

Supporting your child if they are viewing or sharing self-harm and suicide content online

Many people will view, read or share things about self-harm or suicide on the internet. It can be a helpful, positive experience and part of recovery. It can also carry risks.



This guide is for parents and carers. We'll help you understand what might be happening and give you ideas on how to help. Use the ideas if you're supporting your child in relation to self-harm or suicide or if you're worried about them viewing this kind of content.

Ways the internet can help

Finding information and support. People find places to ask questions and learn about how to look after themselves. The internet can be a first step towards opening up and finding more formal support.

Connecting with others with similar experiences. People can feel understood and find hope when they connect with others with similar experiences. For many people, it's easier to share feelings online than talking face to face.

Sharing their experiences of hope and recovery. People can make sense of what they're experiencing by sharing their own journey. They can also feel validated and empowered when they're able to support others.

Reducing loneliness and isolation. When people are struggling with difficult feelings they can be less likely to find people to talk to. Finding a supportive community online can help them feel less alone.

Risks

Some content **makes suicide and self-harm seem like an effective way of dealing with difficult emotions.** People who regularly see this content may not realise that their feelings and beliefs about suicide and self-harm are changing. They may identify closely with the people posting content and be led to copy what they've seen.

Some posts **share advice on methods** showing people how to hurt themselves or end their life. They may also discuss methods for concealing plans and hiding damage people do to their bodies. This can mean people miss out on getting the support they need.

You don't have to manage alone. If the child you care for is under 25, Young Minds offer a Parents Helpline and Webchat.

Call for free on 0808 802 5544 from 9:30am–4pm, Monday–Friday or visit the webchat at [youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat)

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If someone views graphic images or descriptions of suicide or self-harm **it could be distressing**; if they view more of the same kind of content, they can become desensitised to it. The way the internet uses algorithms to choose what it shows us can add to this, as people can end up seeing content they didn't search for.

What should I do?

You'll want to help your child work out how their experiences online affect them. Encourage them to share their experience of the internet with you. This should help you talk to your child about the risks and benefits of different communities and activities, and how they're affected by them. It may help you encourage them to try other support.

Take some time to prepare. These conversations can be daunting, but you should try to be calm and non-judgemental with your child. You need to think about the positive reasons they might look for support online as well as the risks. And you need to be as ready as you can be to hear difficult information.

Talk to your child

Think about it as something to mention often – not a big conversation. Asking about their online activity regularly and without judgement will help them feel less embarrassed and secretive about it.

Keep it casual and brief, but free from distractions. Quick conversations that happen when you're side by side can feel less pressured. Put your phone down and go for a walk together, or talk while cooking or sitting on the sofa.

Use everyday prompts. TV, films, news or books sometimes mention the subject. This can help you find a neutral starting point.

Let them talk. Ask them to tell you about the sites they use and what they like to do online. Don't worry about knowing everything about the internet. Let them share what they know with you, helping them feel empowered and knowledgeable.

Make sure you're genuinely listening. Focus on trying to hear what they are saying and understanding their feelings.

Be honest. Talking about your own feelings and experiences online may help reassure them that you're on their side and will not judge or punish them.

Don't force things. If they aren't ready to talk, don't give up. Keep offering opportunities for them to reach out. Try encouraging them to speak to other trusted adults, formal support services, or the safer moderated communities listed below.

Share tips for staying safer online

Learn about different safety tools to control what you see online, including reporting, blocking and filtering content, by visiting [samaritans.org/using-online-controls](https://www.samaritans.org/using-online-controls)

Consider parental controls

Some parents and children might decide that they want to work together to manage internet use. If you want to use parental controls you can get advice from [internetmatters.org/advice](https://www.internetmatters.org/advice)

Find safer spaces online

If your child is interested in safer spaces to share online they can view our list of charity run moderated communities at [samaritans.org/sharing-experiences-online-safely](https://www.samaritans.org/sharing-experiences-online-safely)