



SEEN SOMETHING INAPPROPRIATE ONLINE

If your child is online, there is always a risk they may come across inappropriate content. Some content may be upsetting or scary. Some content may also be against the law. This article explores what you can do if this happens. Anybody can post and share videos, pictures, or ideas on social media. This means children may see things they don't want to. Inappropriate content can be pictures, films, messages or posts which worry, scare or upset them. For example, content meant for older children or adults, sexual or violent content, or content which encourages your child to engage in dangerous behaviours. Some content is also illegal. This includes nude or semi-nude pictures of children and sexual messages to children.

My child has seen something inappropriate – what do I do?

1. Stay calm.

If you have just discovered that your child has seen inappropriate content online, you are probably feeling a lot of different emotions. You may be worried or upset, especially if they saw it accidentally. If they have been searching for inappropriate content, you may also feel disbelief, shock, anger and even guilt or denial about what has happened. These reactions are normal but it's important to try to stay calm and supportive for your child.

If your emotions are running high, give yourself time and space to be calm, before talking with your child. For example, talk to another family member about what has happened so you have time to express your own emotions and approach the conversation with your child calmly

2. Think about how your child is feeling

The impact of seeing inappropriate content varies from child to child, and depends on the type of content they have seen. Some children will be worried or upset by what they see, others will not.

Some children may feel confused and unable to process what they have seen or experienced. Some children may be curious and want to find out more. If someone has sent something to them directly, they may feel threatened or



distressed.

Think about how hard it may be for your child to talk to you about what has happened. They may struggle to tell you because they feel overwhelmed or feel they are to blame, especially if they have stumbled across content accidentally. This can result in them feeling embarrassed about what they have seen or what they are going through.

3. Find the right moment to talk and listen to what they say

Many parents are worried they will say the wrong thing to their child and so they say nothing at all. Try to find time to think about what you want to say first, and find the right moment and discuss with your child what they have seen and how it made them feel.

In the first conversation you should:

- Reassure them that whatever has happened, you are there for them. Make sure they know that you would never blame them for anything that might happen online.
- Listen to what they say to establish the facts. Did they stumble onto the content accidentally, were they simply curious and went looking for it or did someone send it to them?

If it was an accident, reassure them that is not their fault and show understanding.

If they went looking for it or created it, have an honest conversation about why they felt the need to.

If they were sent it, explain that this is not OK, the person who has sent it has done something wrong and there are some actions you can take together to report it.

If your child doesn't want to talk to you and you are still really worried, don't give up. Try again another time or find a different way to start the conversation. Remind them, if they don't want to talk to you, they can also talk to another trusted adult or call [Childline](https://www.childline.gov.uk).

4. Agree together what actions to take

Together, you should agree what actions to take. These actions should be

positive, encouraging them to be safe, rather than punishing them for what has happened. You may want to remove your child's online access, but consider the impact this may have. The most likely consequence of such an action would be that your child will not discuss future problems with you for fear of being cut-off from their online lives.

Talk about what they can do to be safe and reduce the possibility of it happening again. For example, making sure parents controls in place to filter out inappropriate content.

If you need to report content, try to do this together. This will help your child to feel in control of what has happened. Most inappropriate content can be reported to the platforms and sites. Sexual or violent content that appears in adverts, films, television programmes or video games can be reported to Ofcom.

If the content is a nude or semi-nude image of a child they can be reported to the Internet Watch Foundation. Reporting to the IWF is confidential and can be done anonymously.

If your child has been inappropriately contacted by an adult online (for example, sent a sexual message or picture or being asked to do something that makes them feel worried, uncomfortable or afraid) report it to us at www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre.

After first conversation, it's important to continue to take steps to support your child.

Keeping talking

Check in and chat regularly to make sure your child is OK. It can take time for them to deal with what they have seen or experienced. Help them to understand any feelings they may have, and remind them that help is available if they need it. It's also best to have the bigger conversations about what they do online and how they stay safe, after dealing with any incidents. Don't forget



to talk about their positive experiences too – remember most of the time your child enjoys being online.

Review your actions. Talking about whether the actions are working is a great way to help your child think critically about being safe. How are they finding any changes they have made? Do they feel more confident? Are there any things that they need to change?

Seek further support. Your child, or you, may need further help and support. For example, if you are worried about inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age, you could discuss your concerns with your child's teacher or the person in charge of safeguarding at their school.

