Supporting your child with SEND to thrive online
Healthy relationships

Thrive Online

💡 Things to know

A healthy relationship is when two or more people behave, communicate and treat each other with kindness and respect.

Some young people might find it easier to communicate with others online, so it's important they know what healthy relationships are, and how to manage them. Often, this relies on reading other people's emotions or behaviour, which can be a challenge for some young people with SEND, particularly online. Talking about what makes a healthy relationship, how these should make us feel, and discussing appropriate behavior online will enable your child to understand the difference between what is healthy and unhealthy.

A healthy relationship:

- is respectful of your choices and feelings
- is when everyone in the relationship is treated equally
- should make you feel safe and happy

An unhealthy relationship:

- no longer makes you feel safe or happy
- pressures you to do something you don't want to do
- is when someone says inappropriate or hurtful things

👍 Things to do

Talk to your child about their online friendships. Ask your child who they talk to and how they spend time with others online. Ask them how they know the people they talk to online. Are they people they know offline too, or do they only know them online? You could write a list or draw a diagram to highlight these people.

Support your child with their relationships online. Encourage your child to always be kind and respectful to others, both offline and online. Explain that they should treat people online the same way they would like to be treated. Even though they might not be able to see them, they are communicating with real people who have real feelings.

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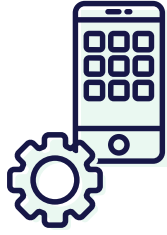
Explore the settings available on your child's devices and the apps they use. These settings can help young people to manage the way they communicate with others online. For example, changing certain settings to 'friends only' allows them to control who can see and interact with the content they are posting. **Internet Matters** provides some helpful guides to show you how to do this.
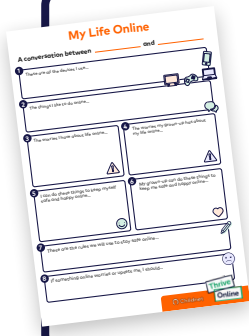
Set clear boundaries and be consistent with the rules. Use Childnet's **My Life Online** resource to help your child understand the differences between a healthy and unhealthy online relationship. Alternatively, you could make a chart and add key words from the circles above, together with familiar emojis, pictures or symbols. Display this somewhere visible and revisit often. In time, your agreement (or chart) could also include acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online within a romantic relationship.

Discuss warning signs. Develop the above circles further by adding symbols or emojis to help your child recognise feelings that are associated with an unhealthy relationship. Explain that this is when someone online makes them feel uncomfortable, worried, scared, or sad. Being aware of these feelings as warning signs could help your child know when an online relationship isn't good for them.

Be open to change. As your child becomes older, they might want more privacy, especially if they have started a romantic relationship. Whilst it might seem easier to stop something from developing, instead remind your child of the boundaries you discussed. Restricting your child's online activity may mean they find other ways of accessing it and be more secretive about their online behaviour. They may also be more reluctant to come and speak to you if they have an issue. Remember it's never too late to set boundaries or to amend the ones you have already set.
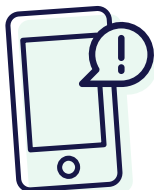
Know when and how to report. Whether you are concerned about the identity of your child's online friend, or if that person has sent or is pressuring your child to send inappropriate content, it's important that you know how to respond quickly to keep your child safe. You can find out how to make an online report **here**.

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Things to say

"Let's have a chat about healthy relationships and what this means."

Ask your child about the healthy relationships they have in their offline life, such as their close friendships or relationships with other family members, and list the good things about these. Again, you could use the circles above to help with this conversation. Explain that healthy relationships make a person feel safe and happy, and online friendships or romantic relationships should feel like this too.

"Remember to never share any personal information with someone you only know online."

Explain that not everyone online is who they say they are and that friends made online are still strangers, no matter how long you have been chatting to them. Even if someone online seems friendly, explain to your child they should never share personal information, such as their home address or where they go to school. Reminf them to always tell a trusted adult if someone they only know online ever asks for intimate photos or videos.

"Getting involved in arguments online could make things worse."

Explain why it is important not to reply or retaliate to an unkind or mean comment online. Suggest other things they could do instead, such as leave the chat, take time to cool down and ask a trusted adult for help. Also mention that being a good friend does not necessarily mean getting involved in their arguments.

"No one should pressure you to do something you don't want to do – it's okay to say 'no'."

Talk to your child about mutual respect and explain the meaning of giving and obtaining consent. Help them learn how to say no confidently and politely if someone ever asks them to do, or send, something that makes them feel uncomfortable.

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> **Not everyone finds the same things funny.**

Sometimes, things meant as a joke online can be upsetting to other people. It's important to recognise when this happens, take responsibility for it and apologise. If they know the person offline, this is best done privately or face-to-face.

> **Always tell a trusted adult if someone or something worries or upsets you online.**

Even if they are embarrassed at first, explain that telling someone is always the right thing to do because, the sooner it is dealt with, the sooner it can stop. Reassure your child that you are always there for them. Remind them that they should always tell you or another trusted adult, if they are worried or upset about an online relationship.