



When they've seen confronting content

For parents and carers of children aged 6-14




Calm, research-based steps for when your child sees confronting or age-inappropriate content online.

Discovering that your child has watched something violent, sexual, or frightening can feel confronting. In many cases, exposure happens accidentally through autoplay, peer sharing, or trending clips. Whatever the reason, the way you respond now will set the tone for safety and trust in the future. This playbook gives you calm, research-based steps to help your child process what they saw while keeping your relationship strong.

Coach yourself first

It is normal to feel alarmed. Take three slow breaths, roll your shoulders, sip water, then begin. Children match your nervous system, not your words.



Quick reality check

-  Distressing content is common, even for responsible children.
-  It often appears through autoplay, algorithms, or peer sharing.
-  Your calmness helps your child feel safe again.

You are not in trouble. I want to understand what you saw and how it felt.



What not to do

-  Do not panic or grab the device.
-  Avoid saying "It's fine" or "Forget it." **Dismissal closes the door to trust.**



Open the Conversation Calmly

Choose a quiet time. Sit side by side. Keep your voice soft and steady.

Prompts you can use:

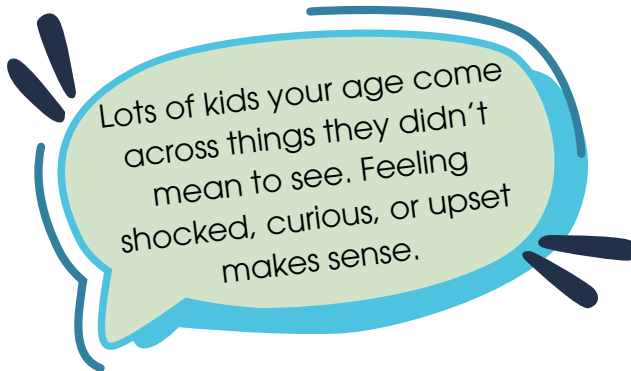
👁️ “What did you see?”

🧠 “How did it make you feel?”

❤️ “Did it make your tummy feel funny or your heart beat fast?” (for younger children)

💬 “How did it make you feel in your body?”
(Some older kids describe body feelings before they find words for emotions, use whichever question feels right for your child).

❓ “Did it pop up, or did someone send it to you?”



Age-specific support

Ages 6–9: Keep it simple and concrete. Clarify real versus pretend.

💬 “Those were actors and effects. It looked real, but you’re safe here with me.”

Ages 10–12: Focus on real-world context and safety.

💬 “News and apps often show the most shocking clips first. If it sits in your mind, let’s talk and reset your feed.”

Ages 13–14: Add critical thinking and digital awareness.

💬 “Some people post shocking things for attention. Algorithms boost what people pause on. Let’s teach your feed what you want to see.”



Handling the Tricky Moments

If they minimise or joke: “Humour can help when something felt a bit much. If the images keep popping back, we’ll handle that together.”

If it was pornography: “You didn’t do anything wrong by seeing it. Porn is made for adults and often shows things that aren’t real care or consent. We can talk about any questions.”

If it was violent or graphic news: “That was a lot to take in. Most people are safe today, and we’ll stop those videos from replaying. If those pictures keep popping into your head, tell me; we can make them smaller together.”



Do a Safety Check Together

Make it teamwork, not surveillance.

📌 Save evidence if someone sent it, including links or usernames.

🚩 Ask, “Did anyone pressure you to watch?” Then practise an exit line: “Not for me, gotta go.”

🕒 Notice patterns: late-night scrolling, conflict moments, certain friends or apps. Plan gentle screen-free wind-downs.

🔧 Adjust settings, turn off autoplay, tighten filters, tap “Not interested.”

Explain algorithms simply

💬 “Apps learn from what we pause on or watch. Changing what we view and tapping ‘Not interested’ helps reset what they show.”



Platform safety steps

Filters reduce risk but can’t block everything. Keep talking and checking in.

YouTube

● **Restricted Mode** – Go to Settings → General → Restricted Mode and switch on to filter most flagged or mature videos.

▶ **Autoplay off** – In Settings → Autoplay, toggle off so new videos don’t roll automatically.

🗑️ **Clear watch history** – Go to Settings → History & privacy → Clear watch history to reset recommendations.

TikTok

👨👩👧👦 **Family Pairing** – Under Settings → Family Pairing, link your account to your child’s to manage screen time, filters, and DMs.

🚫 **Filter keywords** – Go to Settings → Content Preferences → Filter video keywords. Add words such as violence, fight, scary, gore to block those clips.

🏠 **Not interested** – Long-press any upsetting video and tap Not interested or Hide video to retrain the algorithm quickly.

Instagram

⚙️ **Sensitive Content Control** – Open Settings → Content Preferences → Sensitive Content Control, set to Less to reduce graphic or suggestive posts.






💬 **Hide offensive words** – Under Settings → Privacy → Hidden Words, switch on message and comment filters.

🔍 **Tidy the Explore feed** – Long-press a post and tap Not interested. Unfollow or mute accounts that post upsetting content.









Setting New Boundaries

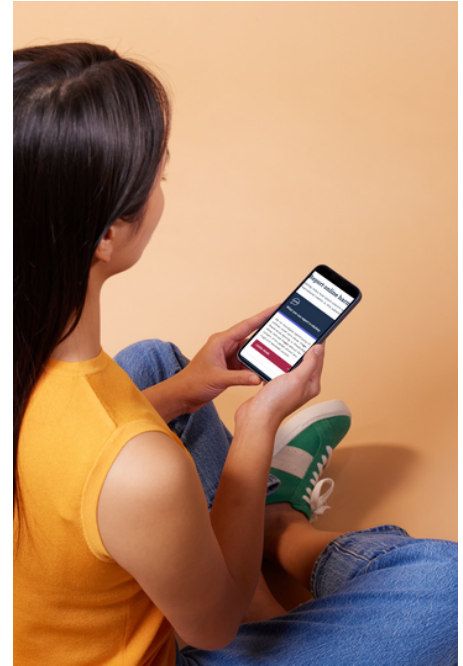
Add to your Digital Family Agreement Kit.

-  Use apps and shows suited to your age.
-   Devices stay out of bedrooms overnight.
-  Choose three words for how you want to feel after watching (calm, curious, entertained) and use them as a click filter.
-  End the day with calming routines, not scrolling.

Coping after exposure






Help their body settle and replace the mental image.

-  Take three slow breaths together, in for four, out for six.
-  Draw the scene smaller or blur it and throw it away.
-  Pat a pet, step outside, feel feet on the ground.
-  Finish with a comforting story or light show before bed.
-  Avoid re-watching or showing friends; that can make the scary memory stronger.
-  “When something feels heavy, doing a soothing thing helps. Let’s pick one together.”







If Harm Has Already Happened

If the content was extreme or distress continues:

-  Save evidence, links, usernames, screenshots.
-  Report on the platform, then block or mute.
-  Use the eSafety Commissioner portal for illegal sexual material, self-harm, or extreme violence.
-  If a peer shared it, contact their caregiver or school with facts, not blame.
-  “You are safe. Thank you for telling me. We’ll work this out together.”

Red flags that need extra support

-  Nightmares or sleep refusal lasting over two weeks.
-  Avoiding devices completely, or compulsively re-watching the clip.
-  Ongoing anxiety, withdrawal, appetite changes, or school refusal.
-  Self-blame or panic spirals.

If these appear, contact your GP or a child psychologist and let the school know.

For immediate help: Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 or Lifeline 13 11 14.



Keeping the Conversation Going

Do short regular check-ins about online life. Ask, “See anything interesting or weird this week?” Praise wise choices. Make it clear you won’t overreact to honesty.

“I care more about helping you than about a rule being broken. You can always talk to me.”

These talks don’t need to be long; a few calm minutes often matter most.

Family prevention checklist

- ✓ Turn off autoplay on all kids’ devices.
- ✓ Use private accounts and filter words in DMs.
- ✓ Follow creators who model kindness and creativity.
- ✓ Keep feeds short before bedtime.
- ✓ Practise reporting and blocking together.

For younger children

Read *Teddy TV* from the Little Citizens series. Teddy’s story helps kids name big feelings after seeing something confronting and turns fear into conversation and comfort.



What Matters Most

No child should feel ashamed for stumbling across confronting content. When you stay calm, talk openly, and set protective boundaries together, you turn a frightening moment into a lesson in resilience, empathy, and safe digital citizenship.



You’ve got this.

“You are safe. You are loved. And together, we’ll figure out what to do if this happens again.”

Dr Cat Horvat

For more support, resources, and courses, visit www.blendedcitizensproject.com.au or

eSafety Commissioner – reporting and guidance