



👁️ **When you discover a concerning conversation with a stranger online**

For parents and carers of young people aged 11-16

Australia's social media ban has changed where risk shows up, not whether it exists. Since the ban, more contact is happening through private messages, gaming chats, group chats, shared logins, and hidden accounts. This means situations like this are often discovered later and are becoming more common.

Discoveries like this are becoming a common occurrence.

This playbook offers calm, practical guidance for when inappropriate or sexual contact online has been discovered.

What this moment is really about

Discovering that your young person is talking to someone they haven't met offline can be confronting.

Australian research shows this is common, not rare.

Around **1 in 4** young people are contacted by someone they don't know online, and many are outside of their human-centred world.

Most of this contact is harmless, but some of it isn't.

Since the social media ban, contact has shifted into private messages, gaming chats, group chats, shared logins, and hidden accounts. This means situations like this are often discovered later.

This is not about bad parenting or broken rules.

When contact becomes sexualised, secretive, coercive, or pressuring, responsibility always sits with the older person.

What matters now is how safety and trust are handled from here.

This is about:

- 🧠 a power imbalance
- 🧠 developmental vulnerability
- 🧠 an older person crossing a serious boundary.

How you respond now will shape whether your young person hides the next scary thing or brings it to you.



Why Bans and Controls Aren't Enough on Their Own

Situations like this highlight the limits of bans.

Rules can reduce access, but they also push behaviour into hidden spaces.

When young people **fear punishment**, they get better at hiding.

When they feel **safe**, they get better at asking for help.

This moment is an opportunity to reinforce:

“Safety matters more than rule-following.”

Open the conversation calmly

Your calm helps regulate their nervous system. Even if you feel panicked or angry inside, a steady voice and relaxed posture help keep them open.

Lead with safety, not consequences.

Helpful language:

- “You’re not in trouble. I’m worried about what someone else did.”
- “I want to understand how this unfolded so I can help keep you safe.”
- “Nothing you did makes this your fault.”



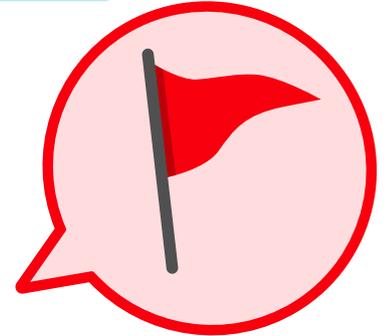
Keep your voice steady. Sit side by side. Slow the moment down. Expect embarrassment, silence, defensiveness, or mixed feelings. These responses are common when young people feel scared or unsure. Listening comes before fixing.



Red Flags That Need Urgent Action

Treat this as high-risk if you notice:

- pressure to keep secrets
- sexualised messages or images
- requests for personal information
- attempts to move platforms or go private
- threats, coercion, or persistence



If sexual content, pressure, threats, or fear of exposure are present, police advice is appropriate.

What To Do Immediately

These steps protect two things at once, your child's safety and your relationship with them.

Do

- Preserve messages, usernames, dates, and platform names.
- Keep the device intact.
- Seek police advice if there is sexual content, pressure, coercion, threats, or fear of exposure.
- Frame all steps as protection, not punishment.

Do not

- Delete messages or accounts before advice is given.
- Contact or confront the other person. Contacting them can escalate pressure, alert them, or lead to evidence being deleted.
- Demand full explanations immediately.
- Threaten permanent bans in the heat of the moment.

Slowing down protects evidence and trust.

Images and Evidence

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

If explicit images are found:

- Do not forward, save, or screenshot the images themselves.
- Let police view them directly on the device.
- Screenshots should be limited to text, usernames, dates, and requests.

This protects your **child and you**.

If you're unsure what to save, pause and seek advice rather than deleting anything.



Adult intervention and device access

Young people often hear “police” or “adults stepping in” as punishment.

Reframe it clearly:

- “You’re not in trouble.”
- “Adults step in when behaviour isn’t safe.”
- “This is about protection.”

Even if an account seems anonymous or overseas, reporting still matters.

Patterns across reports help protect others.

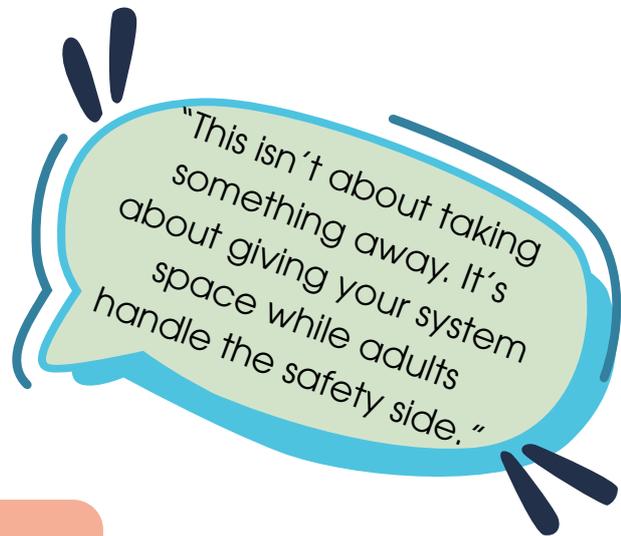
Managing Device Access After Harmful Contact

Decisions about device access after harmful contact can either support safety and regulation, or unintentionally increase secrecy and distress. The police may take the phone while they conduct investigations. You will need to be prepared for this.

A break from the phone can be regulating.
 When a phone is removed, young people still need social connection, predictability, and reassurance, otherwise distress and secrecy increase.
 Handled as punishment, it fuels secrecy.
 Handled as protection, it reduces intensity and pressure.

Plan what replaces the phone:

- predictable routines
- safe social contact via family-managed channels
- connection, not isolation.



Making choices together

Safety grows through shared visibility, not surveillance.

Talk together about where contact can happen and how to ask for help early.

Map contact routes together:

- messaging apps
- gaming chats and DMs
- group chats
- shared or secondary accounts
- alternate emails.

“Let’s look at where people can contact you, so we can make safer choices together.”

Moving forward

In the weeks ahead, watch for:

- ongoing sleep disruption
- withdrawal or school avoidance
- shame or heightened anxiety
- sudden phone avoidance or fixation

If these signs persist or intensify, seek support from your GP, school wellbeing staff, or a psychologist.

Support for Families in Australia

- eSafety Commissioner
- ThinkUKnow
- Crime Stoppers NSW
- Bravehearts Parent Line 1800 272 831
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800



What Matters Most

The ban changed the landscape, not the need for connection.

If your young person learns one thing from this moment, let it be this:

“When something feels wrong, I can tell my parent or carer and they will help me.”

That belief is one of the strongest protective factors we have.

You don't need perfect control to keep your young person safe. You need connection, consistency, and calm leadership at home.



You've got this.



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

🔗 eSafety Commissioner – reporting and guidance