

Parents and carers

How to support healthy tech use as your child transitions into high school

The social changes heading into high school

As your child moves into high school the influence of peers intensifies. This includes their online social connections and how they interact online. There are changing expectations from family and community, and it is during this time the family influence shifts.



Don't expect your child to be perfect online

According to [eSafety research](#), standing up for friends, expressing ideas and emotions, forming healthy relationships, fostering inclusion and navigating [consent](#) can all be challenging for young adolescents. So, don't expect your child to be perfect during this transition.

Building resilience

Building resilience is an essential lifelong skill that may assist your child through this transition. Firstly, validate their feelings and let them know it is OK, then help them figure out what they can and can't control. Encourage a range of online and offline connections, so if key friendships change, they still have other reliable positive connections.

How your child spends time online

A quarter of 12 to 13-year-olds are concerned about not fitting in with their friends, so young adolescents are communicating online in chat groups and gaming communities to deepen their sense of belonging and provide relief from tough times.

Source: Truong, M. and Joshi, A. (2024) 'The influence of peer relationships in the middle years on mental health', Australian Institute of Family Studies, February.

What pressures may your child experience online?

Inclusion pressures: may include deciding which group/s to join, the constant need to check in on games or chat groups.

Exclusion pressures: chat and other online features can enable a young person to feel excluded, such as being left out of conversations or invitations.

Social and peer comparisons: females aged 12 to 13 and males aged 14 to 15 may be most susceptible to the negative effects of online trends such as fitness fads. This could lead to low self-esteem and anxiety.

Orben, A., Przybylski, A.K., Blakemore, S-J. and Kievit, R.A. (2022) Windows of developmental sensitivity to social media. *Nature Communications*, 13, 1649.

Cyberbullying: AI driven body-based insults, deepfake images, voice cloning and harassment material or vague posting (cryptic messages that hint something is wrong without explaining what happened).

Gaming influencers: content targeted at tweens and teenage boys may reinforce harmful gender norms.

If a child or young person finds it hard to make friends offline, or has limited coping strategies, this vulnerability can be amplified in the online world.

If your child is the one doing the bullying?

Discovering your child may be bullying others can be upsetting, but your support can guide positive change. Talk with your child to explore what's behind their behaviour. Encourage honesty, reflection and taking responsibility, including offering a genuine apology. Support positive change and praise their efforts. Also, work together with the school to move forward.

Have conversations early and often

Having lots of little chats that match your child's age and stage of development can be more effective than one big conversation.

Ask questions about how they feel and what they know. Listen, don't judge, as this can help you understand their specific issues.

Help them to feel no shame or blame about anything they do online, and trust that they can come to you even if they make mistakes.

It may be less awkward if you chat while you're doing something else together, like taking a walk or a car trip. Starting the conversation can be difficult and there are **conversation starters** available.



Encourage help-seeking

Your child may find it easier to speak with another trusted adult like a cousin or aunty or uncle. Talk with them about putting together a team of people they trust and can go to if they want to chat about online. Encourage your child to use the [eSafety young people page](#). You can also check out our [list of counselling and support services](#), or go directly to [Kids Helpline](#), [eHeadspace](#) or [Beyond Blue](#).

Build your support networks

As your child enters high school your social network may change too, so it may be an opportunity to think about your own support networks. Different families and separated parents may have different approaches, and this may result in peer pressure for your family. Don't be afraid to discuss strategies with other parents at the sporting field or when picking your kids up. Reach out to your school if there are signs that things may not be right. Communicate in writing and provide specific details. Visit eSafety's [parents and carers page](#) on the main issues that impact young people online, or chat to a [parent helpline](#).

Build safety skills together

Young people need more digital skills.

- Check they know how to block, delete and [report](#) and that they understand why this is important.
- [Check their privacy settings](#) and whether they are sharing their contact details online.
- Discuss the possible pitfalls of sharing passwords and passphrases.
- Check what protections school laptops have when used at home.
- Use [parental controls](#) you feel are right for the age and experience of your child.

[The eSafety Guide](#) provides updated information on the latest games, apps and social media. This includes the recommended age to use, features that may pose risks, available safeguards and how to report inappropriate content.

