

Play, connect, protect children in a digital world

Many children and young people spend time online – gaming, streaming, chatting and exploring. Digital platforms like games and social media are part of how children learn, relax, and build relationships.



Act for Kids ran a survey to find out how families connect online.

The survey found:

- ♥ While some families spend time online together through games, YouTube, or social media, **many families don't connect online.**
- ♥ Even though they enjoy screen time, **most kids prefer spending time in person with their family.**
- ♥ When they have worries, **most kids would prefer to talk with their parents** than an online friend.

Almost **75%** children liked having a trusted adult in the room while they were online, and **17%** said it made them feel safer.

Gaming is kids' favourite online activity (41%), but only 30% of families play online games together.

The power of playing online with your child

There are lots of benefits to connecting online with your child:

- ♥ **Build trust** – Your child is more likely to talk to you if something goes wrong online.
- ♥ **Show balance** – Kids learn from seeing adults take breaks and enjoy offline activities.
- ♥ **Understand their world** – Knowing the games or apps your child uses helps you support and guide them.
- ♥ **Teach kindness** – You can help your child be respectful and thoughtful when they're online.

Good communication about tech use between a parent and child can reduce the risk of online harm.



What the research is saying...

Strong parent-child bonds are protective

Young people who are social media 'friends' with their parent are less likely to be cyberbullied².

A good relationship between a parent and child can reduce risky online behaviour³.

Family connection buffers online risks

Young people who feel less connected to their family often turn to social media for support.

Strong family relationships help protect kids from online bullying and promote safer online behaviour⁴.

Benefits of gaming and social media

Social media use makes children and young people feel more connected to their friends and provides a sense of community for support. It can promote feelings of belonging, and a sense of control¹.

When used positively and with guidance, online gaming and social media can support:

- ♥ Positive emotions – Excitement, fun, and feelings of mastery.
- ♥ Engagement – Builds attention, resilience, and critical thinking.
- ♥ Social connection – Strengthens friendships and family ties.
- ♥ Meaning making – Helps kids explore identity and values.
- ♥ Learning – Supports memory, language, literacy, and problem-solving.
- ♥ Creativity – Encourages storytelling, building, and design.
- ♥ Overcoming challenges – Builds frustration tolerance and perseverance.

Know the risks

Risky social media use is linked to low self-esteem, cyberbullying, feeling left out, body image issues, loneliness and mental health concerns .

Know what to look for:

Unknown players or friends

Monitor who your child interacts with online.

In-game purchases and ads

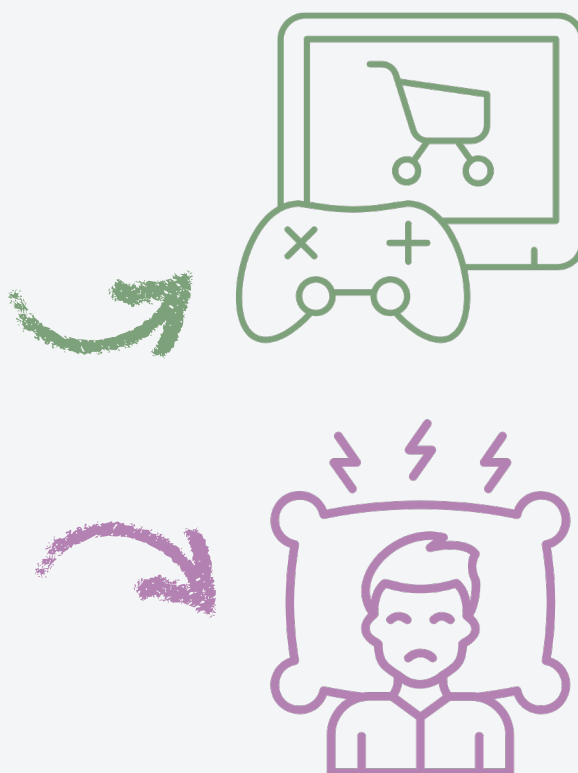
Set clear rules to avoid accidental spending.

Isolation or insomnia

Too much screen time, especially at night, can affect sleep and wellbeing.

Toxic communities

Risk of cyberbullying, racism, misogyny or rejection.



Knowing what your child is doing online helps you support them and keep their screen time positive.

What You Can Do Today

- ♥ Play a game together – Let your child be the expert and guide you.
- ♥ Talk often – Make online safety and digital wellbeing a regular conversation.
- ♥ Use tools – Parental controls, timers, and filters can help support healthy use.
- ♥ Hit pause – Help your child recognise when online time isn't fun anymore and remind them they can walk away.
- ♥ Offer alternatives – Encourage time away from screens with creative or physical play.
- ♥ Celebrate positives – Ask your child what they're proud of online and what they've learned.

Be involved, set limits, and play with your child to help them feel safe, supported, and confident online.



76% of children feel connected to their family when they're talking in-person about their day.

References

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4. Winstone, L., et al. (2021). Social connectedness and adolescent social media use. *Journal of Adolescence*, 89, 85–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.04.005>
5. Sampasa-Kanyinga, H., et al. (2020). Social media use and parent-child relationship quality. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 23(12), 803–810. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0155>

Connecting with kids IRL

Children and young people want to connect with the adults in their life. Listening to our young people helps them feel safe and secure.

Make small talk

Small talk leads to big talk. Ask them about their day – even if you don't get much information, you have shown them that you are interested in them.

Use open-ended questions

E.g. What was the best part of your day?

Take a moment

Make simple moments a time to connect – car rides are a great chance for easy or meaningful chats.



Turn off

Put down your phone, turn off the TV, close all the tabs in your brain, or remove other distractions that make it difficult for you to tune in to them.

If you can't focus on them right away, let them know you will give them your attention as soon as you can.

I'm sorry but I have to reply to this email. I want to be able to give you my full attention – can we chat in three minutes?"

Tune in

Listen with your ears and your eyes. Body language shows you are interested in what they are saying. Look at them kindly, keep your body relaxed and calm.



Listen

Sometimes we just want someone to listen to us. Clarify what they need from you. Don't give advice or help unless they ask for it.

Use prompting questions

E.g. Do you need some advice, or do you just want me to listen?

Connecting with kids online

Online safety means being smart and careful when you use the internet—like when you're playing games, watching videos, or chatting with friends.

Be Curious (Not Critical)

Children thrive when they feel heard and valued.

- ♥ Show your child you are interested in them, not just monitoring their online activity.
- ♥ Let your child teach you how to play the game – let them be the expert.
- ♥ Ask your child about the games and platforms they use.

What do you like about this game?

Can you show me how it works?

Get in the game

Playing games with your child – even online games – can help build a stronger relationship.

- ♥ Play a game together or explore their favorite app. Try family-friendly games like *Minecraft*, *Mario Kart*, or *Rocket League*.
- ♥ Ask your child for tips and tricks – this builds mastery and confidence.
- ♥ Celebrate their wins, whether it's building in *Minecraft*, editing a cool video, or completing a stage in a game. They worked hard to achieve that goal!

46% of kids spend more than one hour per day talking to someone online.



Only **15%** of kids in our survey would prefer to spend time online, whereas **41%** said they would prefer to spend time with their family.



Learn the Landscape

Learn about the platforms your child uses. This will help you:

- ♥ Support their interests.
- ♥ Spot potential risks.
- ♥ Set suitable boundaries.

Keep the Chat Open

Playing online with your child can help create fun shared moments and opens the door for meaningful conversations.

- ♥ Talk **with** your child instead of **to** your child about online safety – appropriate games, who their friends are, spending money online, screen time, etc.
- ♥ Talk frequently with your child about:
 - digital kindness
 - online safety
 - protecting their privacy
 - spending money online
 - getting help if something feels wrong online.
- ♥ Conversations are more effective when they are:
 - ongoing (rather than one-off)
 - open (rather than a lecture) and
 - relaxed.

QUICK TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

- ♥ Play and explore together online
- ♥ Ask questions and listen
- ♥ Praise their effort and creativity
- ♥ Play games together that require strategy, teamwork, etc.
- ♥ Acknowledge their skills
- ♥ Avoid judgement
- ♥ Celebrate their wins
- ♥ Set shared agreements instead of strict rules



HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Common Sense Media

offers useful reviews and advice for families about age-appropriate games, TV shows, movies and more.

[commonsensemedia.org](https://www.commonsensemedia.org)

ThinkUKnow

offers cyber safety education.

[thinkuknow.org.au](https://www.thinkuknow.org.au)

eSafety Commissioner (Australia)

provides reliable online safety tips.

[esafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au)

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation

DigiTalk online hub offers resources to help parents and families build digital skills.

[alannahandmadeline.org.au](https://www.alannahandmadeline.org.au)