



SCROLLSAFE

A GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND WELLBEING FOR PARENTS AND CARERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

This guide offers simple ways to start meaningful conversations, build trust, and create a shared sense of what healthy social media use looks like – together.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Social media is deeply woven into young people's lives. Whether directly or indirectly, it plays a key role in connection, entertainment, creativity and information – in fact, it is difficult to have relationships and experience today's society without some form of online connection.

It's not all good or all bad, but it's almost always present.

When it comes to their mental health, young people have told us that social media:

- allows them to build a sense of community and social connection
- provides an accessible and appropriate way to seek help and find information
- gives them a platform to discuss their feelings in a non-stigmatised way

But that doesn't mean it's always helpful. Social media platforms are intentionally designed to keep us scrolling for longer. The same platforms that offer connection and support can also contribute to mental ill-health, such as increased risk of anxiety, depression and body image challenges.(1,2) At the same time, recent research suggests that while high levels of social media use (more than three hours per day) are connected to poor mental health outcomes and loneliness, moderate use (between one and

three hours per day) is linked with similar – and in some aspects better – wellbeing outcomes to low use.(3)

That's why it's important to help young people develop their own skills and habits to use social media safely, and to ensure they feel comfortable to speak with parents and carers when things aren't going so well online.



Social media minimum age legislation and your family

The Australian Government has introduced world-first legislation to age-restrict social media for young people under the age of 16 years.

The eSafety Commissioner have developed a set of FAQs, tools and resources to support parents and carers to have conversations with young people about the changes.

[Social media age restrictions and your family | eSafety Commissioner](#)

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents and carers play a vital role in young people's mental health and wellbeing. You're often their biggest supporter – and one of the first people they'll turn to when things feel overwhelming.

That said, your teen might not always come to you straight away when something goes wrong online. You can't be across everything they're seeing or doing – and you don't need to be. What matters most is creating a space where they *know* they can come to you when they need to.

Life is busy, and it's not realistic to monitor every message or scroll. But making time for regular, open conversations helps build trust and keeps you connected. It also gives you the chance to check in and stay across how your teen is feeling – online and offline.

Creating a safe space

When you communicate openly with your teen about mental health and social media experiences, you are providing a safe space for them to share their thoughts and feelings with you. You are also showing them that they can talk to you if they are worried about themselves, or someone else. Creating this kind of open communication is a valuable way of providing support to young people and can help keep them safe.

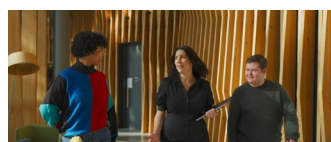
Evidence suggests that a positive, trusting relationship between parent and child lowers the risk of harmful or unhealthy social media use. It is also important that parents are mindful of their own social media use – the way you post, scroll and talk about social media – because that also shapes the way young people learn to use it.^(4,5)

Being proactive, staying curious, and setting boundaries *with* your teen (not just for them) can all help create a home environment that supports safer and healthier social media habits.

What young people want you to know...

- Keep an open mind about social media – it's not all bad!
- Take the time to understand our perspective by giving us space, sitting down, and listening
- Validate our feelings and don't minimise what we might be experiencing
- Don't force us to share anything before we're ready. Create safety and we will come to you
- Don't follow our online activity behind our back. If you have questions, ask us – this can build trust
- If you're unsure how to help, you can always just ask

Hear directly from young people



HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

Having conversations with your teen about the online world can help create a sense of safety and trust. It also gives them a chance to reflect on how they use social media – what’s working, what’s not, and how they can get the positives without some of the pressure.

Every family has its own way of parenting and talking about social media and mental health. These approaches are often shaped by culture, values, and past experiences. Not sure how to begin the conversation? You don’t need a perfect script – just curiosity, openness and a willingness to listen. Here’s some starters to help you explore social media, safety and mental health – **together**.

TOPIC Mental health and wellbeing

Have you found a space online that makes you feel safe and supported?

If yes:

That’s great! The online world can be a great place to connect with others and share interests. What do you think it is about these spaces that makes you feel safe? Knowing this can help you find other safe spaces where you feel supported.

If no:

That’s okay – finding positive communities with shared interests can help us feel good when we spend time online. What do you think would make an online space feel safe to you? Maybe we can try find some groups where you can feel safe and supported.

Have you ever noticed certain posts or interactions make you feel worse after being online?

If yes:

That’s common and can happen to us all. Being online can be fun, but sometimes it can also be overwhelming or draining. Have you tried muting accounts before? Or unfollowing accounts that make you feel bad? If you’re already not feeling great, maybe you choose not to go online to protect your wellbeing, and that can be an empowering choice.

If no:

That’s great! It’s always good to check in with ourselves, and pay attention to how different content can affect our mood. That way, we can make choices that supports our mental health and wellbeing. Remember: you have control over what you see online.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION (continued)

TOPIC Being a mindful user

 **Do the accounts you follow – friends, interests, influencers – align with what you enjoy and make you feel happy?**

If yes:

It's great to follow accounts that reflect and align with your interest. What do these accounts have in common? If you find a pattern, you can follow more accounts like that and curate a feed that makes you feel happy and supports your wellbeing.

If no:

Different types of content can impact us in different ways. Sometimes we follow accounts out of habit, or because we feel pressured to. What kind of content do you actually like seeing? Maybe do an audit of your following and remove accounts that aren't serving you well and follow more accounts that align with what you enjoy. You can have control over your feed.

 **Are you scrolling because you genuinely want to, rather than it just being a habit?**

If yes:

That's great – being intentional and mindful with your time online is important for your mental health and wellbeing. What kind of content do you like to engage with?

If no:

That's really common and many online platforms are designed to keep us scrolling like that. There's no right or wrong way to use social media but being mindful of when and why you're using it can help protect your wellbeing. When you notice you're scrolling out of habit, try put the phone down and do 10 star jumps, go for a walk, or read a book!

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION (continued)

TOPIC Navigating everyday challenges online

 **Do you feel like you're missing out if you're not on every app all the time?**

If yes:

That's understandable – so much of our life and social interactions exist online so it's easy to feel like there's always something happening online. It's important to remember that you don't have to be available in every group chat and on every app, all the time. Setting your own boundaries can be really empowering and help make your time online more enjoyable.

If no:

That's great! It's really empowering to be in control over how you use social media, instead of feeling pressured by it. How do you decide which app or trends are worth your time?

 **Have you ever connected with someone online that you didn't know in real life?**

If yes:

That's really common. Being online can be a great way to meet new people in communities where you feel safe. If you were ever thinking about meeting someone new in real life, it's a good idea to let me know, meet in a public place, and bring a friend along. It's always worth thinking about safety – how do you tell if someone is who they say they are? Are there any red flags you look out for?

If no:

That's a good way to stay safe online. It can help to think about what personal information you share about yourself online and how we keep our details private. What do you think you would do if you became friends with someone online?



HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION (continued)

TOPIC What to do when you're feeling stuck online

Have you ever lost yourself scrolling?

If yes:

That can be a really common experience – social media is designed to keep us hooked and scrolling for as long as possible. Have you tried setting time limits or taking breaks to see if it changes how you interact with the online world?

If no:

That's great and being aware of the time you spend scrolling can be a great way to stay in control. Do you have any habits or tricks that help you stay mindful while online?

Have you ever felt stressed or sad when you are online?

If yes:

You're not alone – social media and the online world can be a stressful or overwhelming place. Especially when there is so much going on around us and in the world that we have to see online. Healthy habits like good sleep routines, offline hobbies and supportive friendships can help protect mental health and wellbeing. Have you ever tried muting or unfollowing accounts, or even taking a break from technology? Sometimes even just talking about it with me or someone at school can help take the mental load off.

If no:

That's great and the online world is meant to be a fun place! What do you think makes your experience online so good?

WORRIED YOUR TEEN'S SOCIAL MEDIA USE IS CAUSING SERIOUS DISTRESS?

If your teen is experiencing serious distress associated with their social media use, you can:

- Contact support services like Lifeline (13 11 14) or Kids Helpline (1800 551 800)
- Connect with a mental health professional. Your GP can help with a mental health care plan and refer you to a local service
- Reach out to your teen's school wellbeing team who can support or connect you with other resources

In some cases, teens may experience cyberbullying, online abuse or may even be exposed to harmful and illegal content. If you're concerned about their safety, these resources can help:

- Reporting online harm: **Report online harm | eSafety Commissioner**
www.esafety.gov.au/report
- SAFEMinds: **Parents and Carers – SAFEMinds – Schools and Families Enhancing Minds**
<https://safeminds.org.au/parents-and-carers/>
- How to have difficult conversations: **The hard-to-have conversations | eSafety Commissioner**
www.esafety.gov.au/parents/issues-and-advice/hard-to-have-conversations



MODELLING HEALTHY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Just like healthy eating or exercise, young people are more likely to build healthy online habits when they see them modelled at home.

That doesn't mean being perfect, but it does mean being thoughtful about how you use social media, and talking openly with your teen about both the upsides and the challenges. Your example helps set the tone for how they see and use social media in their own lives.

- **Set house rules that apply to everyone.**
For example, no phones in bedrooms or after dinner. When adults stick to the same rules, it sends a powerful message.
- **Make those rules together.** Involving your teen in the decision-making gives them a sense of autonomy and helps build trust.
- **Be present in key moments.**
Mealtimes, family outings or shared hobbies are great opportunities to put devices away and be fully engaged.
- **Post and scroll consciously.** Think about what you share and interact with online. Posting positive content sets a good example.
- **Ask before posting about your teen.**
Talk with them about how they want to be represented online, and consider how your teen's identity is formed. And always respect their right to privacy, even as a parent.
- **Take breaks together.** Try a phone-free weekend or a detox during the school holidays, and then discuss how it makes you feel.
- **Be honest about your own habits – good and bad.** Share your own struggles with screen time or comparison. Young people can learn from your mistakes. It also helps normalise the conversation and makes it easier for your teen to talk.

Put it in writing: A family social media agreement

Sit down together with your teen and chat about how social media fits into your family life and values. You could even create a simple agreement that everyone signs. Include things like screen-free times, privacy, and respectful online behaviour.



IN SUMMARY

You don't need all the answers – just curiosity, consistency and care.

- ✓ Be open, not judgmental
- ✓ Set shared boundaries
- ✓ Lead by example
- ✓ Start the conversation early, not just when things go wrong

Staying connected is the most important thing. You're not in every group chat – but you are in their corner.

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TOOLKIT

Social media safety centres

Below is a list of the most common social media platforms your teen may use. To learn more about them and their various privacy functions, check out the safety centres from each below.

- BeReal help center
<https://help.bereal.com/hc/en-us>
- Discord help center
<https://support.discord.com/hc/en-us>
- Facebook help center
<https://www.facebook.com/help>
- Instagram help center
<https://help.instagram.com/>
- Messenger help center
<https://www.facebook.com/help/messenger-app>
- Pinterest help center
<https://help.pinterest.com/en>
- Reddit help center
<https://reddit.zendesk.com/hc/en-us>
- Snapchat help center
<https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-us>
- Signal help center
<https://support.signal.org/hc/en-us>
- TikTok help center
<https://support.tiktok.com/en/>
- Tumblr help center
<https://help.tumblr.com/hc/en-us>
- X help center
<https://help.x.com/en>
- WhatsApp help center
<https://faq.whatsapp.com/>
- YouTube help center
<https://support.google.com/>

RELATED RESOURCES

- Advice for your teen:
www.orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/digital-technology/ScrollSafe
- Orygen's #chatsafe for parents and carers:
www.orygen.org.au/chatsafe/Resources/chatsafe-for-parents-and-carers
- Orygen's parents and carers' guide to MOST:
www.most.org.au/how-it-works
- Orygen's Mello:
www.mello.org.au/about

MORE INFORMATION

- eSafety for parents:
www.esafety.gov.au/parents
- Department of Education's Safe Socials:
www.vic.gov.au/safe-socials
- Information for family about the social media ban:
<https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/social-media-ban/>
- Visit the Department of Education's Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit for parents and carers:
www.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-toolkit

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Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to their Country, which continue to be important to First Nations people living today.



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