

# COVID lockdowns: What you need to know to keep your child safe from online child sexual exploitation

## Advice for parents and carers



Technology can be a great way for young people to stay connected with their family and friends and has become a key part of remote or home learning arrangements.

While lockdowns can impact family structures or habits around technology use, there are simple things that parents and carers can do to manage risks and ensure their child's safety if they are spending more time online.

It is important to note that while not every online interaction results in online child sexual exploitation, being aware of the issue and taking a proactive approach can protect your child from harm.

## Why do lockdowns impact the chances of online child sexual exploitation?

As children are expected to spend more time online, so are online child sex offenders.

Offenders are using COVID-19 restrictions as an opportunity to find potential child victims, as children and young people are spending an increasing amount of time online, often with limited adult supervision.

Data suggests the amount of child abuse material being shared among online child sex offenders on the dark net is increasing, including offenders discussing their tendencies toward the abuse of children in the COVID-19 environment.

## How does it happen?

Online child sex offenders may use a variety of tactics to groom children and young people. They will look for common interests like sports teams, TV shows, fashion, and hobbies to engage young people in conversation and gain their trust. This can happen in a matter of minutes.

As these case studies demonstrate, an interaction starts off as seemingly legitimate but quickly escalates into something more. These offenders engage the children in conversation that leads to image and video sharing. As these case studies demonstrate, an interaction starts off as a seemingly legitimate but quickly escalates into something more.

## Case studies

See case studies on the [ACCCE website](https://www.accce.gov.au).



## What can you do during lockdowns to keep your child safe?



### Have open conversations, often.

Additional time at home may be an opportunity to start a family conversation about your child's online activities. Family activities and resources to help with this can be found on the [ThinkUKnow website](https://www.thinkuknow.org.au).



### Supervision is essential.

It can be challenging, especially during lockdown, but it is important to have visibility and stay engaged with what your children are doing online, who they are interacting with and what platforms, apps or games they are using.



### Check privacy settings.

Take the time to do some research on app settings, including privacy settings, across all devices at home. This could include turning off location settings, setting profiles to private, or turning off chat functions.



### Be approachable if your child needs help.

Coming forward isn't always easy, and children may feel reluctant to tell you about online issues if they believe they will be punished or have their devices taken away.



### Be aware of changes in behaviour.

Although young people are expected to spend more time than usual online during lockdowns, a sudden change in behaviour or attitude with how they use their device may be an indicator to check in with your child about their online activities.



### Avoid taking devices away.

Being connected to friends and family is important to young people, especially during lockdowns. If your child comes to you with an issue, avoid confiscating their device. They may see this as punishment and may not come forward for help, making them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.



### Know how to report.

If something goes wrong online, it is critical your child is supported. Parents and carers need to know how to take action. Visit [accce.gov.au/report](https://www.accce.gov.au/report).

## Consider establishing a Family Online Safety Contract



Developed by ThinkUKnow and The Carly Ryan Foundation, the contract has been designed as a family agreement to help parents and carers start discussions with their children.

A copy is available at [thinkuknow.org.au](http://thinkuknow.org.au).

## What are the signs of online child sexual exploitation?

- > There is no single sign that a child is a victim of online abuse and it might not always be obvious to you.
- > Online child sexual exploitation can be hard to spot and the signs to look out for can be the same as any other issue your child might be having online.
- > Being aware of changes in your child's behaviour such as sleeping patterns, stress levels and social habits as well as knowing how your child typically uses their device are important things to note as they spend more time online.
- > Those offending against children are manipulative and might coerce them into keeping their abuse a secret. They may also make them feel ashamed about what has happened or tell them they'll be in trouble for their actions.
- > If your child is a victim, they may be reluctant to seek help if they believe they will be in trouble or punished.

## What to do if you think your child or a child you know could be a victim of online child sexual exploitation?

- > If you have a feeling that something isn't right, a good place to start is checking whether your child is using apps or games with direct message or chat functions.
- > Many apps and games come with instant or direct message which are commonly used by offenders to contact children. You may not always be aware that an app or game your child uses has this feature turned on.
- > Stay calm and try to find out as much about the issue as possible.
- > An open conversation that reassures your child they won't be in trouble for their actions, can help you find out what's happening and whether you need to seek help.
- > Importantly: Disclosing online child sexual exploitation to a trusted person can take courage. A child is never to blame for becoming a victim of online child sexual exploitation.

## How do you report online child sexual exploitation?

If you have a feeling that something is wrong, trust your instincts and seek help immediately. You can **Report Abuse** to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, including:

- > Suspected online grooming or inappropriate contact.
- > An individual having a conversation with a child online and saying and doing inappropriate things or trying to meet in person.
- > Live streaming and consuming child sexual abuse material.
- > Coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purposes, including sexual extortion.

There is no information too small or insignificant. Something that may appear small or insignificant could prove vital to a police investigation.

**Report abuse** 

## Is a child in immediate danger?

Call Triple Zero (000)  
or your local police



## Report in-confidence

If you prefer to report in-confidence, visit Crime Stoppers at [crimestoppers.com.au](http://crimestoppers.com.au) or call

**1800 333 000**

Support and wellbeing are critical in cases of online child sexual exploitation. A list of services can be found at [accce.gov.au/support](http://accce.gov.au/support).

**If you encounter child abuse material or other illegal content online, image-based abuse, including sexual extortion, or cyberbullying, you can report it to the eSafety Commissioner who will work to help remove the content. Visit [esafety.gov.au/report](http://esafety.gov.au/report).**

## Further information and resources

### Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE)

The AFP-led [ACCCE](http://accce.gov.au) brings together a world-leading approach, incorporating key stakeholders and partners, and driving a collective effort to counter child exploitation.

### ThinkUKnow

The AFP leads the [ThinkUKnow](http://thinkuknow.org.au) program, a national online child safety program that provides education for parents, carers and teachers, children and young people to prevent online child sexual exploitation.