

A Quick Guide for Conversations on Healthy Online Behaviour with Young People



A toolkit for parents, carers and frontline workers

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Understanding Online Risks
- Protecting Young People
- How to Offer Support
- Signposting and Local Contact Points

Introduction

The internet plays a central role in the lives of young people, offering opportunities to learn, connect, and express themselves. However, it also presents a range of risks that can affect their safety, wellbeing, and development. From online grooming and cyberbullying to harmful content, disinformation, and extremist narratives, young people may encounter situations that they are not always equipped to recognise or navigate safely.

Supporting young people to develop healthy online behaviours is therefore an important part of safeguarding. Parents, carers, and professionals all have a vital role in helping children build critical thinking skills, make informed decisions, and feel confident seeking support when something goes wrong. Creating an environment where young people can talk openly about their online experiences without fear of judgement is often one of the strongest protective factors.

This toolkit has been designed to support those conversations. It provides practical guidance on understanding common online risks, recognising warning signs of exploitation or harm, promoting safer digital habits, and responding effectively when concerns arise. By encouraging informed, supportive, and proactive engagement, we can help young people enjoy the benefits of the online world while reducing the likelihood of harm.

What Is Extremism?

Extremism is when people hold hateful or harmful beliefs and/or promote the use of violence, hatred or intimidation to achieve their goals.

Extremists adopt an in-group vs out-group mentality in which their in-group is superior and others are not only inferior but also a threat. Extremism comes in many forms and guises and is not restricted to one community or identity group.

Key hallmarks of extremism include:



"Us vs. Them" Mentality

Creating deep divisions by viewing anyone outside a specific group as an enemy.



Binary Thinking

Replacing critical nuance with black-and-white perspectives that leave no room for questions or debate.



Justification of Harm

Crossing the line from belief into action by validating violence or intimidation of the out-group.



Mythical Perfection

Obsessing over an idealised, non-existent past or an impossible, perfect future world.



Superiority and Entitlement

Believing one's group is inherently better, more righteous, or more deserving than others.



Conspiracy Obsession

Replacing evidence-based reality with simplistic conspiracies that scapegoat entire communities.

The Online Dimesion

Social media platforms use sophisticated algorithms designed to maximise engagement, which can inadvertently funnel vulnerable users toward harm and exploitation through several key mechanisms:



Algorithmic Profiling

Systems track user behaviour and demographics to serve increasingly sensationalist content, prioritising platform retention over safety.



The "Rabbit Hole"

Automated recommendations can transition users from mainstream interests into unregulated digital spaces dominated by disinformation and conspiracy theories.



Echo Chambers

Constant exposure to fringe ideas within isolated groups creates a distorted perception that these views are widely accepted and mainstream



Artificial Urgency

Harmful narratives often manufacture a sense of impending catastrophe, pressuring young people to take immediate action

Grooming



Grooming is a process used to build trust with a child or vulnerable person in order to manipulate, influence, or exploit them. It is often gradual making it difficult to recognise early.

Gradual Trust-Building



It is a deliberate process where someone builds an emotional connection with a child or vulnerable person often through attention, gifts, shared interests, or validation to lower boundaries and gain influence.

Different Harmful Purposes



Can be used to exploit someone for sexual content or abuse, or to recruit young people into extremist groups, gangs, or illegal online activities such as cybercrime by slowly normalising harmful beliefs or behaviours.

Secrecy, Manipulation, and Escalation



Groomers often encourage secrecy, create an “us vs. them” dynamic, and gradually escalate requests moving from seemingly harmless interaction to increasingly risky, exploitative, or criminal involvement.

Doxing



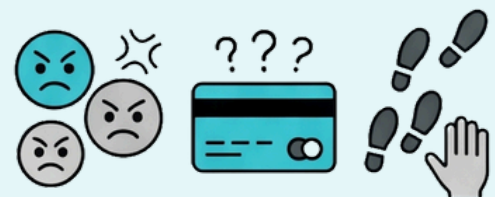
Doxing is the act of publicly revealing someone's private information (home address, phone number, workplace) online without their consent, often to harass, intimidate, or threaten them.

Methods and Motives



Perpetrators may gather information from social media, data leaks, or hacking, with motives ranging from personal revenge and bullying to political or ideological attacks.

Risks and Consequences



Doxing can lead to harassment, identity theft, stalking, emotional distress, and in some cases, real-world danger for the victim.

1. General Parental Control Apps to Use



Qustodio:

Monitors web activity, apps and social media, offering detailed reports and alerts for suspicious behaviour



Bark:

Monitors text messages and emails for cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and risky behaviours, with real-time alerts



Norton Family:

Provides activity reports on websites and apps, sets time limits, and alerts parents to inappropriate content



FamilyTime:

Monitors app usage, calls, texts and location, with real-time activity tracking and customisable time limits

2. Content Filtering



Net Nanny ([netnanny.com](https://www.netnanny.com)):

A comprehensive internet filtering software that allows parents to monitor and control their child's online activity, including real-time content filtering and alerts for inappropriate content.



Microsoft Family Safety (support.microsoft.com):

Offers web and search filters to block inappropriate websites and content. You can set up these filters through the Family Safety app



Google Family Link (familylink.google.com):

Allows parents to set content restrictions on their child's device, including filtering websites and apps. You can manage these settings via the Family Link app.



Content-Based Filtering

How to Offer Support

Young people facing extremism need to feel heard. Use these tools to understand their online behaviour and open communication. *(Note: These do not replace professional help).*

1. Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)

- Coined by Carl Rogers, Unconditional Positive Regard is the practice of **accepting and valuing a person without judgment**, regardless of their behaviour or mistakes.
- The approach separates the individual from their actions and communicates *“I care about you”* even when setting limits on inappropriate behaviour.
- Unconditional Positive Regard **fosters psychological safety**, helping individuals develop self-worth, resilience, and the confidence to grow and change.

How to Practice Unconditional Positive Regard as a Parent

1. Separate the child from the behaviour

Make it clear that love is constant even when behaviour isn't acceptable.

- *“I love you. Using threatening language is not okay.”*

This reinforces that mistakes don't threaten the relationship.

2. Listen before you correct

When your child is upset about something that happened online, try to understand first.

- *“Help me understand what happened.”*

Feeling heard reduces defensiveness and builds trust.

3. Reflect feelings

Show empathy by naming emotions without judgment.

- *“It sounds like you were really frustrated.”*

This communicates acceptance of their internal experience.

4. Set clear, calm boundaries

Unconditional Positive Regard does *not* mean permissiveness. Hold limits consistently, but without shame or humiliation.

- Calm tone
- Clear expectations
- Fair consequences

5. Repair after conflict

If voices were raised or emotions escalated, reconnect intentionally.

- *“We both got upset. I'm still here.”*

Repair strengthens emotional security.

6. Model self-acceptance

Children learn how to treat themselves by watching you. Speak about your own mistakes with kindness and growth language.

When practiced consistently, Unconditional Positive Regard creates emotional safety.

Children internalise the message: *“I am valued, even when I struggle.”*

2. The Socratic Method

- Developed by Socrates, the Socratic method is a form of **cooperative dialogue** that uses probing questions to stimulate critical thinking and illuminate underlying assumptions.
- It relies on **disciplined, open-ended questioning** rather than direct instruction, encouraging participants to examine contradictions and refine their beliefs.
- The method often **exposes gaps in reasoning**, leading individuals to recognise inconsistencies in their arguments and move closer to clearer definitions or truths.

How to Use the Socratic Method with Your Kids

1. Start with curiosity, not correction

Instead of telling your child they're wrong, ask a gentle question.

- *"What makes you think that?"*
- *"How did you come to that idea?"*

This keeps the tone exploratory rather than confrontational.

2. Ask open-ended questions

Avoid yes/no questions. Use prompts that require explanation:

- *"What do you think would happen if...?"*
- *"Why do you think that rule exists?"*

The goal is to get them thinking, not guessing what you want to hear.

3. Clarify their thinking

Help them define their ideas more clearly.

- *"What do you mean by 'not fair'?"*
- *"Can you give me an example?"*

This teaches precision in language and thought.

4. Gently explore consequences

Encourage them to think ahead.

- *"If everyone did that, what might happen?"*
- *"How would your friend feel in that situation?"*

This builds empathy and reasoning skills.

5. Examine assumptions

Help them notice hidden beliefs.

- *"Do you think that's always true?"*
- *"Is there another way to see this?"*

This expands perspective without dismissing their view.

6. Allow silence and struggle

Resist the urge to jump in with answers.

Productive pauses help children develop independent thinking.

Example Scenario

Jake, 12, has started playing a new video game where he can speak with other players with his headset. One day, his father, Paul, overhears Jake using a slur while playing the video game. He was previously unaware that Jake knew this word and is shocked to hear him say it with the other players.

Instead of reacting immediately, Paul waits until Jake has finished the game. He then sits down beside him and starts a calm conversation, using **unconditional positive regard (UPR)** and the **Socratic method** to help Jake reflect on what happened.



Paul (Father)

Hey, I want to talk about what you said in the game earlier. I love you, and I'm not here to attack you; can you help me understand what was going on for you in that moment?

Well, what do you think that word might mean to the people it is referring to? How they might feel when they hear it?

How would you feel if you offended someone, maybe a younger child, who heard you say that?



Jake (Son, 12)

I was really angry at this guy who was making us lose the game, so I had a go at him, everyone uses that word in the game, it's not a big deal.

I don't really know, I didn't really think about that but I guess they'd feel picked on and targeted.

I would feel pretty bad. I would not want someone to be hurt because of my actions.



By asking open, reflective questions instead of reacting with anger, Paul encourages Jake to think critically about his behaviour and its impact on others.



Tone Tips for Parents

- Stay calm and neutral.
- Avoid sounding like you're cross-examining them.
- Praise effort in thinking, not just "right answers."

When done consistently, this approach helps kids become thoughtful, confident decision-makers rather than simply rule-followers.

3. Lighthouse Parenting

Lighthouse Parenting is one valuable tool to both demonstrate healthy behaviour around internet usage as well as building confidence that parents can be a safe refuge for children if they get into trouble.

Guiding rather than controlling	Lighthouse parenting is a term popularised by Kenneth Ginsburg in his book 'Raising Kids to Thrive'. It describes parents who provide steady guidance and protection while allowing children space to navigate their own experiences.
Safety with independence	Like a lighthouse, the parent offers a reliable point of reference stepping in when there is real danger, but not micromanaging everyday challenges.
Building resilience and confidence	By allowing manageable struggles and problem-solving, lighthouse parenting helps children develop coping skills, responsibility, and self-trust.
Demonstrating healthy behaviour and habits	By showing healthy screen and internet habits, parents can help children build responsible and safe attitudes towards the internet. This means showing, not just telling, children what you would like them to do in relation to internet behaviour.
Consistent conversations about the internet	Online safety should be taken seriously by families and conversations about online safety should be consistent and recurrent. These conversations should include repetition of core points around protecting personal information, being cautious with speaking to strangers, keeping passwords secure, critically analysing content that might be suspicious or harmful.



Tip: Put an event in your Google Calendar or diary to have a conversation about online safety every two months. It might feel like overkill, but kids have shorter attention spans and may not remember conversations that take place several months ago.



Dealing With Difficult Situations



Sometimes mistakes happen online. Situations can snowball quickly. Children can get in over their heads.

This doesn't have to be your nightmare.



1. DON'T PANIC!



Take a breath.
Emotions are high.
Be the safety net.
Offer emotional safety.

2. FIGURE OUT THE PROBLEM (Socratic Method & UPR)



Collect as much info as possible: screenshots, messages, times, names.
Don't delete. Vital for investigations.
Advise child not to block or delete anything.

3. IF THERE IS THREAT OF IMMEDIATE HARM



Threat of violence, doxxing, or blackmail?
Call police immediately on **999** or **101**.

4. IF EXPLICIT CONTENT WAS SHARED



If inappropriate images are shared on public sites: **call police**, then search **Report Remove** (signposted below) to get the photo removed. *Note: This is generally limited to public domain sharing, not private messages.*

5. IF YOUR CHILD HAS BROKEN THE LAW



Seek legal advice immediately. Children have legal right to counsel before being interviewed by police. Rights ensure proper investigation.

6. IF YOUR CHILD HAS ILLEGAL CONTENT ON THEIR DEVICE



Eg. Child sexual abuse material, weapon making manuals, terror attack content, snuff videos etc.
Seek legal advice. Accidental link clicks may have occurred, it's not always an intentional offence.
Children often don't what is illegal. **Teach them about the law.**

7. IF CRIME CONCERNS, BUT YOU AREN'T CERTAIN

NSPCC



Crime concern but not certain? Call **NSPCC** on **0808 800 5000** or speak to your school DSL.



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Signposting

- **Childline:** Call **0800 1111** (Free, private, and doesn't show on the bill)
- **NSPCC Helpline (0808 800 5000)** – For advice and support on child abuse, online grooming, or sexual exploitation. nspcc.org.uk
- **The Mix:** Text THEMIX to 85258 for free 24/7 crisis and mental health support. themix.org.uk
- **Report Harmful Content:** To get help removing leaked info: reportharmfulcontent.com
- **Report Remove:** to get sexual imagery taken down: childline.org.uk
- **Shore Space:** a place for teenagers worried about their sexual behaviour, including resources and help if they are in trouble with the law, sextortion. An online chat function freely available. shorespace.org.uk
- **Safer Internet:** For advice and support to children and young people, parents and carers to promote the safe and responsible use of technology saferinternet.org.uk
- **Police – Online Safety / CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command)** (<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>) – Report sexual abuse or exploitation online safely.
- Haringey **Prevent** Team - prevent@haringey.gov.uk
- Haringey **Hate Crime** Team - elvan.asutay@haringey.gov.uk

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