-one environment. Go somewhere together – perhaps for a walk, or a drive and make sure your child feels at ease. Being in a neutral environment can make things more comfortable for both parent and child.

'Sometimes discussions about sexual topics can be more difficult for parents than for children.'

Tailor the discussion based on your knowledge of your child and their level of maturity and development. Perhaps begin by asking if it's okay to have a chat about 'one of those awkward topics'. Let them know you have read some things recently that got you thinking, and you'd like your child's opinion.

4) ASK QUESTIONS: After your child has agreed to talk with you, rather than lecture, try to ask questions. This will help avoid your child tuning out or becoming defensive. Here are some examples of questions you may want to ask to help guide the discussion:

- What do you know about pornography?
- Do any of the kids at school ever talk about it? What do they say?
- Have you ever seen it?

If they answer yes, reassure your child they are not in trouble. Do not judge. Try to find out what you can about how they found it and why they were searching for it. Ask:

- Did someone show it to you? Or did you find it yourself?
- Even though it's really uncomfortable, can you tell me what you have seen?
- When you saw it, how did it make you feel?

Talk about those feelings. Children at this age may feel yucky – even violated – but they may also feel curious or scared.

Let your child know that pornography teaches attitudes towards sex, and sexual behaviours which are often unhealthy. You may wish to discuss some of the content portrayed in pornographic material (such as lack of respect and consent, violence, and dangerous sexual practises) to help them understand why you are concerned about them viewing it.

Ask: What do you think is the best thing to do if someone tries to show you porn?

Let your child suggest some options. Discourage them from seeking it out, or looking at it if someone does show it to them.

Reassure your child. Let them know it's always okay to talk with you if they have questions.

Talking with teens (12 to 17 years) about pornography

Consent, respect and safety are the three main topics you should focus on when talking to your teenage child about porn.

Consent

Talk to your teen about the importance of always having or giving permission to touch, hug, kiss or have sexual intercourse with another person. Porn often provides graphic examples that teach the opposite.

Help them understand that if someone says “no”, they should respect that decision. And if your teen says “no”, they should make sure their “no” is heard and not taken as a “perhaps” or a “yes”. Also, let them know that consent can be removed at any time, so it is okay to say “no” after saying “yes” earlier.

Respect

Help your teen understand that disrespect, violence and abuse are not okay. Unfortunately, some porn portrays sexual violence, and while this may be easily seen as fantasy by an adult brain, a developing teenage brain (that may be using porn to learn about sex) could view this and think that sexual violence is acceptable or wanted by a partner.

Discuss with your teen the importance of building trust with a partner and how physical relationships are usually shared with someone special to us that we have an emotional connection with. These factors are often missing in pornographic images and video material.

Safety

Help your teen recognise that what they see in pornography is rarely safe. Actors are intentionally pushed to their limits to offer increased arousal to viewers. Explain that porn actors are paid to show they are enjoying the sex – what they are showing on screen is not real.

Similarly, porn usually ignores safe sex practises including even the simplest precaution of using condoms.

Expectations

Help your teenager understand that the actors in porn, and the things they do, are more often than not unrealistic. Watching porn will not help them understand what to expect from a sexual encounter.

Your teen should not expect their partner to look like the women/men in porn, nor should your teen be expected to look that way themselves. The body images presented in porn are not realistic.

Parents and caregivers are right to be concerned about the growing number of young people accessing online pornography and the potential effects on their wellbeing. Rather than lecture our pre-teens and teens, the more constructive approach is to start open, honest conversations with them. Asking questions about how they feel and exploring issues of consent, respect and safety will equip young people with the knowledge and tools to make good choices in the future.

Finally, be sure to tell your children often that they can come to you at any time with questions and provide them with phone line numbers so they can talk to someone else about their concerns (we have provided some numbers below).

Support lines for young people

Kids Helpline: Phone counselling and support for children and young people: 1800 55 1800

Headspace: Mental health support for young people: 1800 650 890

1800RESPECT: National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service: 1800 737 732



IT'S TIME
WE TALKED

It's Time We Talked
itstimewetalked.com

The It's Time We Talked website is an excellent resource for parents, carers and young people. It includes stats, research and useful resources around children and young people and pornography.

Respectful relationships and consent education

What is respectful relationships education?

Respectful relationships education is an extension of personal safety education and is aimed at young people aged between 11 to 17 years. Respectful relationships education enables young people to develop behaviours and attitudes that promote healthy, safe and respectful relationships both with others and themselves, to help reduce harmful intra and interpersonal behaviours, including (but not limited to) harmful sexual behaviours, peer-instigated abuse, bullying, and violence (including gendered-violence).

Respectful relationships education can cover topics such as:

- Consent (including sexual consent)
- Harmful sexual behaviours
- Emotional intelligence and critical thinking
- Healthy vs unhealthy relationships
- Personal boundaries
- Communication, conflict and bullying
- Impacts of pornography
- eSafety, sextortion and sexting
- Helping others, seeking help and reporting

Some form of age-appropriate respectful relationships education is now delivered in most Australian schools as part of a holistic approach to reducing sexual, domestic and family violence in this country.

Having said this, many resources are available to parents and carers to help start and maintain vital conversations with your older children and young people around respectful relationships (see page 31).

Normalising conversations about respectful relationships and consent with your children and young people can not only assist them to develop healthy relationships, it will help open clear lines of communication, helping them to understand that if they ever find themselves in an unsafe situation they are able to seek your help and advice.

Moreover, knowledge of respectful relationships can go a long way in helping older children and young people make safe choices, preventing harm from occurring.

What is consent?

Consent is another way of saying, “I give permission”. Consent is an important concept to teach all children. Teaching children the basic premise of consent from an early age can make the transition to talking to older children and teenagers about sexual consent a smoother one.

The building blocks of consent

Parents and carers can easily demonstrate the concept of consent to young children in everyday situations such as:

- Asking a friend if you can give them a hug.
- Giving your child the choice to greet people in a way that makes them feel safe (for example, not forcing your child to receive a hug from a family member if they don't feel comfortable doing so).
- Politely but firmly asserting your boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others.
- Asking permission before taking a person's photo and/or sharing it online.

‘Teaching children the basic premise of consent from an early age can make the transition to talking to older children and teenagers about sexual consent a smoother one.’



Sexual consent

At its core, consent is when someone agrees to an activity (either online or in-person), however, consent is about more than just saying 'yes' or 'no'.

In the context of sexual activity, consent is when someone explicitly agrees to a sexual activity (either online or in-person).

Consent **IS**:



- 'yes' or enthusiastic agreement.
- free of pressure or guilt.
- given before and is ongoing during every sexual activity.
- able to be retracted or changed at any time.

Consent **IS NOT**:



- 'I'm not sure', 'I guess so', 'no' or silence.
- convincing, pressuring or threatening someone.
- presuming that saying 'yes' to one activity means 'yes' to every activity, or the continuation of the activity you have agreed to if you wish to change your mind.
- communicated by clothing or appearance.
- valid if someone is intoxicated with drugs, alcohol or any other kind of substance, asleep, [under the age of consent](#) or unable to understand what they are consenting to.

Recommended resources to help start conversations about respectful relationships and consent

Bravehearts recommends the following websites and resources to help you start and maintain conversations with your older children and young people about respectful relationships and consent.

- Australian parenting website [raisingchildren.net.au](#) has an excellent page about how to talk to your children and young people about consent, broken down into advice by age-group.
- The [Teach Us Consent](#) website has quality information, advice and resources for parents to help guide conversations with pre-teens and teens.
- Life Education's podcast has a useful episode called '[Lets Talk About Consent](#)', in which experts in their field discuss how to introduce consent concepts to younger children.
- The [eSafety Commissioner](#) website includes a vast resource section for parents and carers. In this section you will find information about online consent-related issues such as sexting and sending nudes, sextortion, online sexual harassment and image-based abuse, exploitation, and more.
- Body Safety Australia has a [continuum of consent poster](#) resource available to download, which may be a useful when introducing consent to older children.

'Consent is about more than just saying 'yes' or 'no.'



Sextortion

The following information is adapted from the [Sextortion Message Kit](#), and the [Online Blackmail and Sexual Extortion Response Kit](#), produced by the AFP-led [Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation \(ACCCE\)](#) and [Think U Know](#).

What is sextortion?

Sextortion is a form of online blackmail where someone tricks or coerces you into sending them sexual images of yourself, then threatens to share them unless their demands are met.

How it works

- Offenders create a fake profile, identify as a female, and send a direct message on social media.
- The fake profile will then suggest that the chat continues onto another platform, usually one where you can do video calls, or where images and videos can be sent.
- The chat will turn sexual, and the fake profile will convince the victim to participate in sexualised video calls or send images or videos. During video calls this content is recorded without the victim knowing.
- Once the 'female' profile has this content, they will ask the victim for a large amount of money otherwise they will threaten to share it with the victim's friends and family from the victim's social media contacts. They might ask for cryptocurrency, online bank transfer, or online game or gift cards.
- Once the victim has paid or met the demand/s, they will continue to ask for money and threaten to share the content.



Online Blackmail and Sexual Extortion Response Kit

For further information on how to recognise and respond to sextortion, download this free kit from the Think U Know website: thinkuknow.org.au/resources-tab/parents-and-carers

How prevalent is sextortion?

- ACCCE reports a global trend of offshore offenders targeting Australian teenage boys by coercing them into sending sexually explicit content and then blackmailing them. This includes threats to share the content with friends and family unless they pay.
- Between June and September 2022, ACCCE received 430 reports for actual or attempted cash-based sexual extortion of a minor.
- ACCCE's current data shows over 90 per cent of victims are male, predominantly 15 to 17 years old, however they have seen examples where victims are as young as 10 years old.
- ACCCE's analysis indicates that less than half of minors report, suggesting the true number of victims is much higher.

What can parents do to help?

Talk to your child about sextortion, how it works, what to watch out for, and where they can report and/or get help (see below).

Making a report

If this happens to your child or young person, it is important they understand that they have done nothing wrong. These offenders make their young victims feel like they will get into trouble for what has happened, which is how they keep the crime going. While your child may be embarrassed to talk about it, it is vital to report and get help as soon as possible.

1. Collect as much evidence as you can:

- Screenshots of the chat
- URLs
- Any other records that you can get from the profile - this might include the profile name, profile picture, or any other contact information.

2. Make an online report to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation: accce.gov.au/report

'...over 90 per cent of (sextortion) victims are male, predominantly 15 to 17 years old...'

Child Protection Services and useful websites

Child Protection Services

IF A CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER OR RISK, PHONE 000

If you wish to report concerns that a child is being harmed, including grooming of a child, please report to Policelink on 131 444.

Please note: The contact details given on this page are current as of January 2025.

In many States and Territories, it is an offence for any adult not to report sexual offending against a child to Police. Below are details on where to report in each State/ Territory.

Australian Capital Territory

Child and Youth Protection Services

act.gov.au/community/families

Reporting Line: 1300 556 729

New South Wales

Department of Communities and Justice

facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/reporting-child-at-risk

Child Protection Helpline: 132 111

Northern Territory

Territory Families, Housing and Communities

tfhc.nt.gov.au

Child Protection Reporting Line:
1800 700 250

Queensland

Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services

dcssds.qld.gov.au

During business hours, contact your relevant Regional Intake Service – list of numbers here:

dcssds.qld.gov.au/contact-us/departments-contacts/child-family-contacts/child-safety-service-centres/regional-intake-services

After Hours Service Centre: 1800 177 135

South Australia

Department for Child Protection

childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse

Child Abuse Report Line: 131 478

Tasmania

Department of Communities Tasmania

decyp.tas.gov.au/safe-children/guide-to-tasmanias-child-safety-services/reporting-concerns-about-the-safety-or-wellbeing-of-a-child/

Advice and Referral Line: 1800 000 123

Victoria

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

services.dffh.vic.gov.au/families-and-children

During business hours, contact your relevant child protection intake service covering the local government area (LGA) where the child normally resides. A list of numbers can be found here:

services.dffh.vic.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse

Western Australia

Department of Communities

wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/child-protection

Intake Team: 1800 273 889

Helpful websites

- Bravehearts bravehearts.org.au
- eSafety Commissioner esafety.gov.au
- Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) accce.gov.au
- ThinkUKnow thinkuknow.org.au
- It's Time We Talked itstimewetalked.com
- Carly Ryan Foundation carlyryanfoundation.com
- Act for Kids actforkids.com.au
- The Daniel Morcombe Foundation danielmorcombe.com.au



Personal safety learning resources

Learn more with Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Game

Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Game brings to life latest research from child protection experts through scenarios and games which help children learn strategies to keep safe. It enables children to learn personal safety in a non-confrontational and enjoyable way.



FREE

Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Book Series

Set of 5 Story Books About Personal Safety \$50

Featuring Ditto's friends, Frankie, Watson, Belle, Sam and Georgia, this wonderful five-book series explores these vital personal safety topics across the five titles: feelings, warning signs, our body, eSafety and trust.



Available to purchase on Bravehearts' online shop
SCAN BELOW



Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure: PARENT PACKS

Empower Your Child with Personal Safety Skills!

Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Starter Pack \$25 - includes:

- Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Activity Booklet
- Ditto's 3 Rules fridge magnet
- Ditto and friends sticker set
- Ditto's 3 Rules A3 poster
- Bravehearts sticker

Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Ultimate Pack \$65 - includes:

- All of the above, plus Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Storybook Series (5 books)



Available to purchase on Bravehearts' online shop
SCAN ABOVE



Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Songs

5 songs about personal safety, free to listen to with your children today! Bop along to all the hits from Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Show! Featuring: Ditto's Theme Song; Safe and Unsafe Feelings; Warning Signs It's My Body; and Go and Tell Someone!

Listen now on Spotify, YouTube Music, or Apple Music.

FREE



Ditto's 3 Rules for Keeping Safe



We all have the right to **feel safe** with people.

It's ok to **say NO** if you feel unsafe or unsure.



Nothing is so yucky that you can't **tell someone** about it.



Sam's SMART eSafety Rules



S

STAY close to a trusted adult when using a phone, tablet, or computer. Always make sure a parent or carer is nearby to help if you need it.

M

MAKE sure you don't give anyone your private information like your name, where you live or any passwords.

A

ASK an adult before you download, install or buy anything online.

R

REPORT anything that you see or hear that makes you feel unsafe or unsure.

T

TECHNOLOGY is fun. To ensure it is fun, you have to keep safe. If you are unsure, always tell someone on your **Safety Team**.

National support lines

Reading about, discussing and thinking about child sexual abuse can be distressing, particularly for those who may have experienced sexual abuse in childhood. If you need support, please reach out to one of the following support lines, which are available to access from anywhere in Australia.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

24 hour domestic family and sexual violence counselling service.

Lifeline: 13 11 14

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

24 hour support line for anyone in personal crisis.

Suicide Call Back: 1300 659 467

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

24 hour counselling for people affected by suicide.

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

24 hour support line for children and young people aged 5 to 25.

Beyond Blue Support Service: 1300 224 636

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

24 hour, free and confidential mental health counselling.

Bravehearts Information & Support Line:

1800 272 831

<https://bravehearts.org.au/>

Mon to Fri (8:30am – 4:30pm AEST) support line for anyone who has experienced, been affected by, or is seeking help and advice related to child sexual abuse.

13 Yarn: 13 92 76

<https://www.13yarn.org.au/>

24 hour crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

National Debt Helpline: 1800 007 007

<https://ndh.org.au/>

Mon to Fri (9:30am – 4:30pm) free, confidential financial counselling.

Blue Knot Helpline: 1300 657 380

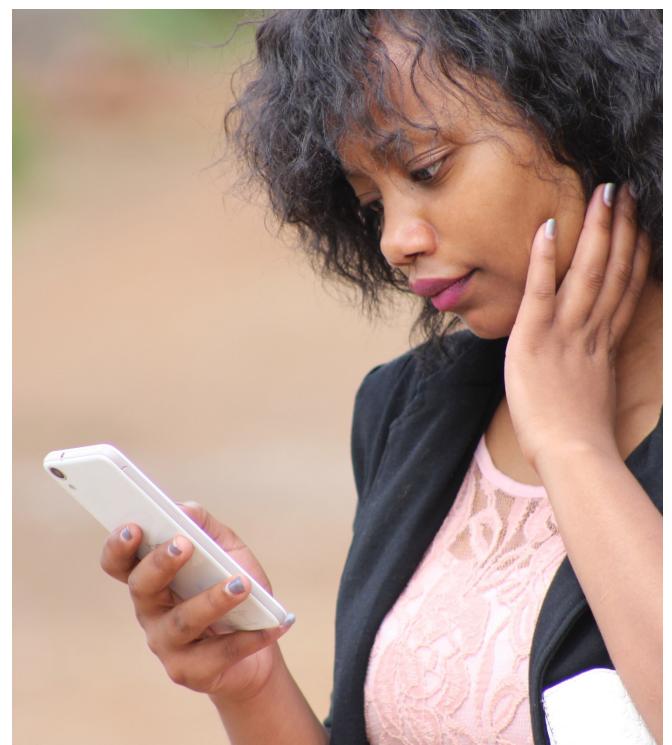
<https://blueknot.org.au/>

7 days (9:00am – 5:00pm AEST) – help for adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse, and those who support them.

Stop It Now! Australia Helpline: 1800 011 800

<https://www.stopitnow.org.au/>

3 days (Mon to Tues 10:00am – 2:00pm AEST; Wed 1:00pm – 4:00pm AEST) – anonymous support for anyone worried about their own sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviour towards children, and advice for those worried about another adult's sexual behaviour towards children.





MY EMERGENCY CONTACTS

MY HOUSE ADDRESS IS:

.....

MY LOCAL POLICE NUMBER IS:

.....

FOR EMERGENCIES DIAL:

000

NATIONAL NUMBER FOR NON-EMERGENCY REPORTING TO POLICE:

131 444

NAMES AND NUMBERS OF 5 ADULTS I CAN TRUST:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

BRAVEHEARTS 1800 272 831

HEADSPACE 1800 650 890

KIDS HELPLINE 1800 55 1800

LIFELINE 13 11 14

13YARN 13 92 76