

Teens and online dating

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Advice and support for parents

For teens, dating online isn't just about dating apps - it's about how relationships develop through social media, online games and private messaging.

Get advice to equip teens with the tools they need to make safer choices about romantic interactions online.



Conversations to have

Discuss the risks of online relationships



Discuss the risks surrounding online dating such as grooming and the signs to look out for. This can help them avoid unsafe situations. Empower them to say 'no' or shut down conversations that make them uncomfortable.

Make sure they never send money or give out financial information to anyone they meet online. Be extra cautious should someone ask them to do so.

Explore healthy relationships

Talk about trust, intimacy and consent along with what is and isn't okay in relationships. Discuss what a healthy relationship looks like, including the risks and pressures of sharing nude images and the importance of respecting boundaries.



Talk about privacy

Encourage them to keep personal information private, such as their location, address and their school.

Use privacy settings across social accounts and turn off location services to control what others can see.



Talk about AI in dating

Explain that some profiles on dating apps or social media might be AI rather than a real person. Teach them to identify AI-generated images and text patterns and look out for unusual responses.

Some teens might also start to view an AI chatbot or companion as an actual romantic partner. Make sure they know that while AI responses might seem human, they lack human empathy and can't offer real emotional support.

Actions to take



If they are already dating, talk openly

If your teen is in a relationship where they're communicating online, stay calm and have an open conversation about their experience.

Ask how they met and if they have friends in common.

Remind them to think carefully about what they share online and encourage them to only share things they would be comfortable with friends or family seeing.

Check minimum age requirements

Most dating apps are designed for adults. If your child is using a dating app for adults, they are at risk of grooming and coercion.

Teens might also use 'meet up' apps or social media platforms where age minimums can vary from 13+ to 16+ to adults only.

Check which apps they're using to start conversations around why age restrictions are in place and to help prevent them coming to harm.

13+

16+

Agree on safety rules and boundaries



Help them learn skills that build their critical thinking and digital resilience when it comes to dating online:

- Create a space where they feel comfortable talking about their digital life by having regular check-ins without judgement.
- Encourage them to share details with you about any dates they're planning offline or online (such as through a video call or meet-up in an online game).
- Remind them not to meet up with online friends alone and to choose a public place with plenty of people around.
- Sexual communication such as sending nude images is illegal for anyone under 16. Make sure your teen knows that sharing this content themselves is against the law, even if they've consented.
- Decide on a plan for if they need help such as texting you a secret emoji or phrase, or having an 'escape route' when out in public.

Respect your teen's space

If they're of age and you feel they're mentally and physically mature, it's important to give your teenager the space they need to safely develop their independence.

Ask them about their experiences and listen to their perspectives to support more open communication.

If you are concerned that they are being groomed or are involved in a harmful relationship, then take action to keep them safe. If they're in immediate danger, call 999.

Just as much as you want them to share with you, make sure you share with them. Explain why you're worried and have regular check-ins to show interest and support.



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