

Online Gaming Whānau Toolkit

Netsafe's guide to keeping tamariki safe





Eighty percent of children in New Zealand aged 8-17 have played games online. They are drawn to their challenge and entertainment.

Netsafe is often asked about gaming and the best ways whānau can support tamariki navigate the challenges they may encounter. This guide has been produced in response. It follows the seven step framework of Netsafe's Online Safety Parent Toolkit - but with a specific focus on gaming.

Games can have many benefits: entertainment, social opportunities, coordination development, problem-solving and multi-tasking skills. But, most of all, gaming is popular because it's fun.

Most parents have had conversations about screentime and battled young people reluctant to put down their controller. Games can absorb the time needed for other things – like education, sport, and family.

As games become more sophisticated and social, they also provide a platform for more complex challenges, such as bullying, unwanted contact, excessive spending and inappropriate content.

You do not have to be an online gaming expert to keep children safe. Sharing your experience, skills, maturity, and support can reduce the chance of something going wrong and the harm that occurs if it does.

Young people prefer to engage with adults they believe have a genuine interest in their online lives. By working through the seven steps of this Toolkit, you should get to a place where you feel confident and equipped to engage with your kids about the world of gaming.

More resources and support can always be found by visiting netsafe.org.nz.

Good luck and happy gaming.
Netsafe team

*this is our
happy place*



The steps

This Toolkit is constructed around seven practical steps that will help every parent feel confident and equipped to help their children stay safe online - no matter what level of experience or knowledge you have to begin with.

4 AGREE

on boundaries using a Family Safe Online Treaty which can help establish the games your child is allowed to play and relevant settings and time limits.

1 UNDERSTAND

potential risks, challenges and sometimes illegal behaviours young people face to understand what can go wrong and the benefits of responsible gaming.

5 TEACH

your child the risks of sharing personal information and the tips to help them thrive.

2 LEARN

about your child's activities and how to ask about who they talk to while gaming and how they use devices and consoles. Check in regularly to see if anything changes.

6 MODEL

positive behaviours and set a good example of the types of behaviours you want to see your child display. Talk about always being a good sport, no matter what.

3 EXPLORE

collaboratively with your child to see how their games work. Check out parental controls and key features designed to keep kids safe. All of this will improve your knowledge of your child's experience.

7 PLAN

so everybody knows what to do if something goes wrong and where to go for advice and support.



Get started

Games and gamers come in all shapes and sizes. Not all games or gaming platforms are equal in terms of opportunity or risk.

Some contain confronting content, some don't. Some provide opportunities to spend money to advance quicker or different levels of customisation and character editing. Others allow or require players to interact with one another. Each of things create different potential risks and challenges.

Some games and platforms already have extensive safety mitigations - and some don't. Similarly, each young person has strengths and weaknesses depending on age and experience.

Your mission is to understand risks that apply to your child in line with games they play and experience they've developed. Then you will be able to focus your energy where it makes significant impact.



Understand gaming

Learn about the risks, challenges and opportunities your child may encounter.

New Zealand children play online for an average 84 minutes each day. The primary reason they play is to be entertained. Young people also use the internet and games to explore their identity, challenge adult norms and boundaries, experiment with relationships, and practice new behaviours.

Many common concerns about games are not supported by research. No amount of time playing games, or time online is directly harmful. Whilst many violent people play violent games, research shows that violent games do not create violent people.

A few games are distributed to shock or defraud users, but most games distributed through mainstream platforms can be relied upon to meet basic safety expectations. Most challenges of gaming are indirect. When a game is so entertaining the time spent playing it negatively impacts time available for other important activities, or spending becomes excessive – it becomes a problem. Social systems set up to connect players can create opportunities for bullies, or inappropriate contact.

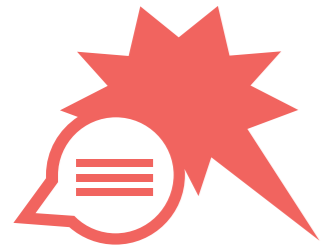
Challenges also arise when young people play games designed for older audiences, as younger players might not be ready for violence or challenging themes within that game.

There are five categories of risk to understand related to gaming.

They are:

- 1. Excessive use**
- 2. Unwanted contact**
- 3. Excessive purchasing within a game**
- 4. Inappropriate contact**
- 5. Online bullying**

To learn more about other challenges, visit netsafe.org.nz/understand



Excessive use

Almost 50 percent of teenagers report having had some conflict with whānau or friends due to time spent online.

Most countries, including New Zealand, do not formally recognise gaming addiction. However, the degree to which young people skip meals and sleep, avoid homework and school, and swap family or social opportunities for time online, can seem like a addiction.

A Netsafe study found 33 percent of young people between 13 and 17 had been unsuccessful trying to spend less time online, and the same number had experienced conflict with family because of this.

For these young people, parents have to set time limits and ensure they are followed. For the other two thirds, an honest conversation about balancing commitments might be enough.

Some games can be structured around milestones and considerable investment of time can be lost if playing time is truncated just short of them. It can help reduce disappointment and frustration if you allow flexibility around times.

How to help

- Explain why you consider it important to balance time gaming with other activities in their life
- Reinforce you do not want gaming to interfere with school work, socialising or quality family time
- Set realistic boundaries and guidelines
- Turn on controls to set time limits for playing
- Discuss with your child a realistic way to balance time spent gaming with offline activities they enjoy
- Talk with your child if you observe behaviours such as: gaming being their top priority, withdrawal symptoms when games get taken away, being unable to reduce playing time or the giving up of other activities to make way for gaming



Unwanted contact

Many games have a social element that allows players to communicate with each other. This can be a very positive aspect of gaming, and provide opportunities for developing teamwork skills. It creates the potential for unwanted contact between young gamers and offenders.

This is a very serious, but less common challenge. Most gamers are there to have fun.

However, young people can be approached for a variety of reasons. They may be groomed into online or offline sexual encounters, recruited to the role of a money mule for scammers or approached by extremist groups.

Gaming provides an easy opportunity to establish common interests – and some provide simple ways to exchange gifts or rewards.

If you suspect your child is being groomed, contact Netsafe or the police and capture all available evidence.

How to help

Explain to your child:

- How easy it is for someone to pretend to be someone else and why they might
- The importance of keeping personal information private
- Ways to safely manage gaming friends

For younger children playing social games, it is worth having a regular check in on who they believe they're playing with and who they recently added as connections.

Recognise young people who get groomed often feel shame and guilt that prevents them reporting. Reassure them it's not their fault.

More help is available at netsafe.org.nz/grooming-and-online-predators

Excessive purchasing within a game

It is common for games to include opportunities for spending. For young people with limited income or parents with linked credit cards – costs can quickly add up and become problematic.

Many games use a “freemium” model. This means they can be played for free, but players can purchase items or upgrades within the game. Achieving progress through some games will become increasingly difficult without purchased items. Even games with an initial cost will often have in-game spending options. Players will be tempted by powerful weapons or tools, increased functionality, cosmetic upgrades for their character, or new environments. Like any purchase, virtual items can lead to disappointment if they don’t return expected value.

Loot boxes have become less popular but are still relatively common. They are a kind of lucky dip, as the content is unknown before purchase. This means players do not know how much money they will need to acquire a particular item.

What to do

- Set up the account together and

- discuss what purchasing abilities or limits your child will have.
- Discuss purchases and their relative value, help children to make informed choices about spending
- Have a conversation with young people about the way games make money
- Set up payment schemes to be authorised by you

Innapropriate content

Online games come in many formats, with a variety of characters and story lines.

Some challenging content is highly visible such as extreme violence, sexual themes or gore. Other inappropriate content is less obvious. This can include characters or play that promote unhelpful or harmful stereotypes.

What you decide is appropriate for your child will depend on individual circumstances - but the most obvious variable is age. Content older players will be comfortable with could be very confronting to younger players.

Major game’s retail and distribution platforms provide ratings that include an age guide (or restriction), content descriptors, and information about interactive elements.

A quick web search can also yield more useful information as most popular games independently reviewed.

What to do

- Use parental controls within games and on platforms
- Review game ratings before purchasing or providing games to young people

- Web search reviews of games your children ask to play
- Discuss with your children the storyline and characters within games
- Respond calmly if your child has seen content and has come to you for help





Most major games and platforms have rules that address abuse and harassment and systems to report.

In more serious cases, people in New Zealand can access services under the Harmful Digital Communications Act which helps victims of online abuse and harassment.

How to help

- Establish whether your child is ready for games that allow interaction with others
- Encourage young people to tell you about their negative gaming experiences
- Discuss player etiquette and behaviour as part of a team
- Encourage children to report and block abusive players
- Let your child know if it's not acceptable offline it's not acceptable online
- Ask your child to think about how the recipient of online bullying could feel
- Explain there is a law that sets out how to communicate online, which includes gaming



Online bullying and abuse

On games that involve verbal and written dialogue, abusive exchanges can occur.

Criticism of playing ability is a common reason for abuse within games. This is especially so in games where players must cooperate for success. But abuse is by no means limited to topics related to the game. At some point, young people

are likely to receive, or at least witness: racist, sexist, ableism, and homophobic slurs. These exchanges can be very harmful.

Not all bullying involves words. Players will sometimes find themselves on the receiving end of more subtle bullying such as being deliberately "kicked" or excluded from groups.





Learn about your child's gaming

The most effective way to find out is to ask. Nothing beats an open and honest korero.

It's important you understand your child's gaming activities and experiences and ones they want to explore. There is a range of games available, but not all are suitable for everyone.

Talk to your child about what they do or want to do, their use of gaming consoles and who they're chatting with. Take time to tune into a meaningful conversation – what might seem like just a game to you could be the way your child is connecting and interacting with people they don't know.

Research shows good digital parenting is critical to the success of young people being safe, confident and capable in using technology. Proactive conversations at home help minimise damage if things go wrong online.

What is the age restriction for your game?

Are you buying things within your games?

Are you playing with school friends?
Do you know the person?

What are you playing?

What information do you share?

Asking your child about the advice they would give to a friend facing online challenges can make it easier for them to discuss theirs. It also helps you understand what they know, what they do and how they behave.

Showing interest upfront makes it easier to have more difficult conversations if a challenge arises down the track.

Explore gaming

Tour games, apps, and consoles your child is using.

This will improve your knowledge and foster understanding of challenges your child could face. Have a go at playing with, or alongside, your enthusiastic gamer.

Don't turn a blind eye

Young people will use technology – if not at home, then at their friends' houses, school, or other places. The things you do to understand how they play will help minimise harm when you are not around.

Ask your child to show you how their game or console works

This is an easy way to start a gaming-specific conversation. Ask them about the games their friends play. Ask them to explain how they keep themselves safe, what features they use and how they protect their identity.

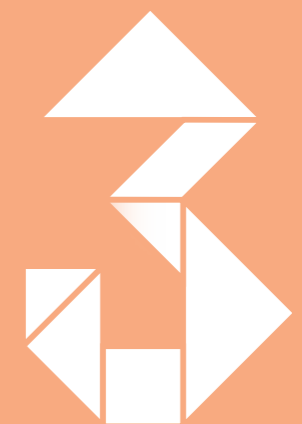
Make sure you take time to read about the functions, safety settings, and terms and conditions

These will explain how old someone should be before using a game, what happens to information your child provides, and whether in-game purchases are possible.



Parents playing with children:

42% in the same room
33% virtually



Agree and set expectations

Once you have a good understanding of your child's online gaming, it's time to reach agreement.

Netsafe has found teenagers are aware too much time spent online can negatively impact their lives. They also admit this doesn't mean they will successfully regulate time online without guidance and help of a parent or trusted adult. Younger players typically have even lower levels of self-regulation, and this extends beyond screentime.

Young people may accept destructive behaviours from other players or get drawn into unacceptable ones themselves if it seems normal. Here is a chance to set expectations about what they can tolerate and what they should (virtually) walk away from.

Young people will likely be introduced to games through friends or online recommendations. Your objective is to get them thinking critically about choices they end up making. This is also a chance to agree on the boundaries about games you are comfortable with them playing and the process for deciding which ones to play. Let them know what you need before you'll be able to support their choices.

Set expectations about:

- A balanced amount of time gaming
- The games that are appropriate to use and the functions you are happy for them to use
- How their behaviour may impact fellow gamers
- What type of information is safe to share
- Where they should go for advice, including you, another trusted adult, a teacher or Netsafe

Your approach will be specific to your household and depend on your child's age and stage. What do you feel comfortable discussing will also impact what you agree on

While games have many parental controls available, these are best used alongside online safety education

For further information, visit netsafe.org.nz/agree





Teach some basics

Let your kids know there are simple things they can do to look after themselves while playing.

Most game manufacturers have a safety centre, and you should look at them together with your child and teach them how to use tools available.

Start with how to block people, how to report content and how to use privacy settings. Teach your child the risks of entering personal information, such as their (or your) debit/credit card.

For the most part, gaming is an enjoyable and enriching way to enjoy downtime or compete in a challenge that will provide satisfaction. But parents need to explain that to enjoy gaming, it needs to be safe.

The five tips to help your child thrive are safety tools you can teach:

1 Keep it FUN Gaming is meant to be enjoyable - and sometimes educational. But it has the potential to get in the way of other things. When you sense your child's gaming is starting not to be as fun, suggest a break.

2 Keep it PRIVATE Some information shared publicly can make your child vulnerable to identity theft or grooming. It's important to be cautious when sharing:

- Passwords
- Address of home or school
- Birthdate
- Bank details
- Personal information that could be used to guess security questions

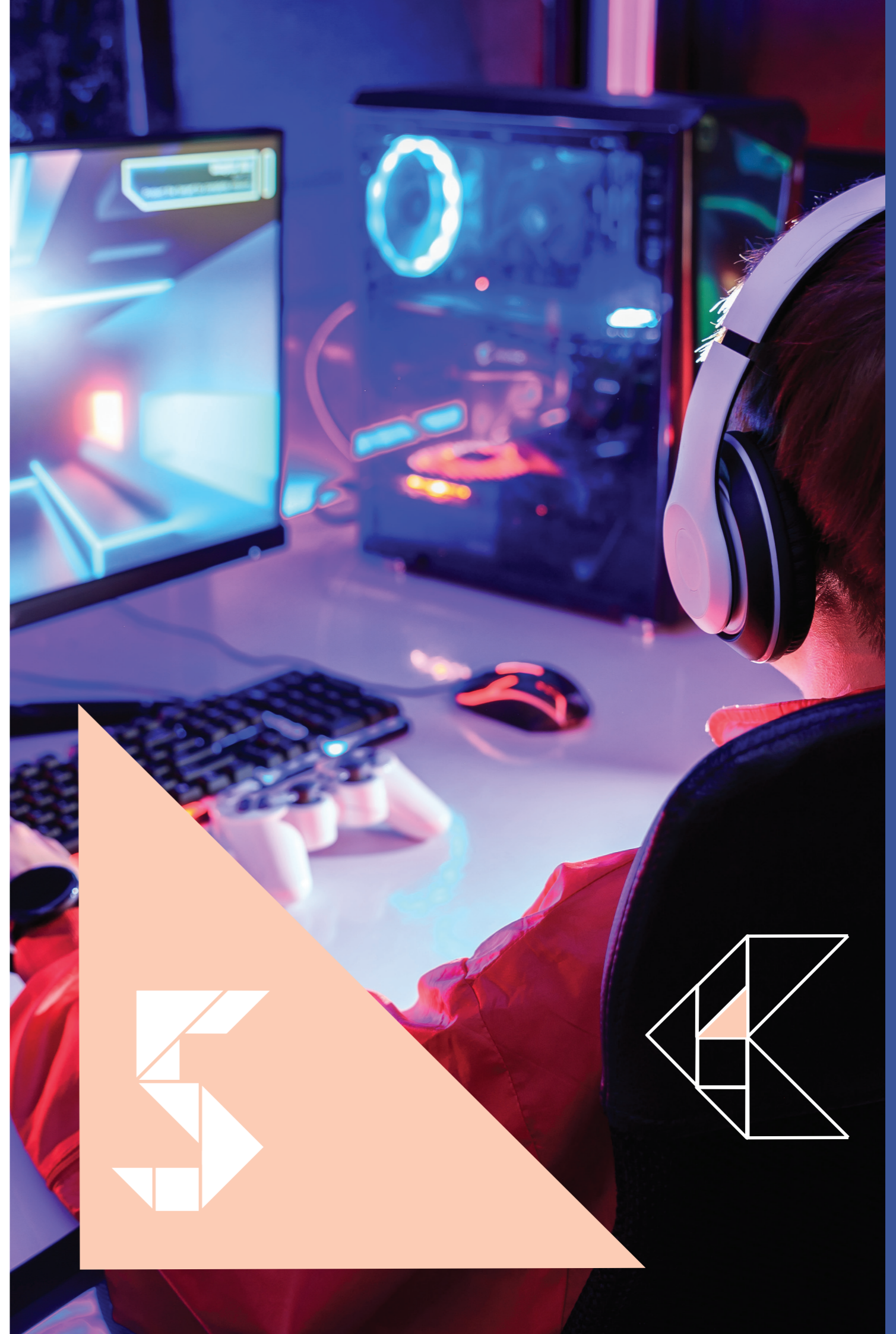
3 Keep it BALANCED

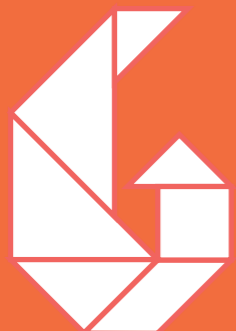
Make sure your child maintains a good range of activities in their life alongside gaming, so they balance offline connections with playing time.

4 Keep it REAL It can seem like common knowledge to adults, but it is hard for children to understand not everyone is who they say. Gaming is based on fictitious personas, so explain while it can be exciting when people want to play, they need to be careful. Talk with your child about games and conversations they share with strangers, why this may not always be safe, and how they should handle tricky situations.

5 Keep it SPORTING

Teach your child to be kind, respectful, and careful when talking to or sharing information with people they don't know. Encourage them to play fairly and always be a good sport.





Role model

Young people always watch what happens around them, so try not to be a hypocrite.

Take a look at the way technology is used by people in your home.

Ask yourself, 'are there patterns, behaviours or activities that might need to be rethought?'. For example, are you on technology at dinner? Are you being courteous with people you are engaging with online? Are you spending long periods of time on your phone or console but asking your child to regulate their usage?

It can be hard to set expectations for family when you are not doing it yourself, and this may cause conflict.

Sometimes it can be useful to explain why you are doing something, such as sending a work email. This allows them to see it as different from their activity online.

For further information, visit netsafe.org.nz/role-model

Plan with them

Young people need to know where to get help.

Let your child know what is available if they are experiencing challenge. Do you want them to talk to you, whānau, a trusted adult, their school or Netsafe?

It is usually a big step when young people ask for help. Netsafe research shows young people choose not to seek support when something goes wrong online. They often ignore the problem or try to fix it themselves, thinking parents will take technology away in response.

If a young person comes to you, focus on fixing the issue, not punishing those involved or confiscating devices - even if they did something wrong. If you remove access to technology, you're less likely to be the first port of call next time something happens.

Many families find it useful to record their expectations in an agreement. On the next page, you will find the Family Safe Online Treaty. This agreement helps to structure the process of setting expectations and planning.

For further information, visit netsafe.org.nz/plan



Family Safe Online Treaty

Netsafe wants all kids and their whānau to have a safe and positive time while using the internet and devices. It can be useful for families to agree on some guidelines so this can be done.

1 KEEP IT KIND

When you are online, think about others and talk or share in a kind way.

2 KEEP IT TO YOURSELF

Keep your passwords and information about yourself or other people safe and private.

3 KEEP IT CAREFUL

Think carefully about what you share and make sure it's something you are proud of and would be happy sharing with someone else face to face.

4 KEEP IT REAL

Not everything you see online is real. It might look or sound real, but some things are made up or fake, so be careful to check or ask a teacher if you're not sure.

5 KEEP IT HONEST

When we copy or use words, pictures and ideas from the internet, we need to make sure we share these things in the right way and follow the rules for sharing things that don't belong to us.

6 KEEP IT FAIR

Make sure you check with others if it is okay to record them, or share photos or videos with them in it. They should have a say in what happens to things that go online if they are in them.

7 KEEP IT RESPONSIBLE

If you bring your own device to school, use it in ways, and at the times that your teacher says it is okay to.

8 KEEP IN MIND

There is free and confidential help available from Netsafe ([netsafe.org.nz](https://www.netsafe.org.nz) or **0508 NETSAFE**) if anyone faces online challenges.

What other guidelines are useful and what will happen if they aren't followed?

If we need help because of a problem with this Treaty we will talk to:

My signature confirms I agree to the guidelines above

Child's signature _____

Date _____

I/we agree to help manage these guidelines fairly. The use of technology deserves respect from everyone and there will be a family discussion if these guidelines are not adhered to. I/we will friend and follow, but will not stalk you online.

Parent/guardian signature _____

Date _____

Get support

There are a variety of places to get support with online safety issues.



Offers a free and confidential online safety service for everyone. It helps people with online bullying, abuse, harassment and other challenges.



Provides practical information and advice on how to keep your information secure. You can also report cyber security problems.



If you or someone else is in immediate danger or if a crime has been committed, call 111 or 105 to report a crime that doesn't require urgent response.



Connect with Netsafe

We keep people safe online by providing free support, education and incident expertise seven days a week.

Contact Netsafe's helpline

Whether you're dealing with online bullying, scams or need advice for yourself or someone else, we can help.

Our service is free, non-judgemental and available every day. You can contact the team in four ways.

Call toll-free 0508 NETSAFE

Email help@netsafe.org.nz

Text 'Netsafe' to 4282

Visit netsafe.org.nz/report

Visit netsafe.org.nz

Our website has information, tips and self-help guides about a range of online safety topics. We offer resources for the education sector and advice about the trends in online safety.

Stay informed

You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter at netsafe.org.nz/newsletter or follow 'NetsafeNZ' on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram to keep up with news, advice and tips.

We keep people safe online



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