



Personal safety for children and young people

# A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

*Empowering adults to help keep children and young people safe from sexual abuse and exploitation.*

**Bravehearts**  
bravehearts.org.au

# Bravehearts

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**Bravehearts dedicates this resource to all survivors of child sexual abuse and their supporting families, carers and friends.**

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Bravehearts acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which we work, and recognises their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present and extend respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and hope and believe that we can move together to a place of equity, justice and partnership.



**TRIGGER WARNING:** This booklet contains information about child sexual abuse and may be triggering for survivors of this crime. If you or someone else is in need of information or support, please contact Bravehearts on freecall 1800 272 831 (Mon-Fri, 8:30am-4:30pm AEST).



**Bravehearts is endorsed by the eSafety Commissioner as a Trusted eSafety Provider.** To learn more visit [esafety.gov.au/trusted-providers](https://esafety.gov.au/trusted-providers). The eSafety website provides a range of information and resources for various audiences.



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# About Bravehearts

**Bravehearts is an Australian child protection organisation dedicated to the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse.**

**Our Mission** is to provide a coordinated and holistic approach to the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse.

**Our Vision** is a world where people, communities and systems all work together to protect children from sexual abuse.

Bravehearts pursues our **Mission and Vision** through:

- **Personal Safety Education:** We work to prevent child sexual abuse by educating children and young people about personal safety, including body ownership, cyber-safety and consent. Our flagship program is Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure (for children aged 3 to 8).
- **Counselling and Support:** We work to treat child sexual abuse through the provision of affordable counselling and support for children (and their non-offending family members) affected by this crime, a national Information and Support Line (1800 272 831), case management for adult survivors seeking Redress, and therapeutic intervention for children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours.
- **Child Protection Training and Advisory:** We work to prevent child sexual abuse through our online child protection training courses for individuals and organisations.
- **Research and Reform:** We work to prevent and treat child sexual abuse by ensuring our education programs, counselling services and training is backed by current, evidence-based research, and by advocating for legislative reform that will work in the best interests of children, young people and survivors of child sexual abuse.

Bravehearts is guided by our **3 Strategic Piers:**

- **Educate:** All children and young people receive evidence-based, age-appropriate personal safety education. All adults are trained, aware and motivated to protect children.
- **Empower:** Adequate specialist counselling and support is available to all child and adult survivors of child sexual abuse and those who support them.
- **Protect:** All systems of community and government engage effectively and respond at all times in the best interests of the child.

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# How to use this guide

As parents, carers, and trusted adults in our children's lives, the most important role we have is to keep them safe.

As protectors, we want to shield our children from harm, but the reality is that we cannot be with them 24/7. What we can do however, is build resiliency in our children, which includes teaching them how to identify and respond to unsafe situations.

This guide aims to equip you with knowledge on what to look for and what to do when it comes to protecting children and young people from sexual abuse.

It's vital that as parents and carers, you know the indicators of abuse so you can identify potential early signs that may indicate harm has occurred or is occurring. These indicators may present themselves through the things children say or do, as well as physical signs.

When harm (or the risk of harm) has been identified, it's vital that we respond effectively.

Understanding how to respond to a child or young person who discloses harm, as well as who you can go to with your concerns, can improve the long term outcomes for a child or young person at risk.

As well as equipping you with the knowledge you need to help keep your children and young people safe, this guide aims to empower you to have conversations with your children and young people about personal safety, online safety and consent.

These conversations should not be one-off talks. They should happen often and from a young age, so children can learn the right language to speak up if they ever find themselves in an unsafe situation.

## WE WOULD LOVE YOUR FEEDBACK

We hope this guide proves to be a useful tool and we welcome any feedback you may wish to provide to help us continually improve on this resource. To provide feedback, please contact us at [comms@bravehearts.org.au](mailto:comms@bravehearts.org.au).



# About child sexual abuse

## What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse and exploitation is any act of inappropriately exposing or subjecting a child (under the age of 18) to sexual activity, contact or behaviour by an adult or other young person for the purposes of gratification (sexual or otherwise).

Dove and Miller (2007) identifies child sexual abuse as: 'Any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other; forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act. It also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism and communication in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.'

Child sexual abuse is a global problem that knows no physical, financial, socioeconomic, geographic, cultural or gender boundaries. All forms of child sexual abuse are a profound violation of the human rights of the child and a crime under law. The impacts of this crime are far-reaching for children, families and communities.

Children who have been sexually abused can suffer a range of psychological and behavioural problems, ranging from mild to severe, both in the short and long term. Effects of the abuse can vary; however, children who are believed when they first disclose and are given the right type of therapeutic support, are less likely to endure long term negative impacts.

## Child sexual abuse topline statistics

- More than **1 in 4 Australians (28.5%)** have experienced child sexual abuse.<sup>1</sup>
- More than **1 in 3 Australian girls and almost 1 in 5 boys** experience child sexual abuse<sup>2</sup>.
- Among Australian children who have been sexually abused, for **more than three-quarters (78%)**, it happened more than once<sup>3</sup>.
- In **up to 90%** of child sexual abuse cases, the offender is known to the family<sup>4</sup>.
- In **more than half of cases (approximately 52%)**, the onset of child sexual abuse is from 0 to 8 years<sup>5</sup>.
- **1 in 8 children** has sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they first met online<sup>6</sup>
- Approximately **1 in 3 cases** of child sexual abuse are instigated by other young people<sup>7</sup>.



1-3) Haslam D, Mathews B, Pacella R, Scott JG, Finkelhor D, Higgins DJ, Meinck F, Erskine HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence D, Malacova E. (2023). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology. 4) Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017; Quadara, Nagy, Higgins & Siegel, 2015 5) McElvaney et al., 2020 6) Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2022 7) Der Bedrosian, 2018; McKibbin, 2017; Finkelhor, Omrod & Chaffin, 2009 8) Watson & Halford, 2010; Tarczon & Quadara, 2012; Quadara et al., 2015; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017 9) Helton, Gochez-Kerr & Gruber, 2018; World Health Organisation, 2018 10) Christensen & Jansen, 2019. 9. El-Murr, 2017

## Common myths about child sexual abuse

### **MYTH Parents are at fault for the sexual abuse.**

Parents often feel guilt and blame themselves for not protecting their child. However, this attitude shifts blame and enables offenders to avoid responsibility for their actions. The offender is always the person who is responsible for the sexual abuse.

### **MYTH The stranger is the danger.**

In child sexual abuse cases, up to 90% of offenders are known to the child and family<sup>8</sup>.

### **MYTH Children with disabilities are less likely to be abused.**

Research shows that children and young people with disabilities are up to four times more likely to be abused as they may not have the language or understanding to communicate what is happening to them<sup>9</sup>.

### **MYTH Children who are being sexually abused will tell someone immediately.**

There can be many barriers to a child disclosing sexual abuse. Perpetrators work hard at ensuring their victims remain silent, using many different tactics. The result is that a child who is being sexually abused may experience fear, confusion, guilt, shame and sadness, making it difficult for them to disclose.

### **MYTH Only children from low socio-economic backgrounds are vulnerable to sexual abuse.**

All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse, regardless of their background.

### **MYTH Children who are sexually abused will hate the perpetrator, so it will be easy to recognise if the child is being harmed.**

If a child is being sexually abused by a parent, loved-one or caregiver, they will often be confused by the behaviour and struggle with conflicting emotions. A child may still view the perpetrator as a loved one and may not outwardly show any anger or resentment towards them.

### **MYTH Children and young people lie about sexual abuse.**

Although children may retract their report, this is commonly due to shame, confusion, fear of consequences or other threats that occur after the initial report has been made. Pressure is mounted on a child following disclosure. Consequences of disclosures can include family breakdown, parent distress, and other effects. Retracting a statement may be a child's attempt to return their situation to normal, rather than an indication that they were lying. This is why it is so important that a child is supported and believed after a disclosure is made.

### **MYTH Children can misinterpret and wrongly accuse an adult of sexual abuse.**

Children often disclose long after the abuse has started. The offender often uses behaviours such as 'accidental touching' or tickling to minimise their behaviour and blame the child. A child's disclosure should always be acknowledged and believed.

### **MYTH All child sex offenders are male.**

It is important to be aware there are both male and female child sex offenders. Although prevalence rates are variable, 2% to 12% of child sexual abuse crimes are committed by women<sup>10</sup>.

### **MYTH Children and young people cannot be sexually harmed by other children or young people.**

Australian studies find that 30–60% of child sexual abuse is carried out by other children and young people, and most young people target younger children or peers, and know their victim<sup>9</sup>. Preventing child sexual abuse requires us to acknowledge this uncomfortable truth and be aware that it is not only adults who can sexually harm children or young people.

# Effects and indicators of child sexual abuse

## Effects of child sexual abuse

Children and adolescents who have been sexually abused can suffer a range of psychological and behavioural problems, from mild to severe, in both the short and long term. These effects vary depending upon the circumstances of the abuse and the child's developmental stage.

Depending on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, and the duration of the sexual harm, subsequent relational trauma could affect the victim's ability to connect with others and themselves. Their personality and behaviours might change markedly from what they were prior to the sexual abuse.

The manipulative nature of grooming that many sexually harmful people use to get close to their victims can cause ongoing thought distortions, self-identity issues, relational harm and isolation of the child.

## Potential short-term effects

- Increased illness, body aches or other physical complaints
- Poor attendance or performance at school
- Difficulty concentrating or memory loss
- Mood changes
- Regressive behaviours
- Sleeping and eating disorders
- Lack of self esteem
- Nightmares
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Self-hatred or reduced self esteem
- Disinhibited behaviour
- Zoning out or not listening



## Potential long-term effects

- Suicidal ideation
- Post-traumatic stress
- Sexual difficulties
- Inability to form lasting relationships
- Identity difficulties
- Relationship problems
- Parenting difficulties
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- The development of violent behaviour
- The development of criminal behaviour

A parent or carer's belief, support and actions to stop the harm after a child's disclosure have an impact on the child's resilience and recovery from the sexual abuse. If a child is not believed and supported appropriately after a disclosure, it can lead to a higher level of relational trauma for the child leading to significantly more negative health and mental health outcomes in the long term.

A systematic meta-review of problems reported by survivors of child sexual abuse found that abuse is associated with many different problems across five primary domains: medical, psychological, sexual, repeated (self-)harm, and other problems. The reported outcomes have been found mostly independent of moderating variables such as frequency of the abuse, relationship to perpetrator and type of control group<sup>1</sup>.

Adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse may experience sexual disturbance or dysfunction, depression and anxiety. Anxiety, fear, and suicidal ideas and behaviours are more likely in instances where the perpetrator used force and threat of force.

The age of onset of the abuse, duration and outcome is characteristic of higher trauma symptom levels. Longer duration of abuse is associated with a greater impact on the child's identity, and increased survival mechanisms and the use of force or threat of force are associated with greater harm.

1. Nagtegaal & Boonmann, 2021

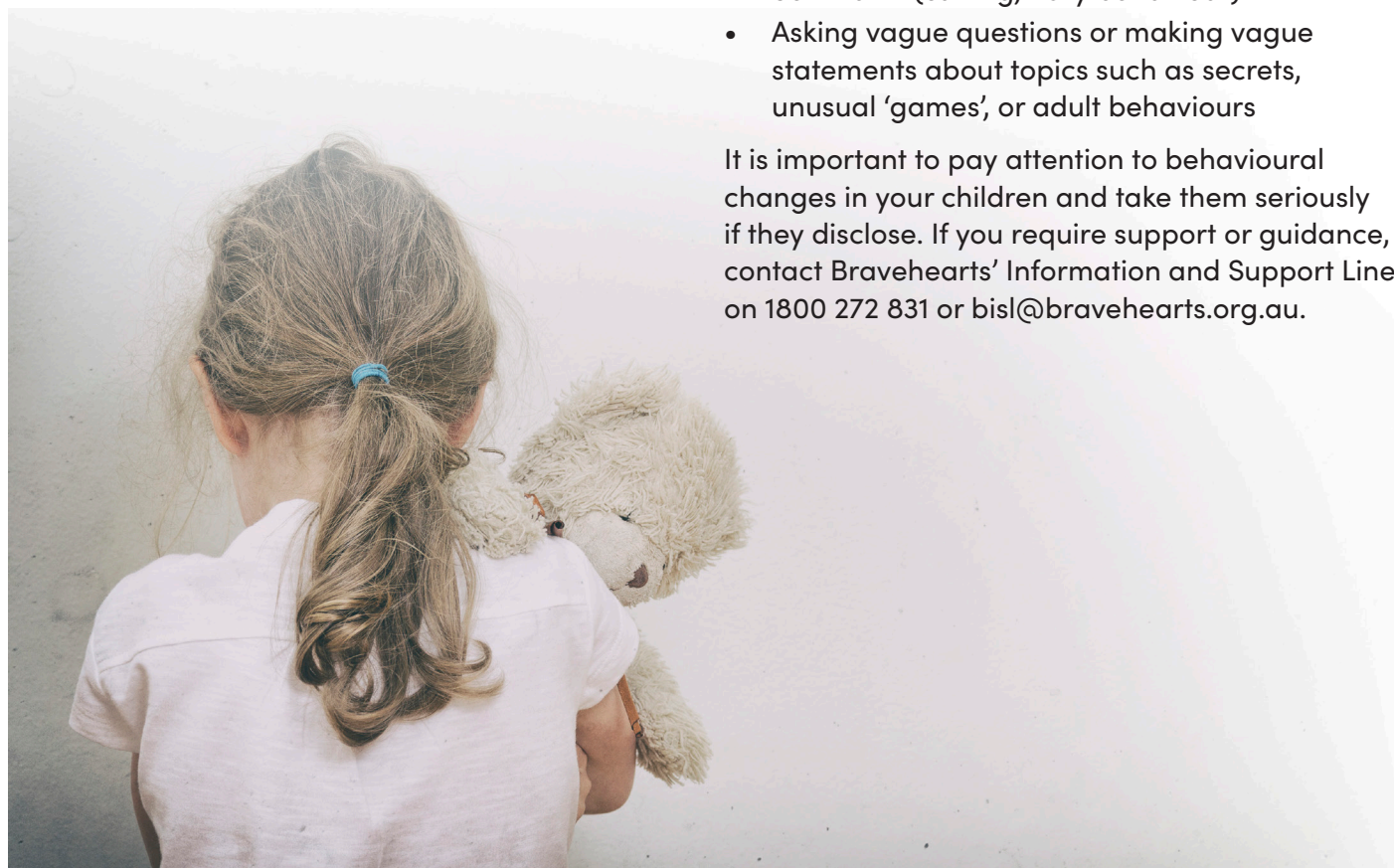


## Indicators of child sexual abuse

Children and adolescents who have been sexually abused can display a range of signs and symptoms. The signs of sexual abuse can vary depending on the child's developmental stage, and the circumstances of the abuse, such as how frequent the abuse is, who is inflicting the abuse and what kind of abuse is happening.

When a child is sexually abused, they might not tell anyone about the abuse, for a variety of reasons. Whilst there are signs and symptoms that may indicate sexual abuse has occurred, it is important to note that the presence of some of the signs does not confirm that sexual abuse has occurred. Some children might show many of the signs and others might show few or none at all.

The experience of child sexual abuse can change the way children and young people understand their world, the people in it and where they belong. After sexual abuse, a child or young person's understanding of themselves and the world can become distorted, and create mistrust, fear, and betrayal. Their personality and behaviours may change noticeably from what they were prior to the sexual abuse.



## Potential indicators of child sexual abuse

- The child is quieter or more distant than usual
- The child is clingier than usual
- Unusual or new fears, sometimes around touch, being alone, being with a particular person or in a particular place
- Difficulty concentrating or with memory, zoning out, seeming distracted or not listening
- Eating, sleeping or hygiene changes
- Regressive behaviours such as bed-wetting or soiling after being toilet trained, acting or wanting to be treated like a baby/younger child again
- Showing knowledge of sexual behaviour beyond their developmental age
- Sexual themes in artwork, stories, play etc.
- 'Acting out' behaviours (aggression, destructive behaviours, truanting behaviour)
- 'Acting in' behaviours (withdrawal from friends and family, depression)
- Problems with friends and schoolwork/attendance
- Vague symptoms of illness such as headache or tummy ache
- Self-harm (cutting, risky behaviour)
- Asking vague questions or making vague statements about topics such as secrets, unusual 'games', or adult behaviours

It is important to pay attention to behavioural changes in your children and take them seriously if they disclose. If you require support or guidance, contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831 or [bisl@bravehearts.org.au](mailto:bisl@bravehearts.org.au).

# Recognising and responding to grooming

## What is grooming?

Grooming describes the preparatory stage of child sexual abuse, often undertaken to gain the trust and/or compliance of the child or young person and to establish secrecy and silence to avoid disclosure.

A child or young person's parents/carers or other significant adults (including organisations) may also be groomed by someone intending to harm a child. Grooming may occur in person or online.

Being aware of the signs of grooming better equips us to understand the steps we can take to keep children as safe as possible.

The manipulative nature of grooming that perpetrators use to get close to their victims can cause ongoing thought distortions, self-identity issues, relational harm and isolation of the child.

## Grooming may cause a child to:

- feel as though they have an important and special relationship with the person who is harming them;
- experience confusion over the nature of their relationship;
- internalise the abuse as their fault, feeling responsibility for any harm experienced and fearing they will be blamed, punished, or not believed;
- fear that they will be separated from their family or home if they speak out; and/or
- believe that disclosure will cause harm to someone or something they love and care for, such as family members or pets.

Grooming includes a range of behaviours and/or verbal or written communications, with the child or young person, or with significant adults, with the intention of facilitating sexual contact with the child or young person and preventing disclosure.

Online grooming can take place through phones and on interactive platforms including chat and instant messaging apps, social media, and gaming. Perpetrators use interactive platforms as a gateway to initiate contact with a child.

## Grooming may take a number of forms:

- **Building the child's trust:** Using presents, special attention, treats, spending time together and playing games with non-sexual physical contact.
- **Favouritism:** The offender treats the child as an adult; treating them differently and making them feel like a unique friend, making the child feel more special than others.
- **Gaining the trust of the child's carer/s:** Careful to be 'seen' as a close, caring and reliable relative or friend of the family.
- **Isolation (from family, friends):** To ensure secrecy and lessen chances of disclosure or belief.
- **Intimidation and secrecy:** The offender may use coercion e.g., threatening looks and body language, glares, stalking and rules of secrecy.
- **'Testing the waters' or boundary violation:** 'Innocent' touching, gradually developing into 'accidental' sexual contact.
- **Shaping the child's perceptions:** The child is often confused as to what is acceptable and can take on self-blame for the situation, as his/her viewpoint can become totally distorted.

It can be challenging to establish if a child is being groomed until after sexual abuse has occurred, as a perpetrator grooming a child often displays similarities of genuine caring behaviour. If you have any concerns and wish to talk with one of our trained staff, contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831 or [bisl@bravehearts.org.au](mailto:bisl@bravehearts.org.au).



# Responding to disclosures of abuse

Your response to any disclosure of abuse can be the first step in stopping the harm and protecting the child from further harm. Whilst an initial response may vary depending on circumstances, it is important that when a child or young person makes a disclosure of sexual abuse, they are believed.

Believing the child is an essential step towards helping them feel safe. Responses may consist of implementing protective strategies, engaging in appropriate support services, and making reports to relevant authorities.

When a child or young person makes a disclosure of sexual abuse it is important to acknowledge that they have acted with bravery, as it can be very difficult for them to disclose. Whilst making a disclosure, a child/young person might feel scared, guilty, ashamed, angry, confused, or powerless. These emotions are normal and should be validated.

## Barriers to disclosure

Offenders put a great deal of time and effort into ensuring the child remains silent. Some of the reasons a child may have trouble disclosing include:

- The offender has told them not to tell, often with accompanying threats such as, “they will take you away from your family if you tell”.
- The child thinks they will be in trouble.
- They feel ashamed or guilty.
- They feel that no one will believe them.

### IMPORTANT

If you think your child (or a child you know) is being groomed or sexually abused, please report to Police on 000 or child protective services (details on page 30 of this booklet).

You may also wish to contact Bravehearts on 1800 272 831 or [bisl@bravehearts.org.au](mailto:bisl@bravehearts.org.au) if you are unsure or want advice.

## What to do if a child or young person discloses to you

If a child or young person discloses child sexual abuse to you, try to follow these steps:

1. **Listen:** Pay attention to what they are saying. Allow the child to share what they are comfortable with in their own words.
2. **Affirm:** Tell them you believe them and it's not their fault.
3. **Support:** Help the child to cope with their feelings. Do what you can to help the child feel safe.
4. **Safety:** Let them know you will do all you can to help them, this might include telling someone who can keep them safe. Though this may upset the child, it is very important that you act in the child's best interest.
5. **Document:** Write down everything they tell you and use the child's exact words as best as you can.
  - **DO NOT** use or ask leading questions.
  - **DO NOT** force a child to talk.
  - **DO NOT** make promises to the child/young person that you may not be able to keep.
  - **DO ACT** on your obligations and report as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities.

## What to do if you suspect a child or young person is being harmed

Sometimes a child or young person's behaviour or words may lead you to suspect or become concerned that the child is unsafe or being harmed. In this situation, it is important that you:

- Do not frighten the child or younger person by asking confronting questions.
- Do not ask leading questions of the child/young person.
- Let the child or young person know that you are there for them if they ever need to talk.
- Record your concerns including any behavioural observations or conversations you may have had with the child or young person.
- Follow your obligations and report as soon as practically possible to relevant authorities.

# Personal safety education for children

## Why teach your child personal safety?

Teaching children and young people simple strategies about keeping safe, can help them build confidence, resilience and empower them to be safe in a variety of situations. Although it may be daunting to educate children and young people about personal safety, all it takes is the willingness to start.

### Benefits of personal safety education:

- Can reduce the likelihood of a child entering into an unsafe situation.
- Clearly demonstrates to the child how to respond to an unsafe situation.
- Increases a child's sense of confidence and in doing so, increases their resiliency.
- Increases a child's knowledge of their personal rights i.e., "I have the right to feel safe with people."
- Increases the likelihood that the child will speak out if they feel unsafe and tell someone they trust.
- Can interrupt or prevent grooming.

## How to talk to your child about personal safety

- Speaking with your child about personal safety should not be a one-off conversation. Rather, create opportunities that allow talking about personal safety to be part of an ongoing dialogue between you and your child. Always let your child know you are there for them, and keeping them safe is your number one priority.
- It is recommended that you teach your child the anatomically correct names for their private parts. Emphasise that those parts are private and belong to them.
- Try not to scare or alarm your child. Speak calmly and confidently, keeping a neutral, natural tone, ensuring that you allow time for your child to process the information and ask questions. Never make them feel ashamed or embarrassed about sexuality or body parts.

## The 3 rules of personal safety

Parents should instill in their children the following three personal safety rules. These three rules form an important part of Bravehearts' personal safety program for young children, Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure, where they are known as 'Ditto's 3 Rules for Keeping Safe.'

### 1. We all have the right to feel safe with people

This rule teaches children and young people that they have the right to feel safe and secure where they live, play, and learn, and that no one has the right to make them do something that makes them feel unsafe or unsure.

### 2. It's OK to say 'NO' if you feel unsafe or unsure

This rule teaches children and young people that it is OK to stand up for themselves and to be assertive if something doesn't feel right.

### 3. Nothing is so yucky that you can't tell someone about it

One of the reasons that children and young people fail to disclose harm is because they are afraid of getting into trouble. This rule helps to encourage them to speak to a trusted adult, even if something seems scary or terrible.

### Learn more about Bravehearts Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure program and resources!

To learn more about Bravehearts' personal safety program and resources for young children, Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure, please scan the QR code below to go to the Education section of the Bravehearts website.





**Pictured: Bravehearts Education Facilitator and Ditto.**

### **Ditto's 3 Rules and Safety Team**

Repetition helps young children when they are learning something new. Therefore, going over 'Ditto's 3 Rules' together regularly with your child will make it easier for your child to learn and retain the information.

A good place to begin is the activity we have provided on the following page. Further to this, several resources are available to purchase on [bravehearts.org.au](https://bravehearts.org.au) that will assist you with teaching your children personal safety.

Reflected in Ditto's Rule number three and explored throughout the Ditto program, is the important personal safety concept of identifying trusted adults - people the child feels safe to talk to if they ever feel unsafe or unsure.

We have provided the My Safety Team activity in this guide for you to work through with your child (see page 21). This will help them identify several trusted adults they can talk to.

Revisiting Ditto's Rules and My Safety Team will provide opportunities for you to have a discussion with your child around keeping safe.

Regularly checking in and asking how your child is feeling and what is going on, helps to keep open lines of communication, reinforcing that you are there for your child no matter how yucky something may seem.

It is also a great opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have including any changes in their behaviour you may have noticed.

# ACTIVITY: Ditto's 3 Rules

Work with your child while they colour in the three activity worksheets and write the names of, or draw people that give them a safe feeling. Then, recap Ditto's 3 Rules together and discuss each rule with your child.

Once coloured, display the rules in a place at home where they can be seen and recalled together.

**RULE 1 We all have the right to feel safe with people:** Kids have the right to feel safe and secure where they live, play, and learn with the people that surround them.

**RULE 2 It's OK to say 'NO' if you feel unsafe or unsure:** It can be difficult for some children to speak up confidently and say 'no' if someone is making them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. This rule teaches kids that it is OK to stand up for themselves and to be assertive if something doesn't feel right.

**RULE 3 Nothing is so yucky that you can't tell someone about it:** Encourage your child to speak to a trusted adult, even if something seems terrible or they were asked to keep it a secret. This rule also leads well into the Safety Team activity.



## QUICK TIPS

- If you have personally experienced child sexual abuse this may be triggering. The best thing you can do for your child and yourself is to talk to someone who can help. Please call Bravehearts' Support Line on 1800 272 831 for information and advice.
- We never want to scare or alarm children. Speak calmly and confidently, keeping a neutral, natural tone, ensuring that you allow ample time for your child to process the information and ask questions.
- Never make a child feel ashamed or embarrassed about sexuality or body parts.
- Know that speaking with your child about personal safety should not be a one-off conversation. Create opportunities that allow talking about personal safety to be an ongoing dialogue. Always let your child know you are there for them and keeping them safe and protecting them is your number one priority.
- Remember that most adults are safe. Talking to children about personal safety is about empowering them to be safe, not scaring them.





# Ditto's Rule 1

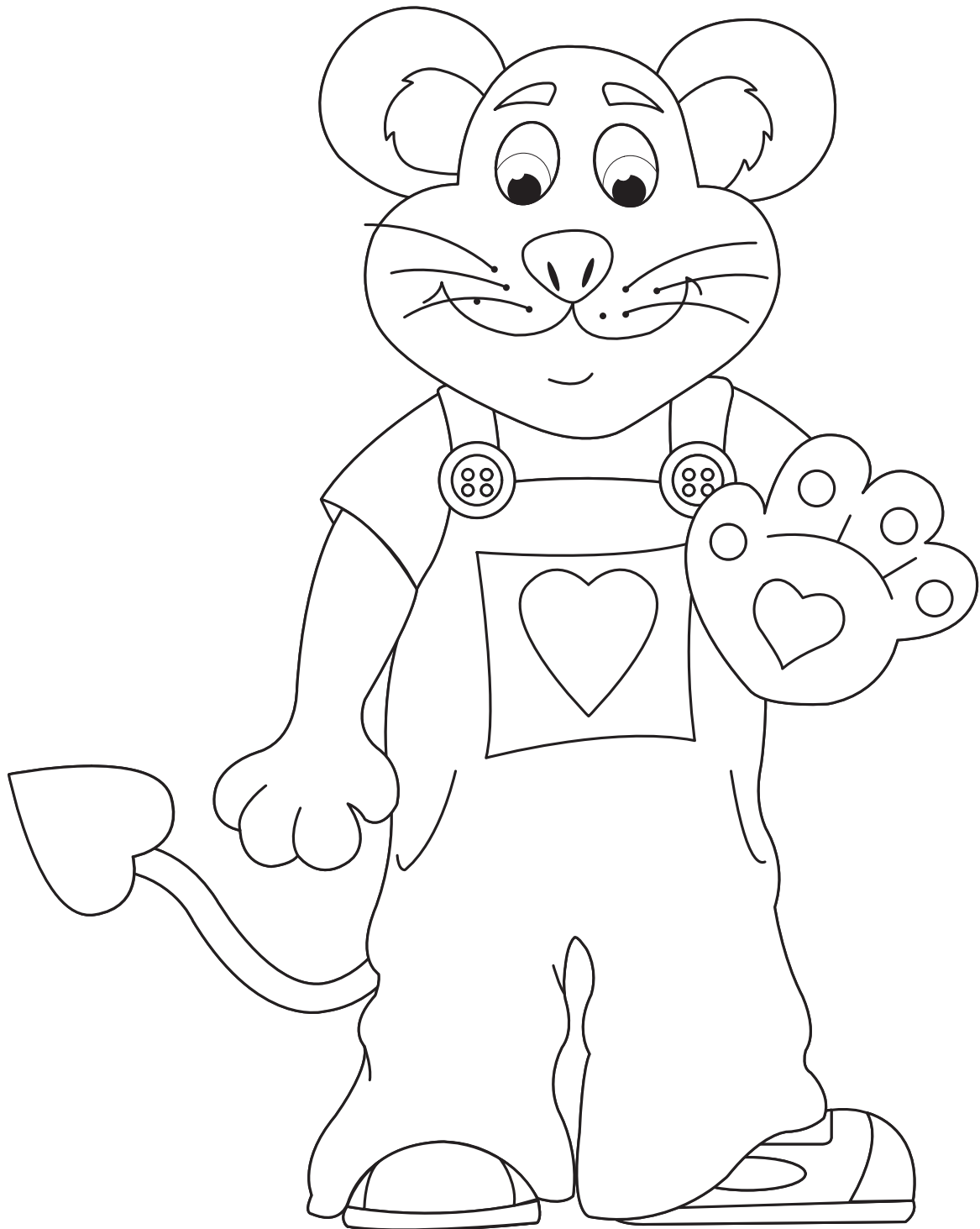
We all have the right  
to feel safe with people.





## Ditto's Rule 2

It's ok to say 'NO'  
if you feel unsafe or unsure.

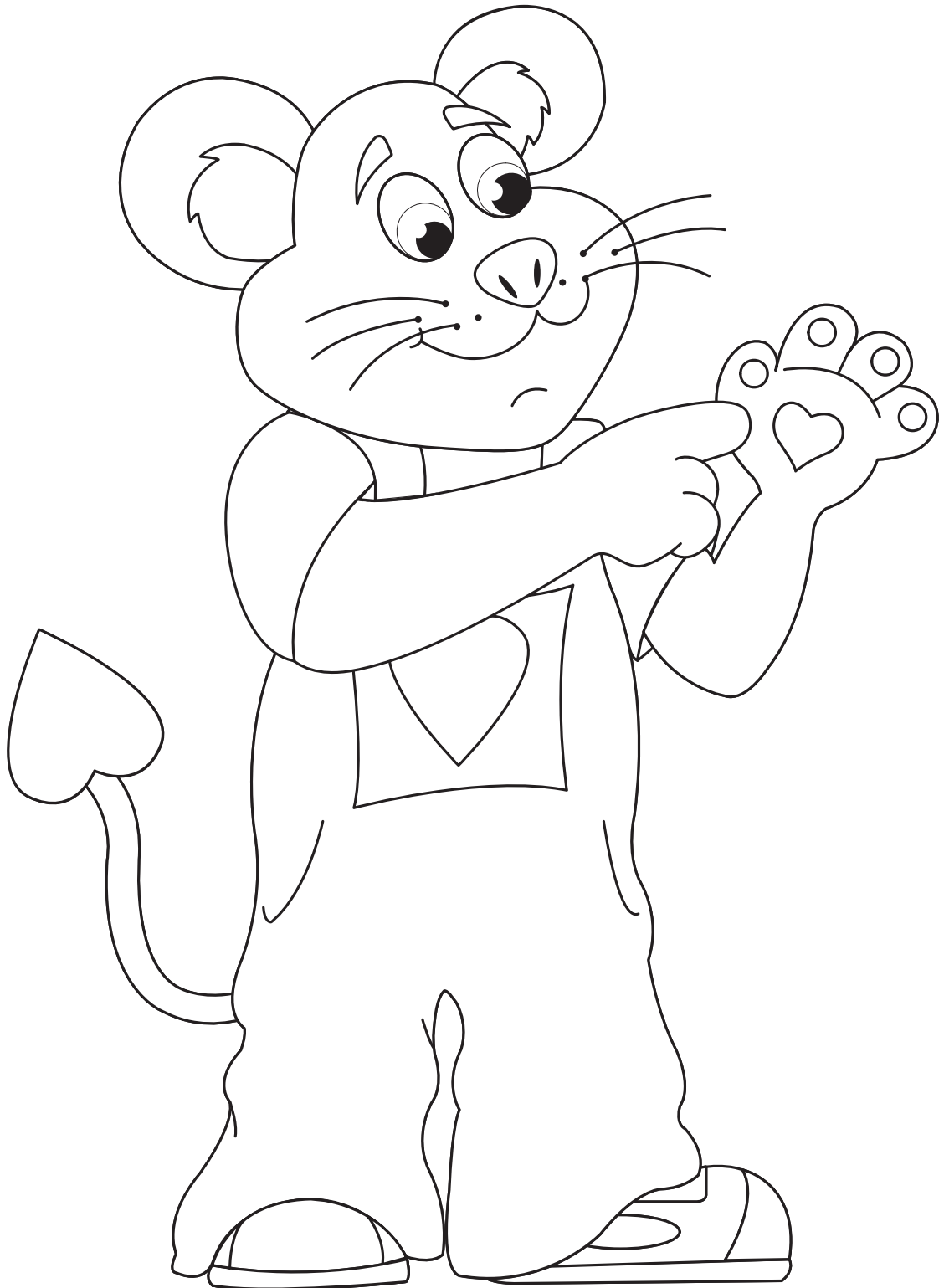






## Ditto's Rule 3

Nothing is so yucky that you can't tell someone about it.



# ACTIVITY: My Safety Team

My Safety Team is an activity sheet (on the next page) to work through with your child to help them identify their support network. This activity should be revisited regularly in case a person on the plan has a change of circumstance. In addition, it is a good idea to revisit the details to help the child remember.

Safety Teams are important to establish who the child feels comfortable with, trusts, and is happy to speak to, and it also provides contacts of official organisations that can help.

Children need time to speak about 'trust' and who they trust with their special or private information.

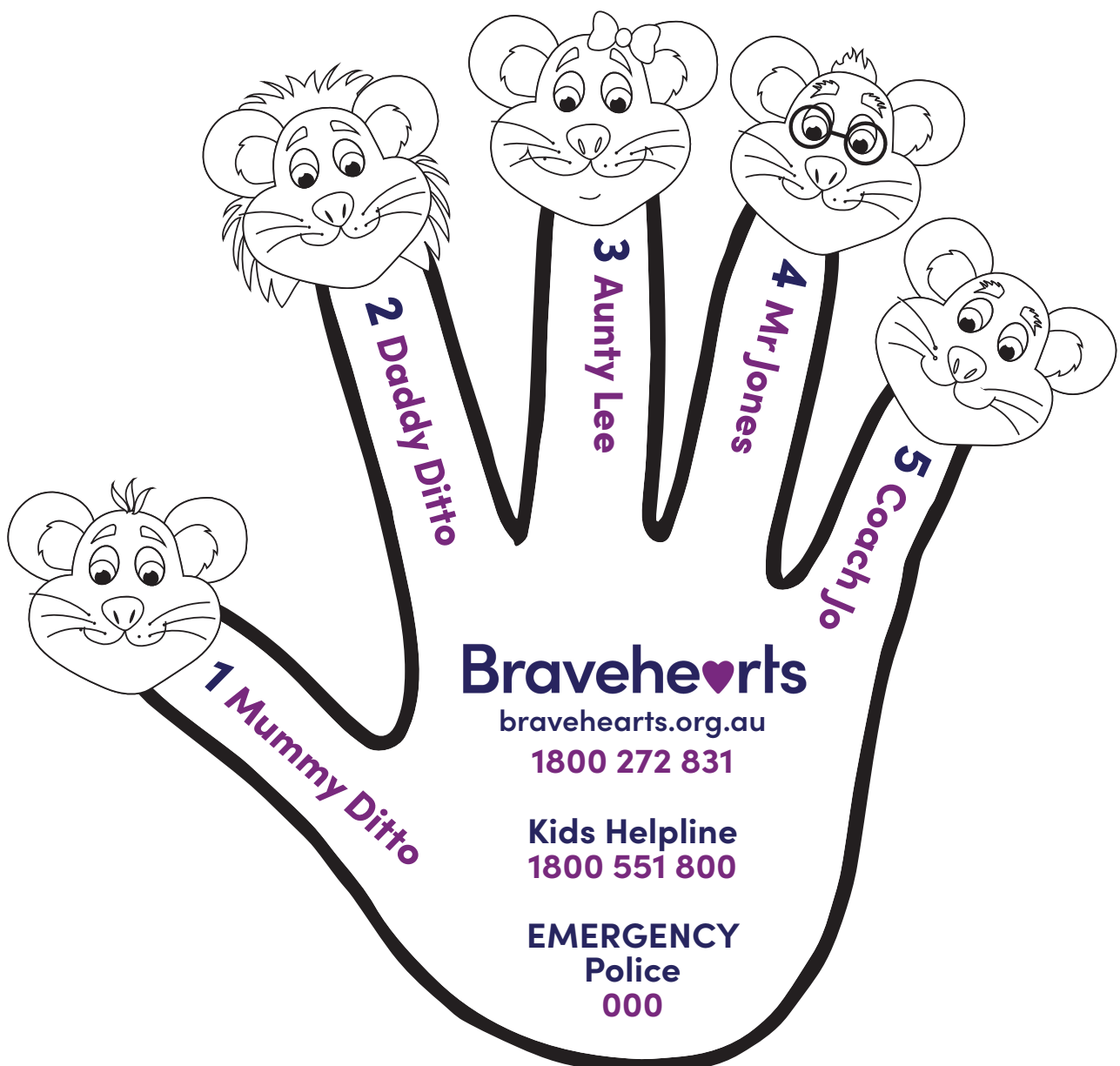
In our education program, we have used the following definition for trust as an example:

**Trust is something we feel when we feel safe. It is when we know somebody will do the right thing to protect us. They will listen to us, believe us and want to help us.**

During this activity, allow your child time to think about who they would like to nominate. Help them to identify five trusted adults who could be from school, in their family, sporting club, etc.

Below is Ditto's Safety Team. Show this to your child as an example (they can colour in the pictures too). It's a good idea to have a range of people on their Safety Team, both inside and outside of their family.

Encourage them to find a safe place to keep My Safety Team when it's complete and be sure to review it with your child every few months.





# My Safety Team



**Bravehearts**

[bravehearts.org.au](http://bravehearts.org.au)

**1800 272 831**

**Kids Helpline**

**1800 551 800**

**EMERGENCY**

**Police**

**000**

# Keeping children and young people safe online

A survey published by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner (2022) of children aged 8 to 17 years and their parents, found that:

- **6 in 10 children** have communicated with someone they first met online;
- **1 in 8 children** have sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they first met online;
- **1 in 8 children** have met someone face-to-face after first getting to know them online;
- **7 in 10 young people** aged 14 to 17 have seen sexual images online in the past year; and
- **Close to half** have received sexual messages from someone online in the past year.

Australian Police have seen an increase in reports of 'self-produced child exploitation material.' In some instances, children are willingly sharing photos of themselves, including inappropriate or naked pictures on social media.

In other cases, sex offenders are reaching out to children through social media platforms and coercing them into sharing inappropriate or naked pictures of themselves, which are secretly captured and shared in the darkest corners of the internet<sup>1</sup>. With this in mind, it is just as important to talk about online personal safety with your children as it is personal safety in the offline world.



1. Alarming rise in 'self-produced child abuse material' sparks online safety warnings, abc.net.au, 2017.

## Quick tips for parents and carers

- **Educate yourself:** Check out different sites, games and apps for yourself. The more familiar you are with them, the easier it is for you to talk to your children. Check privacy settings and recommended age restrictions.
- **Talk with your children:** Have conversations with them about the importance of safety online and show them what that means. For example, let them know you have been hearing about online safety and ask what they think the risks are and what they can do to keep safe. Encourage an ongoing open dialogue with your child, not just a one-off chat.
- **Teach your children to think about online behaviour:** How much should they be sharing online and what happens to information once shared? Talk about respectful interactions and responsible behaviour, and encourage them to critically think about what they read and see online (remind them that not everything they read may be true, what they share will always be there, and not everyone is who they say they are online).
- **Make all devices safer for your children:** Familiarise yourself with all sites, games and apps your children use and check the privacy setting on these. Install safety and security software and keep it updated; use internet and spam filters and a pop-up stopper, install monitoring software and monitor downloads to your computer, enable internet browser security and regularly check the internet usage history.
- **Come up with a plan around safety:** Talk about ways to not only stay safe but also how to respond to anything that happens that may concern them. Let them know they can talk to you or another adult they can trust. The Sam's SMART Rules poster towards the back of this booklet can help guide your discussion around online safety with your child.
- **Monitor:** Ensure that your child is using their device in an open area of the house where you can keep a close eye on them. Do not assume though, that this alone is a sufficient protective measure – be vigilant and monitor your child's activity.

## Advice by age group

### Pre-school aged children

This age group is just beginning to learn how computers, phones and other devices work and the joy they can bring. This includes visiting children's websites and helping them compose emails to family and friends.

Be sure to sit with your child during this learning stage when they are on a computer or device and choose websites, games and apps that are suitable for your child's age group - even games and apps that are designed for young children have features that enable communication with strangers.

### Primary school aged children

Children of this age feel more confident using the internet and may wish to start using social media. Children may also try to search for prohibited material and notice marketing material, wanting to purchase products online.

Ensure computers and other devices are used in a common area in the home where you can keep an eye on your child, rather than in private (i.e., their bedroom). Have a pre-determined plan of action if they stumble across something inappropriate (e.g., turn the device face down and tell a trusted adult).

Similarly, have an agreed plan with your child if a stranger tries to communicate with them online, and remind your child repeatedly and often of the fact that not everyone is who they say they are online.

### Young people

Teenagers will want more independence and freedom while using the internet. Their use of social media will grow as will their network of online 'friends'.

This age group may also try to explore prohibited material. While it is more difficult to keep tight supervision on what teenagers are doing online, it is vital that you stay in touch with them and talk often about safe internet use, the risks and how to avoid them.

## Tips to share with your children and young people

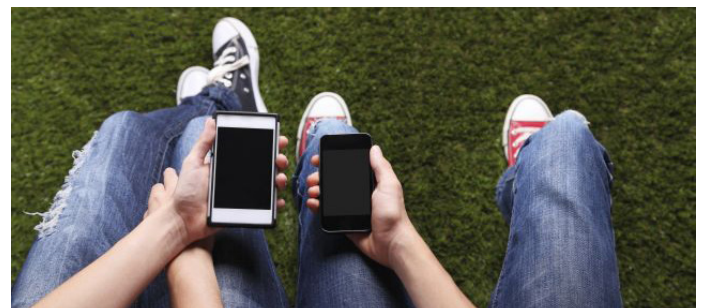
Reinforce regularly with your children Sam's SMART Cyber Safety Rules (these can be found towards the end of this booklet) and reiterate the following safety tips:

### You should NEVER:

- Tell anyone your full name, address, phone number or school.
- Send a photo of yourself (or your friends or family) to anyone, especially one that identifies where you live, your name or where you go to school (including your school uniform).
- Tell anyone your credit card or bank details (or any other personal details).
- 'Friend' or talk to someone online who you do not know in real life.
- Make plans to meet anyone you met online in real life.
- Talk to anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable.

### You should ALWAYS:

- Be careful who you talk to on social media. People are not always WHO or WHAT they seem online.
- Tell your parents, or a trusted adult if someone says something to you online that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- Stay away from websites that are not meant for children.
- Be careful of your online footprint and remember that WHAT YOU SHARE WILL ALWAYS BE THERE.



Consider drawing up an **Online Safety Family Contract**. For advice on how to do this, scan the QR code to go to the online safety section of our website.



## Children and social media

On social media, children and young people tend to interact with more confidence than they normally would in a face-to-face situation. This can make them susceptible to cyber-stalkers who can skillfully pretend to be someone they are not.

In this space more than ever, children and young people need to know they should never give out personal information.

As a parent, it is important for you to have current information about the types of social media platforms that children and young people are using.

Ensure you are aware of the age restrictions on these platforms and apps and understand that those you are using may be very different from those that your children are using. Many apps have 15+ age restrictions and some have much lower age restrictions; however, they may still not be appropriate for the suggested age.

To learn more about children and social networking and how to keep your children and young people safe, please see the **eSafety Commissioner website** (you'll find a QR code link to this site on this page) for the most up-to-date information.



1. Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018.

## Online gaming risks

Children and young people are increasingly interacting online via online gaming platforms. While there may be many positive aspects to online gaming, it's also important to be aware of some of the risks.

One of the biggest risks in terms of child safety is the potential for interaction with strangers via these games. Networked games involve multiple players (in some cases even hundreds of thousands of players). With these games, your child or young person could be communicating with strangers (including adults) through webcam, private messaging or online chat, increasing the risk of contact from predators<sup>1</sup>.

A study by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018, found that when it comes to online gaming, 52% of children played with people they didn't know. Statistics such as this suggest that it is vital for parents to place safeguards around their children and young people when it comes to online gaming and educate them about interacting safely online.

For the most up-to-date information for parents about online gaming and keeping children and young people safe, please refer to the **eSafety Commissioner website** (you'll find a QR code link to this site below).



Bravehearts is endorsed by the eSafety Commissioner as a Trusted eSafety Provider. The eSafety website is an invaluable resource for parents and carers and includes the most current information about keeping your child or young person safe online.

This site will advise you on how to report suspicious, inappropriate or illegal online behaviour and/or content.

# Children, young people and pornography

Young people are accessing pornography from a younger age and more frequently than we may like to think. Gone are the days of the magazine stuffed under the mattress – teens (and pre-teens) are being exposed to, and seeking out, porn online and mostly through their friends and their own phones.

What does the instant accessibility of porn mean for our children and young people, how is their exposure to this content affecting them, and how can parents and caregivers talk to their kids about the misconceptions that porn presents about sexual safety and consent?

## Sex education by porn

We know that kids as young as twelve (and even younger) are accessing online pornography and one of the reasons why is to learn more about sex, so what are our young people learning?

Pornography often portrays sexual violence (particularly against women) and unrealistic notions of sexual relationships. It often depicts and teaches that aggressive and non-consensual sex is acceptable and that it is what everyone wants. One study found high levels of aggression in pornography in both verbal and physical forms:

*'88.2% (of scenes) contained physical aggression, principally spanking, gagging, and slapping, while 48.7% of scenes contained verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Perpetrators of aggression were usually male, whereas targets of aggression were overwhelmingly female<sup>1</sup>.*

Pornography also presents unrealistic images of both the male and female body, as many porn actors have surgically enhanced bodies including augmented breasts, vaginas and penises. Additionally, drugs are sometimes used by the actors to help them maintain erections for abnormally long durations, which may skew a young person's expectations of performance during sex in real life.

On a purely practical level, important lessons about sexual safety, such as consent and using condoms, are mostly absent.

The 'lesson' that porn is teaching young people about sex, relationships and sexuality are highly problematic. There is a risk the messages could harm a young person's sense of self, damage relationships, affect their psychological wellbeing and cause dangerous experimentation that could lead to health risks or even injury.

## Talking to our children and young people about porn vs reality

As tempting as it may be to ban our kids from viewing content that we don't approve of or know to be dangerous, this will do little to help them. The prevalence of online porn in our society means unfortunately your curious pre-teen or teen is likely to seek it out or stumble across it at some stage. Whilst advising our kids not to watch porn is a good start, we need to go further and help them understand WHY.

We need to start conversations that will help our kids understand what we see in porn rarely represents real life. These conversations need to navigate through topics such as consent, safety and respect, and ideally should start happening before they hit their teens.

As parents and caregivers, it is our responsibility to talk to our kids about sex in developmentally-appropriate ways. Over the page are some tips to help parents and carers get the conversation started.



1. Bridges et. al., 2010

## Talking with pre-teens (8 to 12 years) about pornography

Children entering puberty and adolescence may be curious about sex and sexuality. Changes in the brain and body combined with other hormonal changes can increase your child's interest in this area. They may hear things from their friends and they might want to know more, but asking parents about sex can be embarrassing. This may lead to kids in this age group to seek out information online or from their friends, which could lead to them stumbling across or being shown porn.

**BEFORE YOU START:** If your child is over the age of eight, you may have already talked to them about things like puberty, gender, body image, sex, body ownership and personal safety. Extending these conversations to include a discussion about pornography should not be too much of a stretch if done in context and using our tips below. If you haven't yet started talking to your child about these things, now is a good time.

**1 – BUILD TRUST:** It's almost impossible to have influence when there is no trust. Investing time in your relationship with your child helps them feel loved and accepted. Discussions about sexual matters will be more effective when you have a trusting relationship with your child.

**2 – PREPARE:** Work out what you want to say and how you want to say it. Sometimes discussions about sexual topics can be more difficult for parents than for children. Plan ahead and make a discussion outline for what you want to talk about so when the time comes, you don't get flustered and forget what you wanted to say. There are many online resources and books that you can read to help get your head around how to talk to your kids about sex and pornography.

**3 – TAKE THE TIME:** These discussions are best held in a one-on-one environment. Go somewhere together – perhaps for a walk, or a drive and make sure your child feels at ease. Being in a neutral environment can make things more comfortable for both parent and child.

Tailor the discussion based on your knowledge of your child and their level of maturity and development. Perhaps begin by asking if it's okay to have a chat about 'one of those awkward topics'. Let them know you have read some things recently that got you thinking, and you'd like your child's opinion.

**4 – ASK QUESTIONS:** After your child has agreed to talk with you, rather than lecture, try to ask questions. This will help avoid your child tuning out or becoming defensive. Here are some examples of questions you may want to ask to help guide the discussion:

- What do you know about pornography?
- Do any of the kids at school ever talk about it? What do they say?
- Have you ever seen it?

If they answer yes, reassure your child they are not in trouble. Do not judge. Try to find out what you can about how they found it and why they were searching for it. Ask:

- Did someone show it to you? Or did you find it yourself?
- Even though it's really uncomfortable, can you tell me what you have seen?
- When you saw it, how did it make you feel?

Talk about those feelings. Children at this age may feel yucky – even violated – but they may also feel curious or scared.

Let your child know that pornography teaches attitudes towards sex, and sexual behaviours which are often unhealthy. You may wish to discuss some of the content portrayed in pornographic material (such as lack of respect and consent, violence, and dangerous sexual practices) to help them understand why you are concerned about them viewing it.

Ask: What do you think is the best thing to do if someone tries to show you porn? Let your child suggest some options. Discourage them from seeking it out, or looking at it if someone does show it to them.

Reassure your child. Let them know it's always okay to talk with you if they have questions.



## Talking with teens (12 to 17 years) about pornography

Consent, respect and safety are the three main topics you should focus on when talking to your teenage child about porn.

### Consent

Talk to your teen about the importance of always having permission to touch, hug, kiss or have sexual intercourse with another person. Porn often provides graphic examples that teach the opposite.

Help them understand that if someone says “no”, they should respect that decision. And if your teen says “no”, they should make sure their “no” is heard and not taken as a “perhaps” or a “yes”. Also, let them know that consent can be removed at any time, so it is okay to say “no” after saying “yes” earlier.

### Respect

Help your teen understand that disrespect, violence and abuse are not okay. Unfortunately, some porn portrays sexual violence, and while this may be easily seen as fantasy by an adult brain, a developing teenage brain (that may be using porn to learn about sex) could view this and think that sexual violence is acceptable, or wanted by a partner.

Discuss with your teen the importance of building trust with a partner and how physical relationships are usually shared with someone special to us that we have an emotional connection with. These factors are often missing in pornographic images and video material.

### Safety

Help your teen recognise that what they see in pornography is rarely safe. Actors are intentionally pushed to their limits to offer increased arousal to viewers. Explain that porn actors are paid to show they are enjoying the sex – what they are showing on screen is not real.

Similarly, porn usually ignores safe sex practices including even the simplest precaution of using condoms.

### Expectations

Help your teenager understand that the actors in porn, and the things they do, are more often than not unrealistic. Watching porn will not help them understand what to expect from a sexual encounter.

Your teen should not expect their partner to look like the women/men in porn, nor should your teen be expected to look that way themselves. The body images presented in porn are not realistic.

Parents and caregivers are right to be concerned about the growing number of young people accessing online pornography and the potential effects on their wellbeing. Rather than lecture our pre-teens and teens, the more constructive approach is to start open, honest conversations with them. Asking questions about how they feel and exploring issues of consent, respect and safety will equip young people with the knowledge and tools to make good choices in the future.

Finally, be sure to tell your kids often that they can come to you at any time with questions and provide them with phone line numbers so they can talk to someone else about their concerns (we have provided some numbers below.)

### Support lines for young people

**Kids Helpline:** Phone counselling and support for children and young people: 1800 55 1800

**Headspace:** Mental health support for young people: 1800 650 890

**1800RESPECT:** National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service: 1800 737 732



**It's Time We Talked**  
[itstimewetalked.com.au](https://www.itstimewetalked.com.au)

The It's Time We Talked website is an excellent resource for parents, carers and young people. It includes stats, research and useful resources around children and young people and pornography.

# Children, young people and consent

## What is consent?

Consent is another way of saying, 'I give permission'. Consent is an important concept to teach your children and young people.

When it comes to sexual activity, consent is when someone verbally agrees to a sexual activity (either online or in-person). Consent is more than saying, 'yes' or 'no'.

### Consent IS:

- 'Yes' or agreement
- Free of pressure or guilt
- Given before and ongoing during every sexual activity
- Reversible and can be changed at anytime.

### Consent IS NOT:

- 'I'm not sure', 'I guess so', 'no' or silence
- Convincing, pressuring or threatening someone
- Presuming that saying 'yes' to one activity means 'yes' to every activity
- Communicated by clothing or appearance
- Valid if someone is intoxicated, asleep, under the age of consent or unable to understand what they are consenting to.

## Demonstrating consent to children

Parents and carers can easily demonstrate the concept of consent to young children in everyday situations such as:

- Asking a friend if you can give them a hug.
- Giving your child the choice to greet people in a way which makes them feel safe (for example, not forcing your child to receive a hug from a family member if they don't feel comfortable doing so).
- Politely but firmly asserting your boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others.
- Asking permission before taking a person's photo and/or sharing it online.



Bravehearts recommends the parenting website [raisingchildren.net.au](https://raisingchildren.net.au), which has an excellent page about how to talk to your children and young people about consent.



# Useful numbers and websites

## Child Protection Services

### IF A CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER OR RISK, PHONE 000

If you wish to report concerns that a child is being harmed, including grooming of a child, please report to Policelink on **131 444**

Please note: The contact details given on this page are current as of July 2023.

In many States and Territories, it is an offence for any adult not to report sexual offending against a child by another adult to Police. This means all adults have the responsibility to report sexual abuse against children. Below you will find the details on where to report in each State and Territory.

#### Australian Capital Territory

Child and Youth Protection Services  
[communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs](https://communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs)  
Reporting Line: **1300 556 729**

#### New South Wales

Department of Communities and Justice  
[facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/reporting-child-at-risk](https://facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/reporting-child-at-risk)  
Child Protection Helpline: **132 111**

#### Northern Territory

Territory Families, Housing and Communities  
[tfhc.nt.gov.au](https://tfhc.nt.gov.au)  
Child Protection Reporting Line: **1800 700 250**

#### Queensland

Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services  
[cyjma.qld.gov.au](https://cyjma.qld.gov.au)  
During business hours, contact your relevant Regional Intake Service - list of numbers here:  
[cyjma.qld.gov.au/contact-us/department-contacts/child-family-contacts/child-safety-service-centres/regional-intake-services](https://cyjma.qld.gov.au/contact-us/department-contacts/child-family-contacts/child-safety-service-centres/regional-intake-services)  
After Hours Service Centre: **1800 177 135**

#### South Australia

Department for Child Protection  
[childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse)  
Child Abuse Report Line: **131 478**

#### Tasmania

Department of Communities Tasmania  
[communities.tas.gov.au](https://communities.tas.gov.au)  
Advice and Referral Line: **1800 000 123**

#### Victoria

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing  
[services.dffh.vic.gov.au/families-and-children](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/families-and-children)  
During business hours, contact your relevant child protection intake service covering the local government area (LGA) where the child normally resides. A list of numbers can be found here:  
<https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse>

#### Western Australia

Department of Communities  
<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/child-protectionCentral>  
Intake Team: **1800 273 889**

## Helpful websites

- Bravehearts - [bravehearts.org.au](https://bravehearts.org.au)
- eSafety Commissioner - [esafety.gov.au](https://esafety.gov.au)
- Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) - [accce.gov.au](https://accce.gov.au)
- ThinkUKnow - [thinkuknow.org.au](https://thinkuknow.org.au)
- It's Time We Talked - [itstimewetalked.com.au](https://itstimewetalked.com.au)
- Carly Ryan Foundation - [carlyryanfoundation.com](https://carlyryanfoundation.com)
- Act for Kids - [actforkids.com.au](https://actforkids.com.au)
- The Daniel Morcombe Foundation - [danielmorcombe.com.au](https://danielmorcombe.com.au)



# Ditto's 3 Rules for keeping safe

## Rule 1

We **ALL** have the right to feel safe with people!

## Rule 2

It's OK to say **NO** if you feel unsafe or unsure!

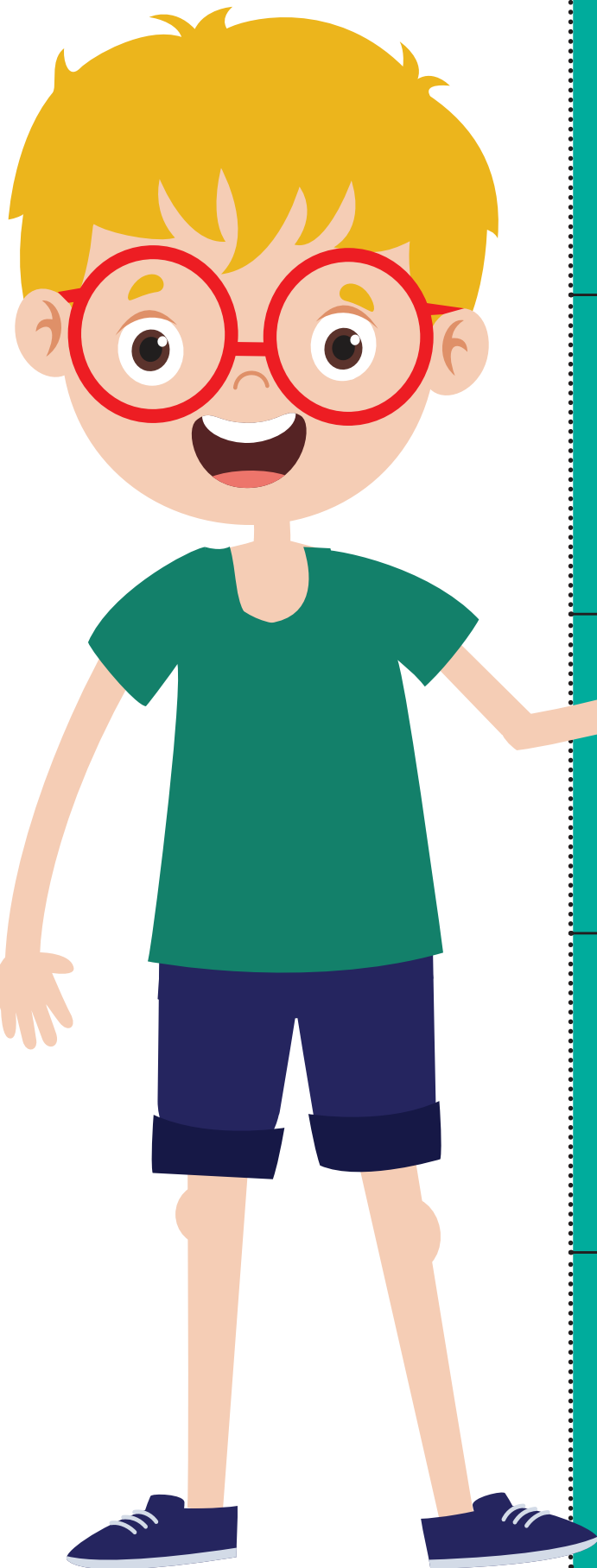
## Rule 3

Nothing is so yucky you can't tell someone about it!

Remember, If you ever feel **UNSAFE** or **UNSURE** about something **GO** and **TELL** someone you can trust.



# Sam's SMART eSafety Rules



**S**

**STAY** close by when you use a phone, tablet or computer. Make sure a parent or carer is nearby so you can get help if you need it.

**M**

**MAKE** sure you don't give anyone your personal information like your name, where you live or any passwords.

**A**

**ASK** before you download, install or buy anything online.

**R**

**REPORT** anything that you see or hear that makes you feel unsafe.

**T**

**TECHNOLOGY** is fun but you have to keep safe! If you are unsure, always tell someone on your **Safety Team**.

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# MY EMERGENCY CONTACTS

MY HOUSE ADDRESS IS:

.....

MY LOCAL POLICE NUMBER IS:

.....

FOR EMERGENCIES ONLY DIAL:

**000**

NATIONAL NUMBER FOR NON-EMERGENCY REPORTING TO POLICE:

**131 444**

NAMES AND NUMBERS OF 4 ADULTS I CAN TRUST:

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.....

Bravehearts 1800 272 831

HEADSPACE 1800 650 890

KIDS HELPLINE 1800 55 1800

LIFELINE 13 11 14

13YARN 13 92 76