Empowering young people with additional learning needs to connect safely online

Chatting to strangers

While connecting online can be a lifeline, it can also leave children at risk of issues such as online grooming. Like all children, those with additional needs can be manipulated into building strong bonds with people they've only met online so they are quick to consider these people friends rather than strangers.
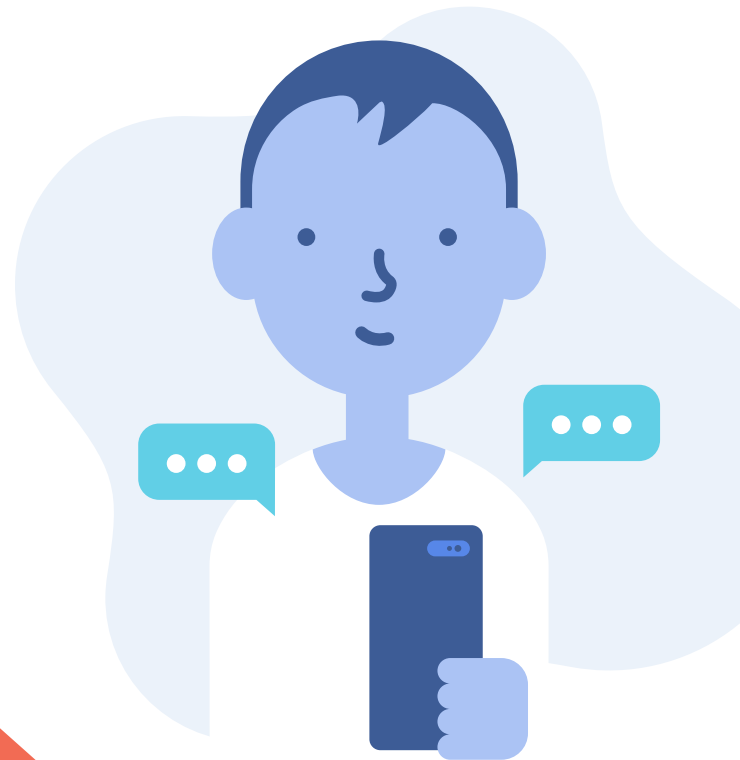
Help your child understand the difference between friends and those who may seek to do them harm to ensure they have a safer online experience on social media.

What you can do to help them

It's important to build their understanding around who their real friends are and what a good friend is.

- Make sure they know why **it's important to protect their personal information** and what information they should keep private

- **Talk to them about what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like** so they can recognise the signs if they are at risks. You can share this video from Amaze.org to help start the conversation

- Spend time looking at **privacy settings** on the platform they use to manage who can see their profile and what they share. See our privacy guide to learn how

- **Review the apps, sites, and games they engage with** to be aware of how they interact and discover together any new safety features that could help them stay safe

- Talk to them about being cautious about what they share with people online. Remind them that even though people they've met online might feel like friends **they may not be who they say they are**

- **Make sure they never** meet someone they only know online without a parent present

- If something makes your child feel worried or uncomfortable online their best course of action is **always to talk to an adult they trust.** You can also direct them to organisations such as Childline

- **To explain the concepts of what is appropriate** to share and what grooming is, you can use the NSPCC Pants video and Share Aware videos

- You can also encourage them to watch the ThinkuKnow Play Like Share films to **help children learn how to spot pressuring manipulative behaviour** online alongside a game - Band Runner - to learn how to stay safe from risks they might face
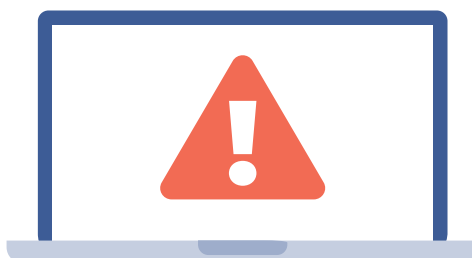
Addressing contact risks

Steps to take if your child is a victim of online grooming:

- **Have an open conversation** - Get as many details about what has gone on and assess the situation together to ensure your child feels supported and confident that they will get the help they need

- **Report it to the authorities** - If you think your child – or another child – could be in immediate danger tell your local police

See 'Where to go for help' for a list of organisations and services to get help.
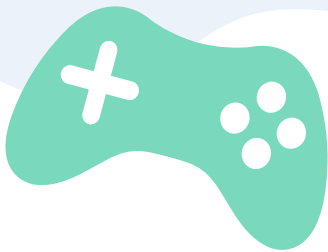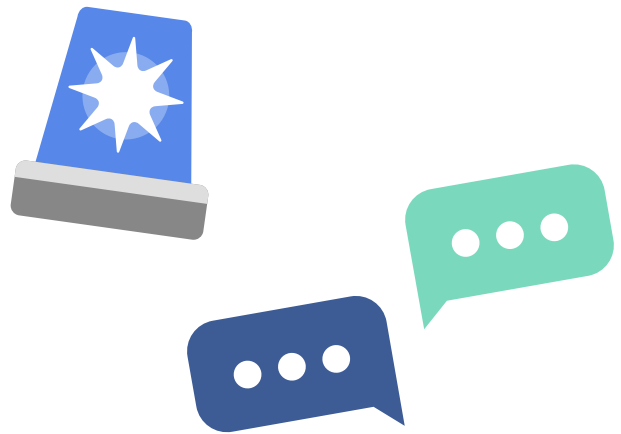
Steps to take if your child is playing games with older groups of people online:

- **Talk to them about how to protect their personal information** and make sure they know that not everyone online is who they say they are

- **Check the settings** on devices to make sure they can only see and do what you've agreed together

- Keep devices in **shared family spaces** to keep an eye on how they are interacting with others

- **Play sound on speakers, not a headset** to hear what is being said

- **Turn notifications on on your account** on the console (Xbox/PlayStation) so you'll be notified if they get a direct message

- **Set up your children's account** so you can monitor their account separately to your own

- **Use settings to create groups of real friends** they can play with

- **Play together** to get a better understanding of who they are playing with

- **Try to do this activity together** - What is a real friend?

Steps to take if your child is in a romantic relationship with someone online:

- **Find out more about who this person is** and the true nature of the relationship to address the issue

- Talk about what a **healthy positive relationship looks like**

- **Discuss what they should and shouldn't share** online (even if they trust that person)

- **Build their body-confidence** by using compliments to reinforce their positives and stop them from seeking these from the wrong source

- Talk about consent so they **feel confident to say no if they are feeling pressured** to do something they are not comfortable with

- **Don't make them feel bad** about seeking affection online but take the time to explain the safest way to explore their feelings

- **Review their list of friends** to make sure you aware of who they are interacting with

You may find this guide helpful: Council for Disabled Children sex and relationship.

Steps to take if your child has sent an inappropriate picture of themselves to someone online:

- **Explore the facts** - Who was the image shared with and was it passed on

- **Contact the website provider** - ask for the image to be removed from the platform (see how to report images here)

- **Contact the school** - if the image was sent to someone at school

- **Contact the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)** if the image was sent to an adult as this is grooming

- **Reassure them** that you will work together to deal with it

- If they can't talk to you, **direct them to trusted support** like Childline to talk to trained counsellors

- **Talk about the nature of relationships online** - talk about how people don't always have the best intentions

You may find this helpful: So you got naked online...

Where to go for help

You can report any concerns about online grooming to the National Crime Agency's CEOP Command.

Report any child abuse images you find hosted by websites to the Internet Watch Foundation.

The Educate Against Hate website offers a range of organisations that can help you report a hate crime or stop extremist content spreading online.
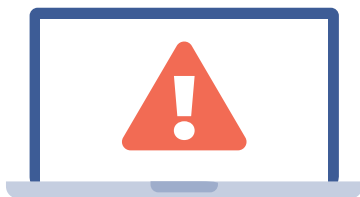
Get one-to-one support

If your child wants to talk to someone in confidence they can call Childline on **0800 1111** or Get Connected on **0808 808 4994 (text 80849).**

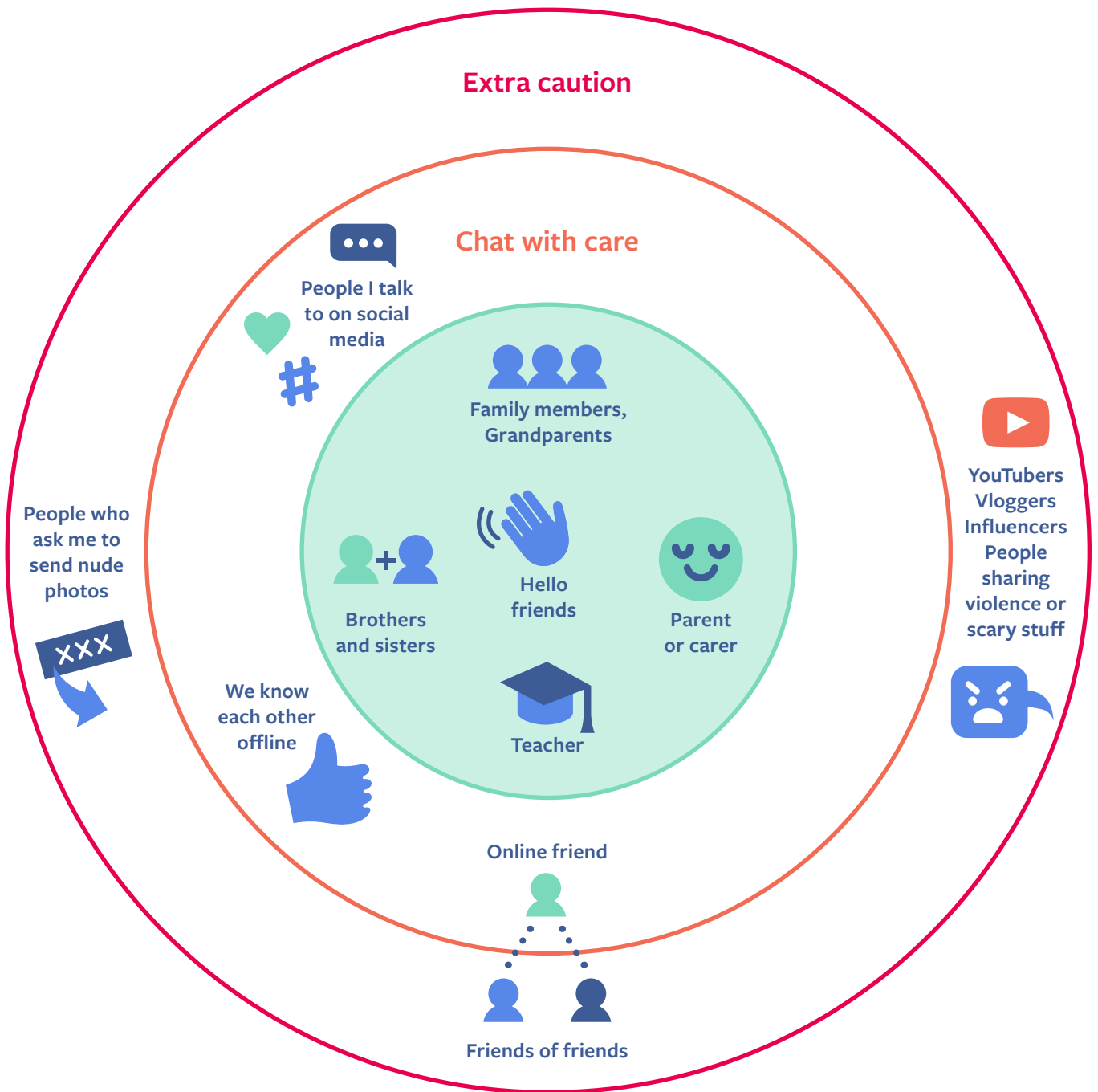Parents can call the NSPCC's free 24/7 adult helpline on **0808 800 5000**, email help@nspcc.org.uk or text **88858**.

Contact the Stop it Now helpline on **0808 1000 900** where you can seek advice anonymously.

You can also contact the administrators of any social media app or platform, they should have a report function.

A resource to use with your child

Extra caution

Chat with care

People I talk to on social media

Family members, Grandparents

People who ask me to send nude photos

Brothers and sisters

Hello friends

Parent or carer

YouTubers Vloggers Influencers People sharing violence or scary stuff

We know each other offline

Teacher

Online friend

Friends of friends

- **Trusted adults and brother/sister. Who else would you put here?**
- **Friends you talk to online. Take care about bullying.**
- **Be very careful in this space. Who else would you put here?**