

Online safety and sexual development guidance

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A resource for professionals supporting families and children

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Introduction

Children are growing up in a digital world where content about sex, relationships and intimacy is widely available. While this can support learning, it can also expose children to sexual content or behaviours before they are developmentally ready to understand them.

Many parents, carers and other supportive adults are unsure how to respond, or how to better prepare their children for what they might experience. They want to support their development and help them build respectful relationships but are often left asking: what is ‘normal’, what is concerning, and how do I talk about topics like bodies, boundaries and sexuality in a way that is developmentally appropriate and safe?

That is exactly what this guidance is designed to help with. The key information and advice that follows is presented as a ‘continuum’ that maps children’s sexual development from birth to 18 years and how this shapes, and is shaped by, their online experiences. It outlines typical behaviours at each stage, highlights those that may require further attention or intervention, and provides practical strategies to help children develop safely and confidently, online and offline.

The guidance has been updated to be inclusive of children with disability. When we refer to ‘children’ we mean everyone under 18, though the advice may be relevant to adults with delayed development.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance has been developed for professionals and frontline workers who advise and support families, including youth workers, health practitioners, community support workers, and educators in organisations, services and practices. It is designed as a reference resource you can use to help families understand how the online experiences of children (including teenagers under 18) impact their sexual development and relationships, with advice on how to deal with a range of related scenarios and behaviours. Rather than being read cover to cover, it’s something you can turn to for guidance when a tricky situation comes up, when you’re not sure how to respond, or when a parent or child asks a question that catches you off guard.

The advice contained in the developmental continuum is based on robust evidence and has been developed in consultation with more than a dozen specialist organisations. However, it should be considered general in nature. It is important to consider each child’s individual needs in relation to any of the developmental advice provided.

While this continuum was designed for professionals, parents and carers may find it helpful if they would like more in-depth information about their child’s sexual development and how this intersects with their online lives. eSafety also has a range of other evidence-based resources for parents and carers that you can direct clients to.

How will the guidance help you?

As a professional supporting families, the guidance will support you to do the following:

- **Contextualise behaviours:** Understand what is typical, what may need attention, and what requires immediate intervention at each developmental stage.
- **Have confident conversations:** Provide evidence-based guidance to families when discussing sensitive topics related to children’s sexual development and online safety.
- **Reassure families:** Help parents and carers understand that many sexual behaviours are an expected part of growing up, reducing anxiety and shame.
- **Respond to concerns:** Know when and how to escalate issues, and what support or advice to offer.
- **Plan preventive actions:** Identify age-appropriate conversations and activities that build children's protective behaviours.

- **Tailor education:** Establish contexts for providing children with education that meets their individual developmental needs.
- **Support diverse needs:** Access considerations for children with disability, diverse cultural backgrounds, and LGBTQIA+ identities.
- **Bridge online and offline experiences:** Help families understand that conversations about bodies, relationships, consent and safety apply in both environments.

What shapes child sexual development

Sexual development is a natural part of children's growth and learning. As children grow, they learn language, develop motor skills and advance cognitively. A child's sexual development goes beyond their maturing bodies to incorporate the development of ways of thinking, knowing, feeling, socialising, and being in their cultures. Children experience shifting points of interest about sex, sexuality, gender, and bodies; a growing sense of self and personal autonomy; curiosity, acceptance, frustration or confusion about their maturing bodies; a drive to connect (and compare) with peers; and to explore their sexual identity, and potentially, sexual relationships.

Children's development has always been influenced by external factors such as family structures, school experiences, community cultures and values, social attitudes and more. Today, the impact of children's digital experiences on their development must also be considered.

The digital dimension: opportunities versus risks

From infancy, many children observe parents and carers using internet-enabled devices on a daily basis, and many of their early learning, communication and play experiences are mediated through digital technologies and interactions online.

The continuum was developed to reflect the increasing prevalence of online device and platform use in children's lives.

According to studies by the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) and Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in 2020:

- 80% of 4-year-olds use the internet and 30% have their own devices
- 33% of children aged 6 to 13 own a mobile phone
- children watch videos and play video games online from very young ages, extending to multiplayer gaming around ages 8 to 12
- From 16 to 18 years, many will use social media to communicate with friends, create online personas and explore their identity.

The online world provides children with a range of opportunities, including access to information, entertainment and creation, helpful sexual education resources, and connection with like-minded people and communities. But they may also encounter harmful content, including pornography and violent, aggressive or exploitative material. Children may be exposed to disinformation and misinformation about bodies, sexuality and consent, or sexually abusive or manipulative contact. There are also more insidious forms of misinformation, such as 'wellness' bloggers who might for example provide harmful advice relating to body image and disordered eating; relationship podcasts that might reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, and misogynistic material on video platforms like YouTube and TikTok.

It is vital that parents and carers understand how the wide range of opportunities and risks online affect children's understanding of self, gender, sexuality and respectful relationships, and their skills in navigating online safety as they grow. Children have a right to participate safely online, and to experience healthy sexual development and relationships.

The role of trusting relationships and open communication

Most advice about promoting children and young people's sexual development and online safety refers to creating warm, trusting relationships and open communication between children and their parents and carers (for example, Walsh 2018; National Sexual Violence Research Centre 2013). Many parents and carers are aware that sexual development is not inherently 'bad' and understand the importance of talking in positive ways about relationships and sexuality with children. However, family and community cultures and values play an important role in deciding if and when these conversations take place.

Common barriers to conversations include:

- uncertainty among some parents and carers, especially fathers, about how to initiate these talks (Walsh 2018)
- cultural, religious or family norms that discourage open discussion
- lower levels of parent educational attainment (Kamaludin et al 2022)
- shame or embarrassment
- lack of knowledge about what is age-appropriate
- fear of encouraging curiosity or early sexual activity.

Supporting families to have appropriate conversations

When supporting parents and carers to talk and yarn with children about sex and relationships, it's important to emphasise that conversations are tailored to the child's developmental stage, maturity and communication ability (mental, physical, social and digital).

The continuum uses age ranges as a proxy for developmental stages. However, eSafety acknowledges that many factors contribute to children's development, and some children will fall outside the age-based descriptions provided. Parents and carers are the experts in their own children's development and should be guided to adapt advice according to their child's unique needs. See further advice on this under 'Important considerations for users'.

Developmental continuum

How to navigate and use the continuum

The continuum is structured across two child sexual development tables, with each table organised into five age groups from birth to 18 years. It begins with an overview of sexual development and behaviour through childhood and adolescence, with reference to online contexts. This is followed by more detailed information about specific areas of development in sexuality and relationships, with a focus on how these are impacted by growing up in an online world.

Both tables provide advice on expected behaviours, as well as those that may require further consideration. Together, they help you understand development over time and in different contexts, recognise potential risks, and respond in ways that promote safety, wellbeing and respectful relationships.

Table 1: Sexual development and behaviour

The first table provides a general foundation for understanding sexual development across five age ranges: 0 to 4 years, 5 to 7 years, 8 to 12 years, 13 to 15 years, and 16 to 18 years. Where applicable, this information is contextualised to online behaviour and considerations of online safety. It underpins the more detailed domain-based table that follows.

Within each age range, this table identifies a range of behaviours:

- **Expected or ‘typical’ developmental behaviours** – this information can be used as a baseline when considering the healthy sexual development of children in relation to their online lives (noting that many other factors contribute to development and children may fall outside of these age-based descriptions).
- **Behaviours that may require attention** – generally those that may cause an increased risk of harm to the child or others (for example, a child aged 8 to 12 using sexually explicit language, avatars or images online may be targeted for grooming by adults, or exposed to sexual content they are not developmentally prepared for).
- **Behaviours that may require intervention** – those with a strong likelihood of causing harm to the child or others (for example, some behaviours, such as sharing sexually explicit images, are more concerning at younger ages; while other behaviours, like engaging with racist, misogynistic, homophobic or transphobic online groups, may require intervention at any age).

Table 2: Four developmental domains

The second table forms the main body of the continuum and covers four areas of development in greater depth across all age stages. Each domain is explored first in relation to online experiences and risks, and then by more general themes relating to the domain. This allows you to understand both the digital context and the wider patterns of development.

The four domains are:

1. **Culture, social norms and sexuality** – Human rights and sexuality; gender norms; gender-based violence.
2. **Bodies, consent and privacy** – Puberty; body image; consent, privacy and body integrity.
3. **Relationships** – Families; friendships and romantic relationships; inclusion and respect, norms and peer influence; decision-making; communication and online experiences.
4. **Sexual literacy** – Media literacy and sexuality; sexual health information online; online pornography and learning about sex; finding help and support.

For each domain and age group, the table describes:

- **What children** may experience, understand or do at that age/stage (online focus, then general focus).
- **What parents and carers** can do to support healthy sexual development and minimise harmful or risky behaviour, including specific suggestions for activities, conversations and interventions they can engage in with their child.

If you need to quickly assess whether a sexual behaviour is typical, concerning or requires immediate intervention:

1. Go to Table 1: Sexual development and behaviour
2. Find the relevant age group
3. Check whether the behaviour is typical, may require attention, or requires intervention.

If you're responding to a broader developmental concern or question and wish to provide families with specific, practical strategies for supporting children:

1. Go to Table 2: Four developmental domains

2. Identify which domain is most relevant and find that section of the table. For example,
 - Questions about gender stereotypes, go to Culture, social norms and sexuality
 - Questions about sharing nudes, go to Bodies, consent and privacy
 - Questions about dating, go to Relationships
 - Questions about online pornography, go to Sexual literacy
3. Look at the age group that best matches the child's developmental stage
4. Review both the online focus and general focus sections
5. Use the 'Parents and carers can' guidance to provide practical advice.

If you're supporting a family more generally:

1. Start with the child's age group in Table 1 to understand their overall sexual development stage
2. Then explore all four domains in Table 2 for that age group
3. Look at adjacent age groups to understand what comes before and after
4. Use the 'Parents and carers can' sections throughout to provide relevant, actionable advice.

Important considerations for users

Children develop at different rates and within different contexts, and developmental stages may not always align with a child's age. Draw from the tables and tailor your support according to each child's individual needs, maturity, emotional readiness and circumstances.

- **Children with disability or developmental differences:** Factor in age where possible but focus on matching advice to a child's developmental phase and consider other protective strategies as necessary. For example, a child with neurodivergence or a disability may not follow typical age-based timelines for some or all of the domains and may face additional barriers and risks online. This includes exposure to potentially harmful online content (such as [pornography](#)), conduct (such as [cyberbullying](#)) and contacts (such as unsafe adults who may attempt to sexually [groom](#) them). More detailed guidance on supporting children with disability is provided after the tables.
- **Cultural and family diversity:** Family, community and religious cultures significantly shape understanding of and attitudes towards relationships and sexuality. Apply the continuum with cultural sensitivity and respect for different values and beliefs, while recognising that all children have rights to safety, education and healthy development. Be aware that some families may face language barriers or cultural norms that make these conversations more difficult.
- **Continuing conversations:** Discussions listed at lower age groups should be continued at higher ages, even where not explicitly mentioned in the continuum.
- **Individual variation:** The inclusion of any activity at a given age level does not mean it is suitable for every child - it indicates the behaviour may be more common at that age, with or without parental knowledge or support. For example, children younger than 13 may seek access to online games that include mature content such as extreme violence and gore, sexual themes and simulated gambling.

Table 1: Sexual development and behaviour

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
Sexual development and behaviour (Online focus)	May require attention Children engaging in sexual play online, for example, mimicking sexual activity using video game characters/avatars in games such as Roblox, as they might do with dolls in physical play.	Typical behaviours - May explore bodies with peers, for example: ‘Show me yours/I’ll show you mine,’ but are more likely to stop when adults are around. This may extend naturally to online spaces, for example with video calls. Parents and carers should always maintain awareness of who their child is communicating with online, and who else may be present during those communications. - May encounter sexual language online, such as through other people’s usernames, and may mimic that language. - Have little or no understanding of how to recognise predatory or grooming behaviours. Parents and carers can support children to understand what these behaviours might look like. In later years, may: - Engage in online social activities such as gaming, or dress-up games via video call. - Use photos and videos to document their lives. - Use the internet for learning activities and communicating with friends. During the course of these activities, children may accidentally encounter online pornography, which may pose a risk for concerning sexual behaviours. May require attention - Secrecy around online activities. - Prolonged engagement with online sexual images. May require intervention Sending/soliciting nude images of self or others or sharing sexually explicit media. - Encouraging others to do sexual things online.	Typical behaviours - Many children compare their bodies to images they see in media, and to others offline. - Use photos and videos to record their lives. This may include taking (but not necessarily sending/sharing) photos or videos of themselves in a sexual way. - When encountering others, particularly older children and adults online, children may misunderstand predatory sexual behaviour as exciting ‘adult’ behaviour (e.g. making them feel mature, cool, or sophisticated). - Increasing curiosity about sex and bodies may mean that they search online for things like naked bodies and nudity, sexual or sexualised bodies and body parts, and sexual acts. - Children may accidentally or intentionally view online pornography. This can be part of natural and developmentally expected curiosity about sex and bodies. Accidental viewing while searching for sexual health or medical information, or via pop-up ads, may be upsetting for a child but does not constitute concerning behaviour. Two in five (39%) children first encountered online pornography before the age of 13. May require attention - Taking or sharing photos or videos of themselves in sexual poses, or their own genitals, or offering ‘nudes’ to others. - Requesting ‘nudes’ or photos or videos of sexual body parts from others. - Exposing other children to pornography, including when other children have agreed to viewing it. The number of children exposed to online pornography increases at around age 9. This can be intentional or unintentional.	Typical behaviours 48% of 14- to 17-year-olds go online to find sexual health information. - May view sexual content accidentally or unintentionally. - May view sexual content intentionally for arousal and/or pleasure. - May have trouble navigating unexpected sexual attention they receive as their bodies change, especially girls who are developing breasts. This may include receiving welcome and unwelcome sexual comments, messages, or requests online. They may require adult support to address these scenarios. - Likely to have an increased need for privacy. - May have increased understanding of, and/or interest in, the online sexual activities of others. - May begin developing an understanding of image-based abuse and/or sexual harassment online. May require attention - Deliberately seeking out online pornography involving sexual aggression and/or violence. 23% of children have seen violent sexual content online. Receiving sexual images or videos of others with consent. - May take and post sexualised profile pictures of themselves online, with or without the specific intention of encouraging/receiving sexual interest. May require intervention - Participation in online groups dedicated to violent, homophobic, or misogynistic ideas, such as sites that ‘rate’ female classmates on sexual attractiveness.	Typical behaviours - Some 16- to-18-year-olds may start exploring dating apps, although these are restricted to people aged 18 and over. - May develop a stronger understanding of image-based abuse and sexual harassment online. May require attention Taking sexual or nude pictures without consent, such as secretly recording sex, or taking a picture of someone’s breasts or underwear without their knowledge. - Using the perceived anonymity and disconnectedness of ‘fake’ online personas to engage in harmful activities such as cyberbullying or sexually aggressive conversations that they would not do otherwise. Requires intervention - Creating sexual content online for financial or material reward (such as money, gift vouchers or gaming credits). - Engaging in sexual behaviour online such as livestreamed sexual activities, sharing nudes or sexual conversations with someone more than 2 years older/younger. - Photographing others’ genitals without consent. - Taking and/or sharing sexual images of someone else without their consent. Threatening to share someone else’s sexual content (such as image or videos originally shared with them consensually) to cause distress or intimidate them into providing money or other ‘payment’ (such as additional sexual images or videos).

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
			- Using sexually suggestive language, avatars or usernames. - Intentional and repeated searches for online pornography at this age may be concerning (Quadara et al 2017). This can be a time for parents and carers to provide frequent supportive statements that encourage children to confide in them when they encounter things online that make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. May require intervention - Intentionally exposing other children to pornography without their agreement - Distributing links to naked and/or sexual images or videos without these having been requested - Using sexually suggestive avatars and/or usernames with the intention of attracting sexual attention. - Frequent compulsive viewing of online pornography. A preference for viewing online pornography over other activities. Requires intervention - Taking and/or sharing sexual images or videos of someone else without their permission. - Taking and/or sharing images or videos of others engaged in private activities such as bathing, showering, or toileting without their permission.	- Storing multiple nude images and/or videos of self or others as this places themselves at risk of exploitation or extortion. - Viewing and then engaging in harmful sexual behaviours normalised in mainstream pornography, for example choking, restraining, forcing, or not using condoms. Requires intervention Taking sexual images or videos of others to exploit or extort them. Taking and/or sharing sexual images of someone without their consent. - Grooming younger children online for the purpose of sexually abusing them. - Using artificial intelligence (AI) to create, collect and/or distribute sexualised images of others.	
Sexual development and behaviour (General focus)	Typical behaviours Children start learning about their bodies and their relationships with others from birth. Babies first begin to learn about loving relationships through responsive carers. Children in this age group are naturally curious. They will explore and ask questions about their own bodies and show curiosity about other bodies. Infants will discover parts of their own bodies including sensitive body parts (with lots of nerve endings) such as the genitals. Many children will touch their own	Typical behaviours By age 6, many children may have asked where babies come from. Children in this age group may also have an increased awareness of, and desire for body privacy. At this age, play involving sexual behaviour is usually between children who know each other and play together often. It is usually driven by curiosity and ‘nice feelings.’ Children may continue to touch their own genitals for comfort or pleasure and may do this unconsciously.	Typical behaviours Puberty may begin as early as age 8, but more commonly at around ages 11 to 12. For some children it may not begin until ages 14 to 15. During puberty, children may become concerned about what is ‘normal’ in terms of bodily changes such as breast size, penis size, menstruation, and breast enlargement in male bodies due to hormonal changes. Children may experience hormonal changes that can drive sexual interest and behaviour, and ‘crushes’ may turn into something more like	Typical behaviours Australian surveys of secondary school students show that the average age children start masturbating is 13.5 years, and the average age of first vaginal, anal or oral sex is around 15.5 years. Around one third of Year 10 students report experiences of vaginal or anal sex (Power et al 2022).	Typical behaviours Teenagers at this age are continuing their self-discovery, including understanding their identity (including gender and sexuality) and how it relates to feelings of attractiveness, love, popularity, self-worth and belonging. Friendships are an important source of support, both in person and online. However, this age group often values and wants to understand their parents and carers’ beliefs about relationships. While there may be generational differences in views,

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	genitals for comfort or pleasure, and this is normal and healthy. Toddlers’ curiosity about bodies may include wanting to look at or touch others’ body parts, especially those of their parents and carers or other familiar adults and children. This is an opportunity for parents and carers to begin teaching about body boundaries and appropriate touching. Many children will play games that involve showing each other parts of their body (‘You show me yours, and I’ll show you mine’). In addition to body parts, children may also show a fascination with bodily functions, such as going to the toilet. As they explore, children will begin to learn the differences between male and female bodies and may begin to identify as a boy or girl, or as both or neither. They will also begin to understand gender norms and may assert a gender identity informed by those norms. Children may segregate into groups to play games that are ‘boys only’ or ‘girls only,’ and this may be an important time to challenge gendered stereotypes. It is also important to support children who are being excluded, or who are excluding others. May require attention At this age, concerning behaviours are those that involve coercion and/or force, or compulsiveness. This can be forcing other children into sexual play or attempting to trick or manipulate adults or other children into sexual play. Sexual play with dolls that mimics coercion and/or force is also cause for concern. Parents and carers should remain alert if children persist in these behaviours after redirection.	May require attention Wanting to play in a sexual way with much older or younger children, or purposeful attempts to expose or see others’ genitals (or publicly expose their own). Sexual knowledge beyond the developmental level expected may also be cause for concern. Requires intervention A child persistently touching or rubbing their genitals in public, or engaging in aggressive or forced sexual play, particularly when it seems compulsive and is not responsive to redirection.	sexual attraction. Children may also start to identify their sexuality as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or other. Family and school attitudes are critical in supporting children to navigate these experiences. While all children may be exposed to sexual abuse and assault, children with disabilities are more often targeted. Similarly, children in out of home care may also be more likely to be exposed to sexual abuse and assault. Sexual assault in these settings is not always perpetrated by an older person, and there is increasing concern around peer-on-peer harmful sexual behaviour (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017). May require attention Mutual masturbation with a sibling, peer or group is cause for concern as it extends beyond the usual curiosity at this stage.	May require intervention Sexualised behaviour towards siblings or other family members is very concerning. Requires intervention Very concerning behaviours at this age include sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape. Very concerning behaviours also include coercive control in close personal relationships, overt ‘slut-shaming’ or victim-blaming (with regard to sexual harassment, assault, and rape) and discriminatory attitudes towards women or gender/sexual minorities.	talking about them openly can support strong family relationships. They may also experience their first romantic relationships, which are important in learning about closeness, trust and intimacy with others. European research found that 53.4% of teenagers aged 13-17 had not had sex and were happy with their decision. 93.2% reported that their most recent sexual event was wanted (Project deSHAME 2017). May require attention Spying on others who are nude or engaged in private or sexual activity. Requires intervention Of those who had sex, 28% had been sexually assaulted or raped. Victim-survivors of sexual assault identified pressure from a partner, intoxication and being scared as factors in the experience (Project deSHAME 2017). More than half of transgender and gender diverse Australians have been victims of sexual violence or coercion – almost four times the rate of the general population (Callander et al 2019). In addition to sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape (including group sexual assault), coercing others into online sexual activities by making threats, payment or applying pressure is very concerning behaviour. The use of alcohol and/or drugs during sex, or to lower inhibitions or coerce others into sex, is very concerning. Sexual contact with, or the grooming of much younger people is also very concerning.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	Excessive or persistent masturbation or sexual touching of others may also be cause for concern. Requires intervention Any forced penetration (oral, anal or vaginal) with objects or body parts is very concerning behaviour. Compulsive or persistent behaviour involving sexual play or touch that is not responsive to redirection will require intervention.				

Table 2: Four developmental domains

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
Culture, social norms and sexuality (Online focus)	Children may: - Identify what online games and activities are stereotypically ‘for boys’ and ‘for girls,’ including taking cues from colour and design. These stereotypes may influence children’s interests and behaviour. - Be interested in the online programs and apps their family use. Parents and carers can: - Be playmates and role models for children, including engaging in online play and exploration. - Introduce children to educational online content. - Foster children’s self-regulation using offline games, songs, and rhymes. - Talk and yarn about what the Internet is and how people use it. - Encourage their child to share online experiences and talk about positive behaviours. - Provide children with safe online spaces for imaginative and creative play, including play that does not adhere to rigid structures of gender. - Model positive online behaviours, including seeking consent before	Children may: - Make decisions about what they do and how they interact online based on personal values and preferences. - Acknowledge that everyone has rights in the online environment, e.g., safety, freedom. They may recognise their right to belong and contribute to a variety of groups. - Use critical thinking skills and explain their reasoning in identifying trusted online sources for learning about themselves, their feelings, and bodies. - Begin to identify who or what informs their values and attitudes and how this impacts their online behaviours. - Learn about screen time and online behaviour through the activities/role-modelling of adults. - Talk and yarn about how they feel about their sex and gender, and gender stereotypes, and how these are portrayed, enacted or challenged online. - Talk and yarn about how rules for online experiences might change with different family members.	Children may: - Begin to use and be exposed to online activities and influences, e.g., multiplayer gaming spaces, sharing selfies, and discussion spaces such as forums. - Experience online interactions that impact offline relationships, such as in the classroom. - Talk and yarn about how role models influence them and the way they see themselves, including online ‘influencers.’ - Start to identify misinformation online. - Reflect on, describe and express support for human rights and rights in the online environment, e.g. safety, freedom. - Acknowledge that online sources can affect their understanding of themselves, their sexuality and growing up. - Talk about their personal values and how these relate to issues of sexuality and online behaviour, e.g., begin to take a personal view on sexualised media. Parents and carers can: - Share with children their own ideas about what influences their values and behaviours, including	Children may: - Participate in and be exposed to more complex online spaces and activities, e.g., participating in virtual worlds, engaging in online activism. - Seek out ways to promote equality and reduce harm in online interactions. - Question influences on their personal values and social norms and how these impact their online behaviour. - Identify how their personal values interact with and impact others and begin to navigate relationships with people who hold different values and beliefs about online behaviour, e.g., what is and is not appropriate to share online. - Develop values and attitudes about sexuality and online behaviour that are different to those of other people in their family or community. - Experience the impact of online algorithms on what they see, understand and consume, for example content relating to cultural norms and stereotypes around bodies and body image, gender and sexuality.	16- to 18-year-olds may: - Accept and respect values about online behaviour that are different to their own. - Appreciate, describe, and promote ways to protect rights online, including those that impact sexuality. - Understand their peers’ engagement in sexual content online, such as through sharing images (including ‘nudes’ and sexualised images) and use of dating apps and pornography. - Understand that laws and policies protect individuals’ rights, and that specific laws have been created to protect human rights online, including online safety laws and child sexual abuse laws. - Reflect on social and cultural norms and how they influence online behaviour, e.g., viewing sexual content or feeling pressure to engage in sexual activity online, and that different communities may hold opposing views. - Show support for people experiencing homophobia, transphobia, ableism, disablism and racism, including safely and assertively standing up for them in online spaces.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	taking and sharing photos, and help-seeking. - Model safe internet use, such as checking the privacy or purchasing settings in apps and games. - Help children identify positive role models of masculine, feminine and LGBTQIA+ identities, disability and disabled characters online. - Encourage critical thinking about sex and gender stereotypes online, such as whether a game is 'for girls' or 'for boys,' or in the way people interact with each other.	- Identify online spaces and tools that are safe for them to use. Co-create and apply rules about safe and healthy use of online spaces and tools. - Start to use technology at school. - Start to develop self-regulation of screen time and balance of online and offline activities. Parents and carers can: - Model the ways in which values influence online choices. - Foster children's self-regulation by playing games online together that involve stopping, pausing, turn taking, and waiting. - Play 'What if...' situations in which various problem scenarios are posed and children respond with possible solutions and receive feedback. - Talk and yarn about, and reflect on, their own values and how these influence their online behaviours, for example, I like to/prefer not to have my photo taken or shared online. - Acknowledge others' human rights online, such as the right to connect with others online and feel safe. For example, providing assistance to others seeking help to perform activities online such as video calls. - Offer support to children with unique interests who may struggle to fit in, for example, by helping them connect with child-friendly online communities. - Model, encourage, and support help-seeking behaviour when something goes wrong. Ensure children understand they will not be punished for coming to you for help. - Encourage children to talk and yarn about what they notice about how gender impacts what they and others do and experience online. For example, are girls, boys and gender-diverse children treated differently in online games they play together? - Discuss the differences in rules and values between different households, such as rules about	online behaviours. For example, parents and carers might talk about it being okay to disagree with others online but doing so with respect and using respectful words. - Use scenarios to explore how to navigate online experiences where personal values are different to the values of others, for example, discussion of social or political views in games or social media. - Express support for the human rights of others online, for example the benefits of accessible technology or the sharing of stories of diverse people's experiences. Encourage children to share ideas about why these things are important, and if their own online experiences and activities could be made more accessible to their peers with different needs, abilities and disabilities. - Ask questions about children's experiences of gender in online spaces, for example, are girls, boys and gender-diverse children treated well in the game you're playing? Be aware of conversations children are having in online gaming spaces, and address instances of discrimination, such as gender-based harassment and racism, with your child. - Recognise and talk about examples of gender inequality, e.g., the marginalisation of girls and women in online gaming spaces and apply their observations to their personal experiences and/or behaviour. - Discuss misinformation and disinformation in online spaces such as social media, using examples. Ask about strategies children might use to fact-check what they see online. For example, check the content is from a trustworthy source, that different views are included, and the quotes match the story. - Unpack with children how algorithms affect (and even control) online experiences, especially on social media.	- Talk and yarn about the social norms that contribute to gender-based violence and discrimination, such as homophobia and transphobia, and other forms of discrimination such as racism and Islamophobia, including violence in online spaces such as cyberbullying and cyber-abuse. - Consider sharing sexual images or videos as a first step in a sexual relationship. Parents and carers can: - Encourage children to reflect on online experiences and how these relate to their personal values. Keep an open dialogue about how their values may be changing or growing as they get older and let them know this is okay and a normal part of growing up. - Help children understand their online profile and 'digital footprint,' and to consider the potential consequences of what they share online. - Share information about laws that protect individuals from online child sexual abuse and image-based abuse. - Learn about current norms from their children and reflect and discuss with children that this may be different to when they were growing up.	- Develop an understanding that harms such as sexual harassment that happen online impact people's offline lives. Parents and carers can: - Continue to build teenagers' understanding of how laws support human and digital rights in online environments and encourage them to reflect on their rights and responsibilities. - Accept that the values of their children may be different to their own. This may be particularly noticeable in online environments, where this age group may feel like they have more freedom to be and express themselves. - Encourage and support them to share their own ideas about what influences their values and online behaviours. - Help them understand the impact of stigma on getting help for online issues, and the roles that people can play in changing attitudes.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
		what content is okay to access online. • Talk and yarn with their child about the impact of gender stereotypes on how we choose what we like to do and the ways we treat one another. For example, children may feel more drawn to certain types of online content, such as videos or web comics, based on social/stereotypical conceptions of ‘what boys/girls like.’ • Encourage acceptance of diverse interests and discourage adherence to stereotypes. For example, support children to explore non-gender stereotypical interests online (boys may want to learn about ballet, girls may want to explore how cars work), and encourage them to support their friends to do so as well. • List trusted online sources of information and learning, particularly about sex and relationships. Encourage children to talk about why these sources are trustworthy and ask if they can think of others. • Support children to develop skills to make online spaces inclusive, such as ‘upstander’ behaviour.			
Culture, social norms and sexuality • Human rights and sexuality • The social construction of gender and gender norms • Gender-based violence	Children’s understanding of fairness and respect for the rights of others emerges early in life. This may be seen as children include others in play or engage in parallel play. Children may also show curiosity about, and/or enforce rules (Ministry of Education, New Zealand 2017). Children may form notions about identity based on their understanding of ‘boys’ behaviour’ and ‘girls’ behaviour,’ and how they view themselves in relation to these. Children may begin to learn about keeping themselves healthy and taking care of themselves. Parents and carers can: Support children to be themselves by interacting with them and introducing them to interactions with	Children at this age may show an emerging understanding of personal values and preferences, and how these may be different across individuals and communities. Children may identify different families/family structures in their community, for example, two-parent, single-parent, extended and non-traditional families. This supports the recognition of human rights such as safety, freedom and belonging. Children may make personal connections with stories that explore identity and belonging, and talk and yarn about who they are, where they come from, and the important people in their lives. Children may also identify characters in stories who interact kindly and politely with different	Children at this age may be ready to talk openly with their friends and peers about their own help-seeking behaviours. They may have a greater understanding of how community, culture and family sources can impact their understanding of themselves, their sexuality and growing up. They may also be able to talk and yarn about their own gender identity and acknowledge and respect the gender identities of others. Children may start to experience puberty or be aware that they may begin experiencing puberty soon. They may start to take an interest in what their sexuality is or will be in the future.	Children at this age may be seeking guidance on cultural norms and stereotypes around gender and sexuality. This could include the potential impacts of gender norms, and how they shape their identities, desires, practices and behaviour, including online. They may also have questions about the impact of rights and laws on issues related to sexuality. In First Nations communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys/young men may be considered to go through Lore, a cultural practice for young men. A young male may be considered for cultural business. Children may talk and yarn about the social norms that contribute to gender-based violence and	Teenagers at this age may identify and discuss concepts of stigma surrounding sex and relationships across a variety of contexts, such as social, familial, and religious. This may help them to recognise examples of gender bias, including against people with diverse sexual and gender identities, and recognise and counter their own biases. They may show support for people experiencing homophobia, transphobia, ableism, disablism and racism, including safely and assertively standing up for them. Parents and carers can: Encourage this age group to share their own ideas about what influences their values and

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	family members and others. This can include being playmates and role models for children, including in online play. Provide safe physical spaces for imaginative and creative play. Support children to begin developing their identities by encouraging play that does not adhere to rigid structures of gender, or racial, cultural and religious stereotypes. Model talking about and interacting kindly and politely with others, including those with different family types and structures. Provide positive role models of masculine, feminine and LGBTQIA+ identities. Model social rules such as polite responses but also be explicit about when social rules don't need to be followed, such as when feeling unsafe or in danger. Encourage children to seek help and ask questions. Having open conversations can help children identify, share and understand their own feelings, and the feelings of others. This can occur in both face-to-face and online scenarios.	types of families and identify protective and help-seeking behaviours used by characters in stories. Understanding help-seeking behaviours may also help children to use critical thinking skills and explain their reasoning in identifying trusted family and community sources for learning about themselves, their feelings, and bodies. As part of understanding other families, communities and perspectives, children may begin to identify how social and cultural norms, religious beliefs, and media portrayals can impact perceptions of gender roles and relationships. Children at this age may choose to express a masculine, feminine or non-conforming gender identity. Parents and carers can: Talk and yarn with children about people in their community who are trusted sources of information and learning, particularly about sex and relationships. Encourage children to talk and yarn about why these sources are trustworthy and asked if they can think of others. Help children understand social and cultural norms, and media portrayals, surrounding sex, gender and relationships. Learn about other parents and carers' approaches to talking about sex and relationships with their children, for example via online parent groups or forums. Talk about the impacts of shame and fear on being able to have those discussions. However, be aware that some online groups promote unhelpful and/or extreme beliefs.	Parents and carers can: Talk about how elements of their culture or community impact on gender norms and relationships, for example, 'it's important for me to always wear my hijab in photos.' It may be helpful to ask children what is culturally important to them.	discrimination, such as homophobia and transphobia, and recognise how social norms can impact willingness to seek help, for example, if someone has concerns about whether they're ready for sex. Parents and carers can: Help children navigate, understand, reflect on and challenge gender stereotypes, and share information about laws that protect individuals from sexual abuse and harassment. Guide children to develop their personal values around sex, gender and sexuality, and how this might be similar or different to the broader cultural understandings they have grown up with or see and experience in their community. Remind children that whatever a person's values are, discrimination based on those values is unlawful. Initiate conversations about healthy body image, role model healthy body image, and to ask children about their perceptions of their own bodies and bodies they see online. Support children with disability or developmental delay to participate in activities and communities that are empowering, affirming and body positive. Children with disability may face additional barriers because of prejudices around disabled bodies, and body dysmorphia is common among young neurodivergent people. Disability Pride is a growing movement that combats this and celebrates body diversity.	behaviours and learn about their world without judgement. Help them understand the impact of stigma on getting help for issues, and the roles that people can play in changing attitudes. Be open to, supportive of and curious about conversations on a wide range of topics, while recognising your own values and capacity to talk about issues relating to sex and sexuality. Show that it is safe for teenagers to have a respectful discussion with you and acknowledge where it might be awkward or uncomfortable. Where conversations are difficult, or there are questions you don't feel you can answer, explore together the services that they can access such as Kids Helpline and Headspace.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
Bodies, consent and privacy (Online focus)	Children may: - Role-play online activities like taking ‘selfies.’ - Take photos of their own body or show their body on video chats. - Start to notice sex and gender differences in bodies or the way bodies are portrayed online. - Begin to take an interest in gaming; may prefer hand-held games. - Explain body rights, for example, my body is my body, and how this right applies online. - Not have an understanding of privacy, or the interconnected nature of the online platforms they may interact with. Parents and carers can: - Talk and yarn about online preferences and experiences and answer children’s questions. - Provide safety and check in with children’s comfort levels, for example, ‘Would you like to talk to Grandma on video?’ - Use examples to talk and yarn about their own and others’ boundaries in online spaces, for example, one person might feel comfortable having their face showing in a photo online, and another person may not. - Model digital autonomy by asking for and respecting consent for taking or sharing images and videos. Set firm limits around safety issues, for example, explaining that it is best to explore websites together in case there is something that children find worrying or confusing. - Talk about the type of online activities that are public, and that it isn’t socially acceptable to show private body parts in public spaces. - Be mindful of how they talk about and display their own gender and sexuality, for example taking selfies and sharing them online. - Acknowledge and abide by the understanding that children cannot consent to having their genitals photographed.	Children may: - Want to make decisions for themselves about what they do online. - Take and share posed photos of themselves (clothed). - Take photos of others or their possessions, with consent. - Have an emerging understanding of how consent applies to online interactions (though they may make mistakes). - Understand that they should tell a parent/carer or other trusted adult if they feel uncomfortable about online activities. - Understand the importance of seeking help from a trusted adult if they are asked to show pictures of ‘private’ parts of their body online. - Record family and friends telling stories using a device, with consent. - Identify and use strategies to keep usernames and passwords private. Parents and carers can: - Help children identify apps and websites where their personal information might be collected and/or become visible to others, such as some online games. - Enable children to make or contribute to decisions about things that affect them, for example, listening to their input about family rules for screen time. - Talk and yarn about things that happen online, and label the feelings associated with them. Let children have freedom to explore online, so long as it is safe. Use parental controls and filters to help prevent them from coming across content that may be confusing or upsetting and explain how this allows them to have more freedom while keeping them safe. Note that parental controls and filters cannot always protect against children seeing inappropriate content and should be used alongside other protective approaches such as supervision.	Children may: - Use a search engine safely to find information online. - Describe techniques to create strong, easy to remember passwords. - Acknowledge and describe how personal data stored or shared online contributes to an online identity or ‘digital footprint.’ - Have an emerging understanding of what privacy means online and use features of apps to increase privacy and safety, for example, restricting who can view their profile or message them. - Recognise and be able to explain that private online spaces are important. - Show concern over physical changes, and compare body/development to others, including people in the media. - Develop media literacy about the presentation of bodies. - Talk and yarn about how media images relating to bodies and body image may be unhelpful or unhealthy. - Take and share posed photos of themselves as a part of self-expression and begin to explore this as a way of communicating sexual interest. - Have a limited understanding of privacy and the impact of sharing photos, videos, and comments online. - Practice skills to communicate safely and assertively to protect their privacy, such as not sharing passwords with others, and counter unwanted sexual attention, including online, such as through instant messaging. - Begin or continue to experience cyberbullying. Children may be reluctant to talk about these experiences with their parents or carers, particularly if they are worried their devices may be confiscated. Parents and carers can: - Ask children how they feel before taking and sharing images of them online.	Children may: - Develop their own strategies for healthy use of online tools and environments, for example, turning off notifications before getting ready for sleep. - Describe and use privacy settings to protect their personal data online. - Understand the reasons behind online safety rules such as not sharing passwords or location data. - Identify the common techniques used in online scams, such as phishing, and how to avoid them. - Develop strategies to manage their ‘digital footprint.’ - Give reasons for why some images and videos are safe and respectful to share online, and some are not. - Talk and yarn about how media representation influences body image, beauty standards and sexual expectations. - Express consent, and lack of consent, in sexual activity and interactions online, such as sexting or sharing explicit images and videos. - Identify and take steps to address the risks to bodily and sexual safety online, for example, reduced inhibition, anonymous accounts, and adults and children sharing devices and/or online accounts. - Know that children cannot consent to online sexual activity with adults. - Identify safe and unsafe situations and interactions online, including understanding that interacting in an open multiplayer gaming environment may be safe, but accepting an invitation to a private online space may not be. - Be more at risk of image-based abuse and creating child sexual exploitation material (nude or sexualised images of themselves or other children). - Talk and yarn about protective strategies with their friends and peers, for example, resisting pressure to share or send ‘nudes.’	16- to-18-year-olds may: - Make choices about their body, share different representations of their body, and discuss and yarn about issues relating to body image with others online. - Compare their body and/or sexual activity to others’ online. - Make comparisons about their bodies and sexual activity/performance to actors in online pornography. - Seek sexual information about bodies online to understand their own body or sexual interest. - Be aware of social implications if they share sexual content without consent. - Be aware of the legal consequences if they share intimate images of others, including civil penalties in line with Australian state-based laws. Parents and carers can: - Encourage this age group to regularly check in with others about the sharing of their images and information online. - Help them understand how to stop the spread of images that have been shared without their consent. For example, direct them to Take It Down. - Talk and yarn about different situations so they develop real-life skills and knowledge. For example, ‘What advice would you give if your friend were being sexually harassed online?’ - Use scenarios to talk and yarn about how to navigate boundaries in different online relationships, including friendships and romantic relationships. - Question, discuss and yarn about gender stereotypes in online relationships and how these might impact on consent, for example, the impact of online sexual harassment on individuals’ ability to work, or feel safe to connect with others, online. - Understand what information (or misinformation) teenagers at this age find online about sex and relationships and discuss and yarn about knowledge that might

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	• Report image-based abuse and child sexual abuse material (at all ages).	• Talk and yarn about how to identify emotional cues online and help them understand that interpreting mood and meaning through text-based communication, such as instant messaging, is different to face-to-face. • Teach children that it's okay not to do things they're not comfortable with online. For example, it's okay not to switch on your webcam when you don't want to, even if someone asks. • Ask children how they feel before taking and sharing images of them online. • Encourage children to have personal boundaries and adhere to shared guidelines for sharing images (and engaging in activities) online. • Explain to children how they can tell whether a person is 'known' or a friend. • Respect the privacy of children who may appear incidentally in photos of public spaces, and do not share those photos online without consent. • Discuss and yarn about which online activities are public, and why it isn't socially acceptable to show private body parts in public spaces. • Use examples to explore their own and others' boundaries in online spaces, for example, one person might feel comfortable having their face showing in a photo online and another person may not. • Help children understand feelings related to isolation, loneliness and longing for others, and how these might create the need to seek connection online, which may make them feel better or worse. • Help children understand that gender-diverse children, children from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and children with disability face increased risks of harm online.	• Correct misinformation, and talk and yarn about ways to identify misinformation and seek trustworthy sources of information. • Encourage children to have personal boundaries and adhere to shared guidelines for sharing images (and engaging in activities) online. • Identify, discuss and yarn about different types of online relationships, and how power can influence online relationships. For example, older children (or adults) may seem more knowledgeable and mature and may have better online skills. • Use scenarios to teach skills for giving and receiving consent in different situations, including taking and sharing photos of others, and sharing non-explicit vs explicit content. • Have positive conversations about online safety (not punitive or focused on consequences). • Talk and yarn about gender stereotypes in online relationships and how these might impact on consent, for example, a male child might pressure a female child to send (or receive) sexually explicit images because their peers or online influences suggest that is 'how men act' in relationships. • Be explicit about the things adults are not allowed to do with children, such as ask for nude or sexualised pictures or videos, or send nude or sexualised pictures, videos or comments. • Let children know that it is not their fault if they are being cyberbullied, and that you will work out what to do together, without taking away their devices or access to the apps or websites they like to use. Serious cyberbullying can be reported to eSafety if the material has already been reported to the platform and they have not removed it.	Parents and carers can: • Talk and yarn with children about how their online profile or experiences impact how they feel about their body. Ask about how they check in with themselves and reality check what they see online, for example, by considering how the content they see may be determined by algorithms, and may not be a reflection of the broader world. • Encourage children to critically reflect on their personal boundaries and social norms for sharing images (and engaging in activities) online. • Articulate the universal right to privacy and bodily autonomy, and how these apply to online spaces, for example, it's not okay to go through someone's device without their consent. • Challenge gender norms that blame girls or others if someone has hurt them, for example, it is not the fault of the person in the image when image-based abuse occurs, even if they created the image themselves. • Use scenarios to talk and yarn about skills for navigating consent in different situations, for example, before sending sexual messages or sharing sexual content. • Talk and yarn about gender stereotypes in online relationships and how these might impact on consent, for example, why some groups might feel more pressure to send sexual messages or images. • Talk and yarn about consent and how it applies to online interactions (in addition to in-person). Consent should be discussed from an ethical perspective, not solely from a legal perspective. • Use co-viewing of various media as an opportunity to discuss and yarn about how sexual expectations are portrayed and reinforced. • Discuss and yarn about the importance of others' right to have a say in what happens to	be missing, such as information around sexual health, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), abortion services and affirmative consent. • Support this age group to understand that online pornography shows extreme and stereotypical representations of gender, and often surgically enhanced features. Remind them that what they might see in online pornography may not be realistic or safe to try to imitate.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
				their body, including images of their body. This can include talking about the legal consequences of sharing sexual images of someone else online. • Talk and yarn about what bullying and cyberbullying are, and how they can affect people, such as contributing to depression, anxiety and suicide. • Support others who have experienced image-based abuse or child sexual abuse, including online child sexual abuse. This may include helping them access formal supports such as therapy/counselling. • Support children to understand that the images of bodies, and discourse around body types shown online may be curated via algorithms that seek engagement regardless of whether it is positive and negative – and that these do not necessarily reflect real life or realistic expectations.	
Bodies, consent and privacy • Puberty • Body image • Consent, privacy and body integrity	Children at this age may be curious about bodies, including other people’s bodies, and bodily functions. They may play games that explore bodies, draw body parts, and talk about ‘private’ body parts such as genitals. They may also engage in purposeful exploration of their own bodies, including genitals. They may also be able to explain body rights, for example, ‘My body is my body,’ and that others also have the right to say what happens to their bodies. This includes saying no to unwanted physical touch, and requesting privacy – such as when in the bathroom, or when photos are being taken of them. They may be able to sense when something is uncomfortable or not right, both online and offline. They may be able to identify early warning signs that indicate emotions such as fear or excitement. However, they may also ask adults to touch their bodies, including genitals, in ways that are	Children at this age are able to identify which parts of the body are ‘private,’ and may show an increased desire for privacy. They learn to ask for consent when sharing possessions and personal space, and the importance of respecting others’ right to say no. Children will also develop an understanding of the connections between emotions, bodily reactions and body language, which helps them identify uncomfortable and unsafe situations. Parents and carers can: Help children understand the feelings of others and support them to ask if they are unsure. Support children to have boundaries with trusted people. For example, they may help children practice ways to politely tell a family member they would prefer not to hug or sit on their knee or understand what to expect from a support person	As they grow older and start to experience or become aware they will soon experience puberty, children may become more self-conscious about their body and body image. As their desire for privacy increases, they may recognise and be able to explain why bodily privacy and private spaces are important. They may be concerned over physical changes they experience, and compare their bodies and development to others’, such as their friends. Children may experience a range of interactions with body image, for example through online ‘influencers’ who promote unrealistic standards of perceived beauty or fitness. They may encounter and have their perceptions affected by images of bodies that have been digitally altered, or that have been generated by artificial intelligence. Children continue to develop their understanding of consent, what constitutes a sexual behaviour, and what is sexual harassment. They may	Children at this age may have a deepening understanding of the importance of consent and may be developing their skills in expressing consent and lack of consent in relation to their bodily and sexual boundaries. They may be able to assert their bodily autonomy and understand the benefits of navigating consent (and lack of consent), and that drugs or alcohol impact a person's ability to give their consent. They may be able to understand and express that sexual activity is a choice, but may also be at risk of not having the practical information, skills or help-seeking avenues they need to stay safe, and have safe sexual interactions with others, if their sexual and emotional development is not supported by parents and carers, educators and/or peers. Children without information and help seeking avenues are more vulnerable to engaging in sexual behaviours without considering ethical, legal or health outcomes.	Teenagers at this age may become more comfortable or active in expressing their sexuality and gender identity. They may have a deeper understanding of factors that impact power and consent, such as sex, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, language proficiency and positions of authority. There are legal boundaries to when consent can and cannot be given. There are also ethical boundaries that may vary from person to person. They may continue to develop their understanding that consent is legally and ethically required in sexual relationships and interactions. This includes respectfully recognising and acting on consent or lack of consent. Teens at this age may seek to access additional support, or help others to do so, when experiencing sexual or gender-based violence or abuse, or intimate partner abuse.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	not accepted within cultural norms around privacy and consent. Parents and carers can: Help children understand their bodies and bodily functions by naming and explaining them using the proper terms. It is helpful when conversations cover a wide range of bodies, including intersex bodies and bodies with disability such as limb differences. It's also important to help children build their social and emotional vocabularies so they are better able to name and express their feelings. Respect children's feelings and consent, particularly with regard to physical affection and touch. Show, as well as teach, that a child's 'no' will be respected. Help children understand what touch is necessary for caregiving. Model respect for privacy by asking for and respecting consent when taking photos or videos of children. Help children understand that it is never okay for anyone to look at, touch or take photos of their private parts without their consent. Provide children with the language to express when situations make them uncomfortable, and with the assurance that they will never be punished for seeking help in situations where they do feel uncomfortable. Children with disability may require the right communication tools or assistive technology.	engaging in personal care activities. The right to say no to physical affection also extends to other interactions, such as participating in video calls. Reinforce that each new interaction needs consent, and that children are allowed and supported to change their minds. Help children understand the difference between public and private spaces, and that different activities are socially acceptable for each. Continue to discuss, yarn about and normalise bodies and bodily functions, including helping children understand that their bodies can affect their feelings without them realising it, such as through hormones. Help them understand that their privacy should be respected, for example when they are in the bathroom. Support their right to safety and help them to respect the safety and rights of others, including through a shared language around acceptable behaviours and touch. Help identify, discuss and yarn about problematic sexual behaviours if demonstrated by their child, or directed towards their child. Some children in this age group may experience bullying. Up to 58% of children aged 5 to 8 years have reported appearance-related teasing from peers. This has been associated with disordered eating in later years (as young as 8 to 12) (Butterfly Foundation 2022). Parents and carers can help children seek support, including from trusted adults and services such as Kids Helpline.	also develop more effective communication of their intentions in social situations as part of seeking consent and be able to interpret verbal and non-verbal cues associated with giving and denying consent. Children may recognise that their responses, such as how they manage disappointment, anger or rejection contribute to whether or not others feel safe to give or deny consent. They may also recognise how power dynamics contribute to these scenarios. Parents and carers can: Help children understand that others might make comments about their bodies that make them feel uncomfortable or singled out, and that this is not okay, whether it's in public or in private. Children should be supported to understand that some comments, such as when others comment on a girl's developing breasts or on a boy's developing erection, may constitute sexual harassment; and that sexual harassment is never okay, whether from peers or adults. Help children understand how to support each other, and seek help from others (such as trusted adults or support services like Kids Helpline) when they need it. Help children find information about the law with regard to consent and safety, and understand that the law is there to protect them and others. Support children to understand that if they choose to have a romantic or sexual relationship in the future, it is their right for it to be safe, consensual and respectful, including online. This may also include discussion of, and yarning about what sexual behaviours are harmful, unethical and/or illegal (for example, sexual activity with a child under 12), and explicit information about what sexual abuse is.	They are also more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Parents and carers can: Consistently reinforce that their child is worthy of care and respect, and that children have the right to set and communicate their own boundaries. Support children to understand how power dynamics can contribute to pressure and compliance around sexual and other activity, including risk-taking behaviours. Support children to maintain their safety and bodily autonomy by teaching them to expect healthy and safe relationships, and to identify positive aspects ('green flags' – such as being able to be yourself, having your boundaries respected, feeling safe to disagree) within relationships. This may lead to discussion of, and yarning about warning signs and negative behaviours ('red flags' – such as love bombing, harassment, non-consensual monitoring) that indicate violence and/or abuse in relationships, and how they can support others who may be experiencing abuse. Understand that neurodivergent people may have different ways of understanding social cues and relationships, and that perpetrators of violence may use this to target and exploit individuals. Support children to develop healthy relationships, both sexual and non-sexual.	Parents and carers can: Continue to help this age group find information about laws relating to consent and safety, and help them understand the ethical, social, emotional and legal consequences of acting without consent. At the same time, it may be helpful to have discussions about sex that focus on pleasure and joy. Emphasise the importance of navigating consent, including the understanding that it must be affirmative, and not coerced or reluctant. Discuss and yarn with this age group about the verbal and non-verbal clues that may indicate enthusiasm or reluctance with regard to consent and continue to have conversations about the red flags (such as love bombing, harassment, non-consensual monitoring) that indicate violence and abuse in relationships. Support teens to maintain their privacy while accessing medical services, including helping them access Medicare cards. Support them to understand the range of services that can provide assistance if they need it, for example, if they are experiencing dating violence.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
			Ensure that children understand that if abuse happens, it is never a child's fault. If children are engaging in harmful sexual behaviours, they will need help to access support. Be explicit about their concerns, but also help children identify green flags and positive behaviours that indicate that a relationship is safe, supportive and respectful.		
Relationships (Online focus)	Children may: - Use online platforms, with adult support, to communicate with loved ones. - Watch digital content such as their favourite TV/streaming programs. Older children in this age group may learn how to find the content they want to watch. - Begin to be interested in creating digital content or creating a digital identity with adult support. - Understand and enjoy video chats with adult support. Parents and carers can: - Provide safety and check in with children's comfort levels, for example, 'Would you like to talk to Grandma on video?' - Support children to use technology in their relationships, and guide decision making, for example, 'You want to take a photo of your brother? It looks like he doesn't want to, but you can take a photo of me.' - Talk about a variety of relationships and different ways that technology can be used to strengthen them, for example, 'Grandma lives far away; we can Facetime her to feel closer. Let's do it together so I can help you.' - Explain the characteristics of safe online friendships, including in games, messaging and other online activities. - Use co-viewing of various media to talk and yarn about scenarios, such as safe and respectful interactions with known and unknown people.	Children may: - Extend existing offline friendships through gaming and instant messaging. - Use digital technology such as phones and tablets to communicate with friends and family, with adult guidance and support. - Build some skills for self-directed online activities. Parents and carers can: - Talk and yarn about good sportsmanship in online games, such as supporting improvement and not taking losses personally. - Model good behaviour in gaming interactions (good sportsmanship, not using abusive language, etc), and become involved in games that children play. - Support children to choose games that are developmentally appropriate. At this age for example, avoiding games that depict graphic violence. - Encourage children to embed good offline ways of interaction in their online activities, such as being polite and respectful. - Talk and yarn about how equitable relationships contribute to wellbeing, including in online games, messaging and other online activities, for example, 'When Ella comes over to play games together, you can compete with each other and also encourage each other to do better.' - Encourage children to engage in two-way conversation online.	Children may: - Show that their friendships are increasingly important to them, including spending more time online to interact with friends. - Develop stronger communication skills, including expressing themselves in written form through instant messaging, and also through other online communication such as emojis. - Provide affirmation and support online, such as encouraging friends when playing online games together. - Recognise and safely challenge or seek help regarding cyberbullying behaviours. - Have an emerging understanding of the impact of online interactions on people's offline lives. - Begin to show an interest in sexual or romantic relationships. These may include online contexts such as sharing affectionate private messages, images or videos, announcing relationships or using sexual language online. - Acknowledge that 'in-character' interactions in online games can affect players' real-world emotions, especially if behaviour is sexually inappropriate, such as 'squatting' or 'teabagging' (certain actions that are suggestive of sexual aggression/assault that players can make their in-game avatars appear to do using normal in game functions like 'crouching').	Children may: - Become closer with online friends they may not know offline. - Curate and develop an online image or persona that may be similar to, or very different from their offline life. They may present their online identity differently to different audiences such as friends or family. - Identify and avoid unhealthy online behaviours such as nasty arguments, trolling, pile-ons (when trolls encourage mob mentality, urging others to join in the attack) and cyberbullying. - Become involved in cyberbullying or trolling. - Recognise the impact of cyberbullying on relationships. - Begin to recognise the impacts that online interactions have on offline relationships. - Show an interest in sexual activity and viewing sexual material such as online pornography. - Begin to understand that they have a responsibility to make thoughtful choices about the online content they consume, and how they allow it to affect or influence them. They may seek help if they feel they are being negatively impacted by online content. Send sexually explicit messages via online platforms, including text, images, and videos. - Have an emerging understanding of the impact of sharing images.	16- to 18-year-olds may: - Communicate with friends via social media and instant messaging. - Develop an understanding of their responsibility to be considerate and respect consent when creating online content, including that their content should not harm others, and that consent can be withdrawn at any time (for example by people shown in a video shared online). - Become more independent from their family. This may include developing distinct, curated identities for different online audiences, such as family, friends, and public. - Have a strong understanding of the ways that people communicate about and within sexual relationships online. This understanding may be strongly influenced by their peer and/or school context. - Develop sexual feelings/attraction and follow or interact with people they are attracted to online, such as via Facebook pages or TikTok. - Have an emerging understanding of online dating platforms. - Describe disrespectful, unhealthy, illegal or abusive behaviours in relationships, such as online stalking, going through a partner's device without their consent, or sharing intimate content without consent. - Recognise that intimate partner violence can take many forms including psychological, physical, and sexual, and that digital technology can be used to facilitate the abuse. Technology

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	Ensure children's online interactions are with known people only.	- Begin to support online relationships through supervised communication with friends and family. - Co-create and work together with your children to develop an online safety plan, including which online platforms the family will use, and how they will use them. It may include rules around screen time, who children communicate with online, and what is and is not private (with respect to parent/carer supervision). Engaging children in this process helps make it meaningful for them, so they retain more of their learning about online safety. - Help children identify who they are interacting with online. - Help children manage who they follow online so the content they see is safe and child friendly. - Support children to have respectful online interactions. - Help children identify opportunities for help-seeking for themselves or others online.	Parents and carers can: - Model, show and explain how technology can enhance children's relationships and help them feel connected to others, for example, by staying in touch with friends while they're on holiday. - Model healthy use of technology, for example moderating screen time, and putting devices away during face-to-face activities. - Use everyday scenarios to point out ways that technology can influence emotions in negative and positive ways, for example, 'When I received this message, I felt relieved, upset or hopeful.' - Clearly explain online behaviours that might indicate that a relationship is unhealthy, unsafe, or unsupportive, for example, consistently leaving aggressive or argumentative comments. - Share examples of children's rights and responsibilities in online relationships. It may be helpful to use relationships depicted in film, TV and other popular culture as a reference point. - Explore and encourage curiosity about how different relationships are governed by different laws and social norms, for example, people may interact differently with each other online and offline because it can be harder to tell how someone feels online. - Use scenarios to talk about different ways that children show affection in relationships online, and how these can enhance relationships. - Support children to navigate different values within the context of healthy behaviours online, such as when some people do not respond to messages as quickly as others or leave them on 'read.' - Celebrate healthy communication and behaviours online and support children to adopt those behaviours.	Parents and carers can: - Create, offer and provide a safe space for children to talk and yarn about their online relationships and experiences, for example, navigating how to understand tone and ask clarifying questions in text conversations. - Share examples of children's and adults' rights and responsibilities in online relationships. It may be helpful to use relationships depicted in film, TV and other popular culture as a reference point. - Talk and yarn about increasingly complex types of online relationships, and how power can influence online relationships, for example, relationships between adults and children, online influencers. - Encourage children to develop a diversity of friendships and reflect on the benefits of having different types of friends online. - Allow children greater digital privacy, except if they believe the child may be in danger. - Support children to recognise 'red flag' behaviours in relationships that pertain to online spaces, such as controlling what an intimate partner can post online, demanding passwords, and demanding access to private communications such as messages and chats. - Explain to children how to seek help if they are exposed to child sexual abuse material, discussions about child sexual abuse material, or requests for it.	can make it difficult to find respite from harmful behaviours. Send and receive sexually explicit texts and photos or engage in sexual activity online. - Seek help and information on sensitive topics such as pregnancy, STIs or 'coming out' online. - Search online for legal information about sexual activity, such as age of consent. Parents and carers can: - Talk and yarn about healthy, safe ways to feel connected to an intimate partner online. - Share trusted online sources of information on access to sexual health and contraception, how to deal with dating violence and technology-facilitated abuse (or tech-based abuse). - Support teens who have sensitive information about their sexuality, relationship status or sexual activity exposed online with or without consent. This can include helping them manage time online, talking and yarning about the issue or getting counselling support. - Support them to seek help to not perpetrate online sexual harassment, and/or to seek help if it happens to them.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
			Help children identify grooming and ‘sextortion’ behaviours online, and to recognise and articulate when other behaviours make them feel uncomfortable.		
Relationships - Families, and how different families approach online activities and experiences - Friendship, love and romantic relationships - Inclusion and respect - Norms and peer influence on behaviour - Decision-making - Communication, refusal and negotiation skills	Children at this age learn about communication and affection. They may ask and answer simple questions, engage in back-and-forth conversation, or tell a simple story. They may also show help-giving and empathic behaviour, such as comforting someone who is crying, and express simple affection such as a desire for physical closeness. However, they may also lack boundaries around physical proximity and contact. They may recognise familiar people and names, but express shyness or fear around strangers. Play may include mimicking or role-playing what they see in adult relationships, such as holding hands, kissing cheeks, or holding play ‘weddings.’ Children may develop or adopt gendered expectations of behaviour or show an awareness of gender stereotypes through play. They may understand good and bad experiences but may not connect these experiences to factors such as reasonable and respectful behaviour. Parents and carers can: Provide safe and consistent care and discuss routines with children. Care is important, but affection should not be forced. It can be helpful to acknowledge the other relationships that children consider special, such as with family members and friends. Help children be aware of others’ personal space.	Children at this age may form friendships and groups based on common interests and may also be able to describe the characteristics of trusted adults. They may be able to explain their reasons and critical thinking in identifying those adults. Many experiences emerge during play, and children may show skills in cooperation, collaboration and negotiation. They may also be able to describe how they deal with challenging experiences. This can include identifying and discussing others’ emotions, in real life and in stories. Understandings of heteronormative gender roles and stereotypes, such as ‘dominant’ males and ‘submissive’ females, may continue to emerge (and be questioned). Parents and carers can: Legitimise children’s feelings by paying attention to them and supporting children to express and label them. Discuss and yarn with children about who makes them feel good, and who makes them feel uncomfortable. Help children problem-solve when they have disagreements with friends so they can learn to share how they feel, to express boundaries, and listen to their friends. Help children manage rejection, such as when a friend or sibling doesn’t want to play with them.	Children may begin to form new friendship groupings around the age of 8. These may be based on common interests, as well as other traits such as gender. It is important to continue to support children who are being excluded, or who are excluding others. Race, disability and gender expression are other common factors used to exclude and bully children at this age. They may become more aware of their own emotional responses, such as things they find upsetting, and recognise and explain the emotions of others in real life and in stories. They may also develop strategies to manage their own emotions in difficult situations, and to predict the emotions of others. They may begin to recognise bullying behaviours and safely challenge them or seek help to do so. They may recognise the importance of belonging, and stand up against ableism, homophobia and transphobia. They may also recognise how words and labels can cause offence to groups of people, such as those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Children may begin to experience romantic and/or sexual attraction and begin forming relationships with their peers. These may include physical affection such as hugging and kissing. They may also develop strategies for responding to changes in relationships, such as when a friend changes schools or a romantic relationship breaks up. Parents and carers can: Explore ways that inequality affects	Children at this age may become more independent from parents and carers and family, while at the same time struggling to understand and manage big emotions. Friends and classmates may be important sources of peer support. They may seek and enact their own strategies to deal with conflict and power imbalances in their relationships, such as friendships and romantic relationships. This may include reflecting on their communication strategies, and what behaviours and interactions may be appropriate in different environments (including online and offline). Children may need to manage the challenges of puberty, and their emotional responses to challenging situations. They may continue to recognise and/or experience the impacts of bullying on relationships. Children may have romantic relationships, and/or become sexually active. They may recognise and question gender roles and stereotypes within those relationships and seek strategies to mitigate them. They may recognise, experience, and/or seek help to prevent gender-based violence and reflect on how experiences of abuse and violence are linked to gender roles and stereotypes. Parents and carers can: Support children to understand that relationships are grounded on taking care of oneself, taking care of the other, and fairness. Teach children that being pressured or guilted into doing a sexual activity they are uncertain about is not a sign	Teenagers at this age may be developing an awareness that sex is an important part of human experience across all cultures. They may understand that everyone deserves healthy opportunities for connection, affection, intimacy, fun and love. These older teens may experience closer relationships with their peers than with their parents and carers. They may continue to develop a stronger sense of their individuality and begin or continue romantic relationships and sexual activity with partners. They may be concerned about the privacy of their romantic relationships, including online interactions, and judgement from their family or peers if private activity becomes exposed, especially if they are highly monitored or supported due to disability. Teens at this age may develop their own ethical guidelines for managing or engaging in sexual relationships, as well as understanding legal responsibilities. Older teens may also continue to need support to develop healthy relationships and gender roles, including setting and respecting healthy sexual boundaries. Parents and carers can: Support this age group by responding to their questions and concerns with curiosity and empathy, rather than criticism. Encourage them to be curious and ask questions. Continue to take an interest in their lives outside the family, including

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
			personal relationships and interactions (such as age, gender, or even different gaming skills). Talk and yarn about the different contexts in which friendships develop, and the differences in experiences of knowing people online and offline. Help children identify green and red flags (positive and negative, or safe and unsafe, behaviours and attitudes) in relationships, and practice managing conflict and conflict resolution skills.	that the person cares about their feelings, and that gender stereotypes can contribute to these pressures. Support children to feel confident to talk and yarn with their parents and carers or other trusted adults about their experiences, but also to make mistakes in their relationships and develop their own strategies to navigate them. Help children understand that while it is okay to start exploring romantic relationships with their peers, it is illegal to engage in romantic or physical/sexual relationships with children more than two years younger or older than themselves. Discuss and yarn with children about the power dynamics that make this dangerous for both people involved, for example the possibility of the older child engaging in intentional or unintentional abusive or coercive behaviour. The wider the age difference, the wider/larger the power imbalance is likely to be. Unpack how some sexual narratives may mask discriminatory attitudes such as racism, for example by fetishising people of certain ethnicities.	their online lives. Provide teens with help when it's needed to navigate change in their relationships and identity. Be curious about the language being used to describe people and relationships, as this may be different to when they were younger. Support this age group to feel more comfortable having real conversations with their sexual partner/s about comfort, consent and pleasure.
Sexual literacy (Online focus)	Children may: - Encounter online pornography. - Seek help if they encounter sexual content, for example online videos. - Not be able to identify nudity or sexual content as pornography. Parents and carers can: - Explain that children may come across information about, images or videos showing naked bodies and/or sex on the internet, and that this information isn't designed for children and can cause harm, such as making them feel scared or worried; and provide help and information if they do.	Children may: - Engage in self-directed or parent-supported learning online, for example, Google search 'sexual health information.' - Not understand that messages about gender and sexuality may be embedded in content they consume relatively uncritically, such as cartoons. Parents and carers can: - Show children where to find trustworthy information about online safety and sexual health online, for example Kids Helpline. - Draw attention to how bodies and gender are represented in mainstream media and online environments, such as gaming.	Children may: - Use critical thinking skills and explain their reasoning in identifying trusted online sources such as Kids Helpline that they can approach with questions about sex, sexuality, and reproduction. - Not be able to identify all the ways they receive information about relationships, sex and gender (as this is often embedded and/or implied rather than explicit). - Take an interest in or intentionally seek out online and offline pornography. They may respond to it in a number of ways, including thinking it is funny, gross or scary.	Children may: - Use online pornography for arousal during masturbation. - Recognise and critique unrealistic portrayals of sex and relationships across a wide variety of media, including online media such as streaming videos, games, and pornography. Parents and carers can: - Watch online content or play video games with their child and talk and yarn about how sex and relationships are portrayed in these media. - Help children understand what to do if they encounter child sexual abuse material online.	16- to 18-year-olds may: - Know where to find trusted online information about sexual health including STIs, conception, contraception, and access to abortion services. - Seek help online but also be exposed to misinformation and disinformation. - Find community online, particularly for marginalised identities. - Moderate their own consumption of online content, for example the amount of online pornography they watch. - Look for pornography that normalises consent, mutual pleasure, and respectful interactions, and avoid material

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	Regularly remind children that if they see something like this on the internet, it is not their fault, and they should ask a parent, carer or trusted adult for help.		- Begin to consider viewing sexual images or videos as a sexual experience for themselves. Parents and carers can: - Show children where to find trustworthy information about online safety and sexual health online, for example Kids Helpline. - Explain that children may come across information about, or images or videos showing naked bodies and/or sex on the internet, and that this is sometimes called ‘porn’ or ‘pornography.’ - Begin to discuss and yarn about the reasons why people might access sexual information online, including to learn about sex, because it feels good or because they are curious. - Clearly explain the potential harms of online pornography, especially for young children, including misinformation about how sex and bodies work. Clearly articulate your concerns, which will be based on your own understandings and values regarding sex and relationships. Consider carefully that online pornography can be seen as supportive or educational by some children, particularly those with or exploring diverse gender and/or sexual identities. - Watch online content or play video games with your child and talk about how sex and relationships are portrayed in these media. - Be clear that it is against the law for adults to send sexual pictures or videos to children or ask for sexual pictures or videos from children.	Explain to children how and where to seek help if they find child sexual abuse material of younger children sexually arousing. StopitNow! provides an anonymous helpline and chat that can help you if you need to have these conversations with a child. Remain calm and supportive, but make sure the child understands that creating, viewing and possessing child sexual abuse material are unsafe and illegal. You may need to increase monitoring and supervision of device use.	that perpetuates harmful stereotypes or behaviours. - Use shared devices responsibly by clearing search terms and history, especially to protect younger siblings and friends from accidental exposure to sexual content. - Know how to report unsafe or unwanted sexual behaviour online, including sexual solicitation, sexual harassment, cyber-flashing, stalking, image-based abuse, deep fakes, technology-based intimate partner violence, and online dating violence. Parents and carers can: - Provide guidance on safe practices around online dating. - Show older teens where to find trusted information and support online for a range of topics related to sexual violence, including dating violence, technology-based abuse and online sexual harassment, such as receiving unwanted ‘nudes’ and ‘dick pics.’ - Use scenarios and examples to talk and yarn about the ways teens learn about sex online. - Encourage this age group to understand the benefits and risks of accessing sexual content online including information, pornography and support groups. - Support them to have realistic expectations about what sex is like in real life, and that it is not likely to be like what they might see in online pornography, which is sensationalised and deliberately performative. - Help teens who experience feelings of shame or remorse after viewing online pornography to reflect on why it may have triggered these emotions, to modify their viewing habits and to pursue other interests. - Support them to understand that some communities are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation by the pornography industry. This vulnerability may be linked to a variety of factors including ethnicity, disability, sexuality

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
					and/or gender identity, and living in isolated areas or isolated communities (including communities that may be culturally isolated, rather than geographically isolated). - Support this age group to recognise bigotry, discrimination and gender-based violence online, such as in online pornography. - Normalise and celebrate healthy representation of love, sex and relationships for people with disability.
Sexual literacy - Media literacy and sexuality - Sexual health information online - Online pornography and learning about sex - Finding help and support	Children at this age may learn about the human body and ask questions about parts they are curious about. They may make up their own (incorrect) answers to questions about bodies, gender, sexuality and where babies come from if their questions are not answered. They may learn to identify parts of the body and their correct names, including for genitals, and also find some body parts such as ‘bums’ hilarious. They may value privacy, for example, older children in this age group may value privacy when toileting. They may be exposed to and adopt gender norms, family norms and values from birth. As they explore their bodies, they may masturbate for pleasure or comfort. Parents and carers can: Be proactive about addressing children’s curiosity and encourage them to come to you or another trusted adult with questions. It may be helpful to provide child-friendly books about diverse bodies and cultures and have discussions and yarn about them. Discussions may include sex, gender and body differences. Many ACCHOs (Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations) in remote	As they grow older, children may become more curious about other people’s bodies, gender, sexuality, conception, etc, and ask questions about the differences between bodies (for example, male, female and intersex), and how bodies change over time. They might also talk about these topics with other children. Parents and carers can: Help children by normalising bodily functions like toileting. It can be helpful to make anatomical information visible, such as hanging a picture/diagram in the home, or making books or pamphlets readily available. Consider discussions about arousal to normalise self-touch, while explaining that this is a private behaviour, not a public one. Encourage children to come to them with questions, while being mindful that they may need to be proactive about starting conversations, as children may be reluctant to do so. Provide information about bodies and sex that is accurate, and inclusive of LGBTQIA+ identities.	Children at this age may be approaching or beginning to experience puberty and may become familiar with products to help manage the physical changes, such as deodorant, tampons and pads. They may want to talk and yarn about the physical, social and emotional changes they’re experiencing, and explore their sexual orientation or gender identity. At this age, children may be able to identify, think about and explain their reasoning in choosing trusted sources of information about sex and gender. They may show more curiosity about sex, including different sexual acts and partners, and identify and discuss the key physical functions that contribute to reproduction (menstrual cycle, sperm production, ejaculation, etc), and how these work. Children may begin to masturbate. Parents and carers can: Make the experience of puberty easier for children by normalising the changes and talking and yarnning about their own experiences, such as periods or wet dreams. Support children to understand why some things are made for adults but not for children, such as sexually explicit media. Help to answer	At this age, children may have an increased desire for privacy, but may also want to talk, yarn and ask complex questions about issues relating to sex and relationships, such as about consent, online pornography, use of drugs and alcohol, and claims of false sexual assault or rape allegations. They may have increased sexual curiosity and masturbate for purposeful sexual pleasure. They may also develop a broad understanding of contraception, what works and what doesn’t work, and of the role that hormones play in puberty, reproduction, pregnancy, etc. Parents and carers can: Support children by showing them where to find accurate and helpful information about sexual health, including contraception, STIs, and abortion. Be open to questions, awkward conversations and curiosity; these can be answered with simple, factual information. If you are unsure about the answers, let children know you will find out and come back to them. At this age, children may be interested in medical privacy and seeking consultation with medical practitioners on their own.	Teenagers at this age may develop an understanding of the ways that gender inequality and power dynamics may affect people’s ability to make safe sexual choices, such as condom use. They may know where to find trusted information about sexual health including STIs, conception, contraception, and access to abortion. Parents and carers can: Support this age group by continuing to provide them with trusted sources of information on relationships, sexual development and sexual health, and helping them find trusted online and offline information on sensitive topics such as pregnancy, STIs or ‘coming out.’ It can also be helpful to assist them with acquiring an individual Medicare card to support their emerging autonomy and independence. Help them find more information about the law in regard to sexual activity if/when they need it. Seek to understand different social groups or movements (such as ‘incels’ or ‘involuntary celibates’) that teens of this age might be interested in and discuss positive and negative social impacts.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	communities provide access to engaging sexual health resources.		complex questions and problem-solve with children as they navigate puberty. Consider explaining that people become interested in sexual relationships as they get older to experience intimacy, pleasure and joy. Children at this age may be starting to have this interest. Have an open conversation with your child about when they feel like they might be ready for more intimate relationships, and what they think it should feel like. Encourage them to talk through any fears or concerns. Discuss what having a relationship online might include, such as sharing romantic messages or images. Help children understand that romantic and sexual interactions must always be consensual, including that children cannot consent to sexual interactions with adults, or children and young people more than two years older than them (laws may differ between states and territories). Take care to point out that the laws are to protect children and young people, not get them into trouble. Help children understand unsafe and unwanted sexual behaviour and support them to report it.	Focus conversations on intimacy, pleasure and joy, and emphasise that sexual relationships must be consensual. Discussions about sex can also include contraception options, how to access them and their effectiveness, and the use of abortion services in the case of unplanned pregnancy.	

When child sexual development may need support

Barriers to age-appropriate sexual behaviours

Age-appropriate sexual behaviours can become disrupted in children and young people for several reasons. These include but are not limited to the following factors:

- **Exposure to sexual content:** Accidental or unintentional access to pornography, or other sexually explicit material or activity
- **Unhealthy peer pressure:** Pressure to engage in sexual behaviours or share sexual content
- **Lack of education:** Limited access to age and developmentally appropriate sexual education
- **Communication and learning needs:** Cognitive, sensory or motor impairments that affect understanding
- **Social exclusion:** Reduced social experiences with peers
- **Lack of independence in self-care:** for example, children with disability who may not have been supported to gain independence in line with their abilities and needs
- **Trauma and abuse:** Exposure to family violence, physical abuse and emotional neglect (cumulative harm)
- **Other adversity:** Loss of significant others.

Online harms – what the research tells us

When appropriately supervised, children's online activities tend to have lower risks of serious harm, such as child sexual abuse. However, many children and teens under 18 do have harmful online experiences, including encounters with sexual content, sexual contact or conduct:

- [70% of 14- to 17-year-olds have seen sexual images online.](#)
- [23% of 14- to 17-year-olds have encountered violent sexual images or videos.](#)
- [47% of 14- to 17-year-olds have received a sexual message online.](#)
- [Males aged 15 to 17](#) are most at risk of [sexual extortion](#) ('sextortion').
- One in four children aged 16 to 17 years were victim-survivors of online sexual harassment (Warren & Swami 2018).
- European research found that sexual harassment was embedded in teenager's online lives and to some extent it was normalised (Project deSHAME 2017).

The role of algorithms and social media

A young person's self-perception and treatment of others may be influenced by their beliefs about what's considered 'normal,' common, and desirable. Social media, gaming and other online environments can be a source of influence. However, what people see on their social media feeds is also determined by their personalities, interests and the material they interact with. Interacting with harmful material, such as 'liking,' commenting or clicking on a link, can cause similar material to appear in feeds where content is determined by algorithms. This can normalise harmful ideas by making them seem more common. Unfortunately, this can often come at a time when parents and carers, wishing to acknowledge their child's growing independence, may reduce their use of [parental controls](#).

Gender norms and assumptions

Gender is an important aspect that intersects with these dimensions, and it plays a significant role in children's development from an early age. A child's gender and/or gender identity can impact how their parents and carers, and other adults such as teachers and health professionals, expect them to behave and develop. It can also impact the type, amount, and frequency of information or advice parents and carers provide to children about relationships and sexuality (Wilson & Koo 2010; Nolin & Petersen 1992). This underscores the importance of providing children with relevant education for their age and development, alongside awareness of the impact of social contexts and environments to ensure their wellbeing and safety.

Children who don't conform to traditional gender norms may face added pressure and lack of support, including during online experiences. For example, formal sex education programs may focus on reproductive, penile–vaginal sexual activity between cisgender men and women only (Waling et al 2019).

Gendered assumptions such as blaming girls for 'getting themselves in the situation' or presuming male 'entitlement' to female bodies can mask and complicate children's understanding of consent (Walsh 2021). These assumptions are often underpinned online by websites, blogs and video channels by 'Men's Rights Activists' (MRAs), or what has become known as the 'manosphere.' The 'manosphere' reinforces heteronormative gender roles of male sexual activity and female sexual submissiveness, with some MRAs suggesting extreme and harmful views about women and consent (Gotell & Dutton 2016).

These exposures can all have negative impacts on children's sense of self, relationships and sexual development.

Access to digital technology can also be weaponised by perpetrators of gendered and/or ableist violence. For example, abusers may restrict access to devices or online accounts to retain control over individuals with disability, and actively seek to disempower them through control of technology and disrupting pathways to empowerment. Abusive and controlling behaviours such as these are known as [technology-facilitated abuse](#), and are common in domestic and family violence situations. These factors may limit families' ability to access the opportunities of being online, while simultaneously increasing vulnerability to online harms due to the sharing of limited devices among family members and factors such as low levels of familiarity with online risks and safety.

Supporting children with disability

Why children with disability are more vulnerable

The perception that we should protect children's innocence is particularly significant for people with intellectual disability, who historically have been stripped of their rights, including rights around sexual autonomy.

A 2022 Malaysian study (Kamaludin et al 2022) found the following:

- Mothers of children with disability had fewer conversations about sex, in less depth, and at a later age. The primary barrier identified was a perception of children's difficulty in comprehending the conversations.
- Some Malaysian students reported their parents spoke about sex using analogy or euphemism, making conversations more difficult to understand.
- As Kamaludin et al noted, parents and carers of children with disability may also be more hesitant to start or participate in conversations about sex and relationships due to widely held attitudes that people with disabilities do not have sexual needs, so sexual education is unnecessary.
- Some mothers in the same study were reluctant to talk with children about sex due to fear the child would become curious (or 'obsessed' in the case of an autistic child).

This lack of education can leave children (and adults) with disability more vulnerable to sexual harm. Studies have shown that children with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be sexually abused as children without disabilities (Murphy & Young 2005). This can be due to:

- frequent interaction with multiple carers who support activities such as bathing, dressing and personal care
- potential confusion about what touch is acceptable and what is abusive (Kamaludin et al 2022)
- a lack of access to, or understanding of, reporting pathways following abuse (Murphy & Young 2005).

Some children have difficulty articulating their experiences verbally, particularly for non-verbal children or those with significant communication disabilities, or they may comply with harmful requests or instructions online without understanding exploitation or coercion. In these cases, harm may be expressed behaviourally. Some behavioural indicators that harm may be occurring include sudden device avoidance, regression in skills or behaviours, dysregulation or emotional distress, withdrawal or shutdown, or obsessive secrecy.

The need for a mindset shift

Rather than withholding information, today's world requires a shift in our mindset towards communicating with children about relationships and sexuality by sharing developmentally appropriate information with them, therefore being both proactively protective and empowering. Children with disability benefit from receiving the same information about bodies, relationships, consent and safety as their non-disabled peers at the same age, but adapted to suit their cognitive development, communication style and learning needs, for example using simplified language.

Multi-modal approaches to education

For children with disability, sexual education should be delivered in multi-modal ways that support engagement and understanding. These are some suggestions:

- **Visual supports:** pictures, diagrams and video modelling (Miller et al 2026 found that video modelling was effective in teaching individuals with intellectual disability to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate relationship behaviours).
- **Accessibility features and formats:** for example, alt text and image description, and information provided in Easy Read and plain English.

- **Assistive technology:** communication devices, apps, accessible learning platforms.
- **Social stories:** Role-playing and viewing themselves in scenarios (Bornman & Rathbone 2016 found this effective for teaching women with intellectual disabilities about sexuality).
- **Repetition and practice:** Multiple opportunities to learn and practice skills, delivered in ways that meet their communication and learning needs.

When to recommend specialist support

When children engage in sexual activity online that endangers themselves or is harmful to others, family support is essential. As a practitioner, you play a key role in helping families access the support they need.

Key points to share with families

- Incidents of harmful sexual behaviour by children tend to be impulsive rather than premeditated.
- With professional support, children are unlikely to continue harmful behaviour into adulthood.
- Teaching children about healthy and respectful relationships and sexuality is a form of early intervention and can prevent harmful sexual behaviours from occurring or developing (Raising Children Network 2024). This is especially important for children with disability who have complex learning profiles and multi-faceted identities with intersecting needs that should be prioritised because of heightened risks.

The scale of peer-on-peer harm

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017) indicated there may be thousands of children and young people harmed each year by the sexual behaviours of their peers. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study conducted with a representative sample of 8,503 people aged 16 and older found that:

- **1 in 10 Australians** (10.4%) experienced peer sexual harassment during childhood
- **nearly 1 in 5 Australians aged 16 to 24** (18.2%) experienced peer-on-peer harmful sexual behaviour before age 18 (Hunt et al 2024).

Recognising child sexual abuse

Any sexual activity between a child and an adult is child sexual abuse. In Australia, children under the age of 16 (or under the age of 17 in [South Australia](#) and [Tasmania](#)) cannot legally consent to sexual intercourse or other sexual activity with adults. Sexual activity may include sexual intercourse, sexual touching or sexual acts that happen in person or online. It may involve grooming, coercion, force or implied force.

[Child sexual abuse online](#) is any form of sexual abuse of a child under 18 that has a link to online environments (Greijer & Doek 2016). Asking for, accessing, possessing, creating or sharing sexualised images of children under 18 is also against the law (there are some defences or exceptions if it happens between children of a similar age). For more information on Australian consent laws, see the [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#).

Having developmentally appropriate conversations with children about online child sexual abuse helps them:

- recognise risky situations
- understand that they can tell a trusted adult if they encounter something or someone online that makes them feel unsure, uncomfortable or unsafe

- know that it's not their fault if they are harmed.

For children with disability, other or additional approaches may be required. For example, the concept of conversations should be expanded beyond oral or written communication to include visual, gestural, and augmentative forms of expression that reflect diverse communication needs.

Children at heightened risk

Certain characteristics may increase children's vulnerability to sexual abuse:

- **Gender:** 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys experience child sexual abuse. Girls experience 2.4 times the rate of child sexual abuse compared to boys (Haslam et al 2023).
- **Disability:** Children with disability are targeted, including by peers, because they are seen as more vulnerable and have historically been more widely ignored or not given the right support to communicate when violence occurs. They may also be more exposed to the risk of sexual abuse in care environments, or where there are high physical support needs.
- **Social disadvantage:** Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may be more exposed to the risk of child sexual abuse.
- **Other maltreatment:** Children with other experiences of maltreatment such as emotional abuse, physical abuse, neglect, or family violence can also be at greater risk of child sexual abuse.
- **Living circumstances:** Children in out-of-home care, particularly in residential care, can be at greater risk of child sexual abuse.
- **First Nations children:** While First Nations children are over-represented in the child protection system, and it is believed that they are at higher risk for child sexual abuse, it is not known if they experience higher rates of child sexual abuse than other children. Other intersectional factors such as disability may also play a part.
- **Refugee/migrant children:** Children from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds and children who have migrated to Australia may have experienced child sexual abuse in camps or settlements and their unfamiliarity with a new language can increase their vulnerability to child sexual abuse and their ability to report it and seek help.
- **LGBTQIA+ children:** Children who are actively seeking information about their gender and/or sexual identity may be specifically targeted for child sexual abuse if their curiosity becomes known online.

When to escalate concerns

Use the continuum's 'May require attention' and 'Requires intervention' guidance to help determine when concerns should be escalated. Always follow your organisation's safeguarding and mandatory reporting procedures.

How this guidance was developed

This online safety and sexual development resource draws from several evidence-based frameworks and guidelines:

UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (2018)

The 'UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE)' is an important international framework implemented worldwide. It provides an extensive literature review and evidence base for comprehensive sexuality education, aiming to equip 'children and young people with the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will empower them to realise their health, wellbeing, and dignity; consider the wellbeing of others affected by their choices; understand and act upon their rights; and respect the rights of others.'

The ITGSE provides overarching curriculum guidance for formal school-based programs under the inclusive umbrella of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). The defining features of effective CSE include that it should:

- use a learner-centred approach, tailored to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of students
- be connected to real-world applications, making it more meaningful and practical
- centre the content in gender equality and human rights standards and frameworks.

A literature review of 30 years of international research found that school-based CSE can: lower homophobia and homophobic-related bullying; increase understanding of gender and gender norms; improve knowledge and skills that support healthy relationships; build child sexual abuse prevention skills; and reduce dating and intimate partner violence (Goldfarb & Lieberman 2021).

Respectful Relationships Education in Australia: Final Report

Royal Commissions – such as the ‘Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse’, and South Australia’s ‘Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence’, as well as rising reports of family violence and a National Curriculum review saw the introduction of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) in many jurisdictions in Australia. At the same time, the need for an inclusive approach to LGBTQIA+ students resulted in schools increasing action to address discrimination and violence, as well as to include diverse sexual and gender identities in class programs (Robinson 2013b). However, while young people may value relationship and sexuality education, [they often find it too focused on the biological aspects and want more on feelings, love, and boundaries](#).

All Australian schools are required to teach age-appropriate consent education from the first year of compulsory schooling to Year 10, following the implementation of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. Women and girls continue to face heightened gender-related risks online, with a [2024-25 eSafety survey of children aged 10 to 17](#) finding that 47% had seen or heard offensive, sexist or hurtful things online about girls or women. Girls were also more likely to have experienced cyberbullying than boys (56% versus 50%) and non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (26% versus 23%).

Information for students with cognitive disability needs to be modified to be developmentally appropriate at age stages. 8.2% of children under 18 in Australia have a disability and 56% of these have an intellectual disability. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability notes that women with psychological or intellectual disability, First Nations women with disability, and young women with disability are more likely to experience violence. People with disability report these experiences include sexual and financial harm.

Improvements to consent and respectful relationships education acknowledge the implications of the #MeToo Movement, the call from Chanel Contos leading Teach Us Consent, and over 4,000 testimonials from young women who had been sexually assaulted. As such, the National Curriculum in F-10 Health and Physical Education has been updated to reflect these changes. In 2021, the federal Department of Education commissioned the Monash University Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre to undertake a national stocktake and gap analysis of respectful relationships education materials and resources as part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. The report (Pfitzner et al 2022) highlights the following critical success factors for the effective implementation of RRE:

- Gender and sexuality transformative and intersectional approaches
- A sexual ethics informed approach
- A trauma-informed approach
- A strengths-based approach
- A whole-of-school approach involving staff, parents, students and community agencies
- Student engagement

The main focus of this review was to develop a roadmap for improving Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) in Australian schools through a consistent approach to coordination, delivery, oversight and evaluation. Recommended topics for coverage in RRE included respectful relationships, gender equality, and gender-based violence and family violence prevention. eSafety was involved in the consultations for this work, and ensured online safety and respectful relationships education were considered. eSafety has also provided advice on consent laws to the federal Department of Education.

Talk soon. Talk often. A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex

Early drafts of this continuum were developed with strong reference to ‘Talk soon. Talk often. A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex’ (published by the WA Department of Health). Much of the early content of the sexual development tables was informed by this work, and it continues to be a fundamental part of the evidence base in this updated version.

eSafety also collaborated closely with Jenny Walsh (sexuality and relationships expert, former senior member of the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University, and author of ‘Talk soon. Talk often.’) in the drafting process. This work also underpins the purpose of the developmental continuum: to support parents and carers to have confident, informed and positive conversations about sex and relationships, particularly where they intersect with children’s digital lives.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

The ‘Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)’ sets out the equal rights of persons with disability to representation, consultation and protection in policy. The CRPD informed this update to the continuum to more effectively recognise the experiences of children with disability, and their potential exposure to harm online.

Article 7 of the Convention refers to the rights of children with disability specifically, including ‘all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children’. Article 16 of the Convention explicitly notes the right of persons with disability to ‘freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse’, including gender-based violence.

The Convention also led to the development of the Promoting sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities guidance note by the World Health Organization’s Department of Reproductive Health and Research and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). According to the guidance, ‘persons with disabilities are up to three times more likely than non-disabled persons to be victims of physical and sexual abuse and rape.’ This is likely similar for sexual abuse online. However, this does not mean that children with disability should be excluded from online spaces. As the final report of the [‘Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability’](#) notes, ‘The concept of dignity of risk means giving people the right and dignity to take risks they consider reasonable.’ Instead, online safety education and policy should continue to support children with disability to engage more safely online.

Co-design and consultation

eSafety has consulted and worked with a wide range of experts in child development, child welfare, child protection, and sexuality in developing this resource. Consultations included a focus on several priority cohorts of Australian families to help ensure the content’s relevance to a wide range of users:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse families, including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds
- Families of children with disability
- First Nations families
- LGBTQIA+ families

Early drafts and broad conceptual ideas were shared and discussed with a range of stakeholders to help ensure the development of a product that would meet a wide range of user needs. Further scoping and targeted research consultations were undertaken with select organisations. Expert representatives from a range of organisations were also selected to participate in a full-day co-design workshop.

Organisation	Initial consultation	Further user research	Co-design workshop	Stakeholder review
Australian Childhood Foundation	✓	✓		
Australian Institute of Family Studies	✓			
Australian Parents Council	✓	✓		
Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth	✓			
Body Safety Australia			✓	✓
Bravehearts	✓		✓	
Children and Young People with Disability Australia	✓	✓		
Curtin University (Centre for Culture and Technology)			✓	✓
Daniel Morcombe Foundation		✓		
Eating Disorders Families Australia				✓
Harmony Alliance			✓	✓
McNeair Aboriginal Psychological Services			✓	✓
Raising Children Network	✓		✓	✓
Relationships Australia	✓			
Relationships Australia Victoria	✓		✓	
Sexual Health Victoria			✓	✓
Sexuality Education Counselling and Consultancy Agency	✓			
Western Sydney University (Sexualities and Genders Research)			✓	✓

Further drafting of the developmental continuum was informed by information and evidence gathered from the early consultation/research discussions, and the co-design workshop.

The ‘[Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#)’ recommends a set of general principles for the supported decision-making of people with disability. Principle 8 advocates ‘Co-design, co-production and peer-led design processes.’ As such, additional and returning organisations were consulted in 2025-26 to update the continuum to better reflect the needs and experiences of children with disability:

- Autism Association of Australia
- Carers Australia
- Children and Young People with Disability Australia
- Parenting Research Centre
- Queensland University of Technology
- Sexual Health Victoria
- VALID Connect

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