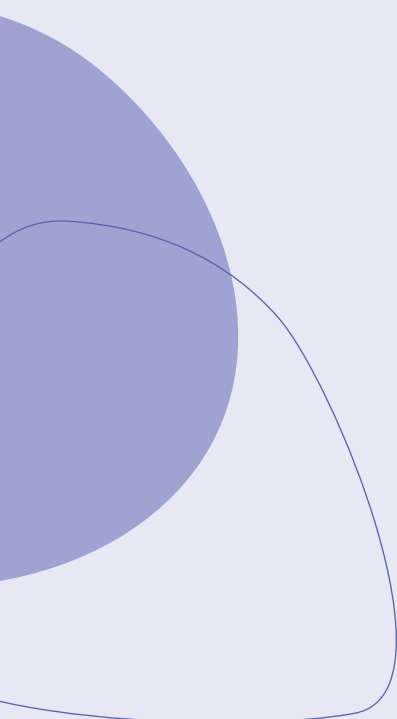


#chatsafe for parents and carers: supporting young people to communicate safely online about self-harm and suicide

Edition two





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#chatsafe for parents and carers: supporting young people to communicate safely online about self-harm and suicide

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Contents

- 6 What is #chatsafe?
- 7 Introduction to #chatsafe for parents and carers
- 8 Global context
- 10 **Section 1**
General tips
- 16 **Section 2**
What does safe online communication about self-harm and suicide look like?
- 28 **Section 3**
Livestreams, games, pacts, hoaxes, and communities
- 32 **Section 4**
Looking after yourself and your young person
- 35 Support services

What is #chatsafe?



#chatsafe is a suicide prevention program that aims to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to communicate safely online about self-harm and suicide.

In 2018, Orygen developed the world's first evidence-informed guidelines for young people to communicate safely online about suicide (1). The guidelines were developed in partnership with young people, media professionals and suicide prevention experts. In 2019, over 200 young people from across Australia then helped us turn the guidelines into a social media campaign (2).

An evaluation of the social media campaign told us that young people not only liked the #chatsafe social media content, but it increased their confidence and perceived safety when communicating online about suicide (3). This suggests that it can be helpful for young people to find information on social media about suicide prevention. It also means that social media can be an acceptable way of reaching young people with information about mental health and suicide prevention.

Even though young people liked the guidelines and social media campaign and found them to be helpful, we felt that they were missing important guidance on communicating about self-harm.

Self-harm involves any intentional self-injury or self-poisoning, regardless of the person's reason for harming themselves or whether they have suicidal intent (4). To fill this gap and to keep up with the fast-changing nature of social media, we have released the second edition of the #chatsafe guidelines to include information about self-harm and new social media trends.

Although the social media campaign is doing a great job of reaching young people with #chatsafe information, we know that many adults are worried about the type of content that young people might come across on social media. For that reason, #chatsafe also includes resources that aim to give adults the knowledge and skills they need to support young people in their lives to communicate safely online about self-harm and suicide.

All #chatsafe resources that have been developed for young people and adults are available on the #chatsafe website: orygen.org.au/chatsafe.

Introduction to #chatsafe for parents and carers

Parents and carers are often some of the most trusted adults in a young person's life, and are an important source of information and support (5). For this reason, it is important for parents and carers to have the knowledge and confidence to talk to young people about sensitive topics such as self-harm and suicide.

It is also important for parents and carers to feel comfortable talking to young people about social media, as online platforms are common places for young people to build a sense of community and belonging, and to find information about certain topics. We know that talking to young people about social media can be tough. We also know that when you add mental health, self-harm, and suicide to those conversations, it can feel overwhelming, and it can be difficult to know how to begin. That is where this resource will help.

We have created #chatsafe for parents and carers to help adults feel more confident and better equipped to support their young person to communicate safely online about self-harm and suicide.

In this resource, we use 'your young person' to refer to anyone aged 12-25 who you may be personally connected to as a parent, guardian, carer, or close family member.

This resource will provide information on how you can model safe language when talking about self-harm and suicide, how to support your young person to create safe content about these topics, and how to help them make decisions about the kind of online content they want to see.

Having these conversations openly and early is critical when providing support to young people, especially when they are struggling with self-harm or thoughts of suicide, or coming across information about these topics that they might find distressing. By increasing your own knowledge and confidence to communicate about self-harm and suicide safely, you can encourage your young person to do the same – both online and offline.

This resource is divided into four sections:

- **Section 1. General tips.**
This section provides general information about the importance of talking to young people about self-harm and suicide.
- **Section 2. What does safe online communication about self-harm and suicide look like?**
This section provides information on how you can support your young person to safely create, view, and respond to online self-harm and suicide content.
- **Section 3. Livestreams, games, pacts, hoaxes, and communities.**
- **Section 4. Looking after yourself and your young person.**



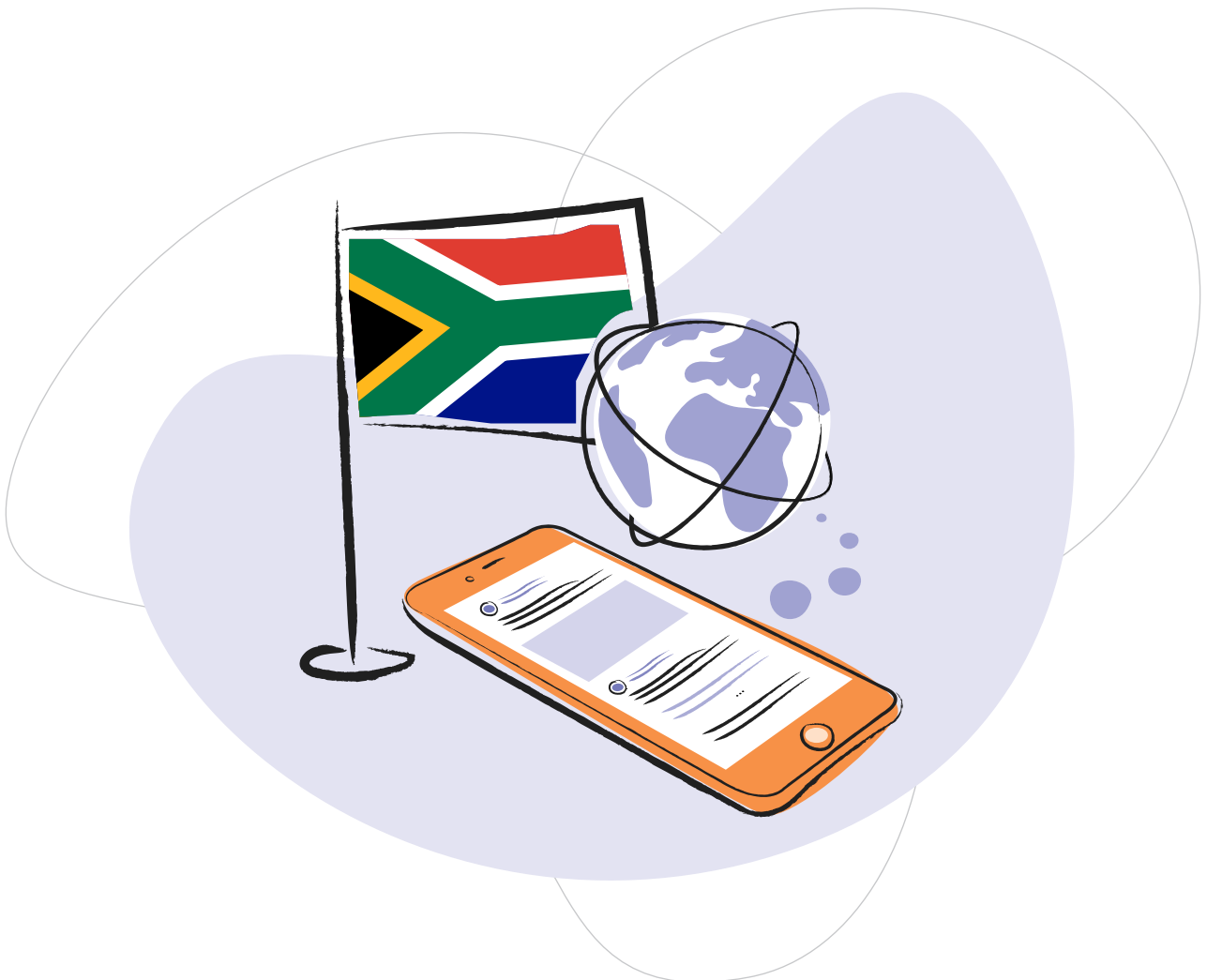
Global context

While this resource was initially developed for parents and carers in Australia, we know that self-harm and suicide are serious problems for young people around the world, and that different cultural and local contexts can influence how conversations about these topics unfold.

In 2023, we received funding from Meta to adapt this resource for a global audience. We undertook a consultation process with parents, carers and

suicide prevention professionals from 15 countries to hear about how topics like social media, self-harm and suicide are discussed around the world.

The current version of this resource has been adapted in partnership with **Waves for Change** for parents and carers living in South Africa. We would like to thank everyone who provided their input through the consultation process.



What suicide prevention professionals in South Africa have told us

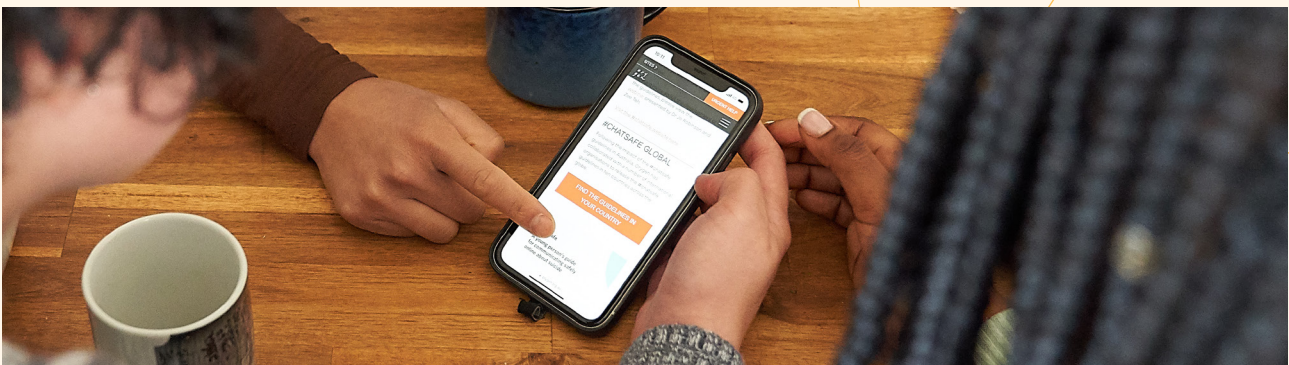
During our consultations, we heard a range of concerns and challenges when it comes to self-harm, suicide, and social media use for young people in South Africa.

We heard that there is a lot of stigma around mental health, self-harm and suicide in South Africa, and that many people avoid talking about how they feel out of fear that they may be judged or ridiculed. This can make it difficult for young people to talk to their parents and families about these topics, or to ask for help when they need it. Parents and families can play a large role in preventing self-harm and suicide in young people, but often report that they lack the knowledge and confidence to talk about these topics. This is where #chatsafe for parents and carers can help.

Suicide prevention professionals told us that online platforms can be a good way for young people to talk about self-harm and suicide, and to find helpful information and support. Safe and open online communication about these topics may help to reduce stigma, and could encourage young people to get help when they need it. However, we also heard some concerns about unsafe content relating to self-harm and suicide that young people may encounter online, such as games or challenges that promote harm.

Part 1 of this guide includes information about why it is important to talk to your young person about self-harm and suicide, and how you can start these conversations.

Parts 2 and 3 of this guide provide information about how you can support your young person to communicate safely online about self-harm and suicide, and what to do if they encounter content that is distressing or unsafe.



1

General tips



It is safe, and important, to talk to your young person about self-harm and suicide

Parents and carers can play an important role in helping young people understand their mental health and experiences of self-harm and suicide. They can also play a key role in supporting young people to get help if they need it. However, many parents and carers feel nervous or unsure about how to talk to their young person about topics such as mental health, self-harm, and suicide (6).

Talking about self-harm and suicide can be uncomfortable

Many adults are worried that talking to a young person about self-harm and suicide could put the idea in their head or contribute to suicidal behaviour. Research tells us that this is not true. There is a lot of evidence to show that it can be safe to talk to a young person about suicide if you are worried about them or if a suicide death has occurred within your community (7-9). In fact, young people have told the #chatsafe team that they want their parents to listen to them and to be able to talk openly about self-harm and suicide.



What are experiences of self-harm and suicide?

When we talk about "experiences of self-harm and suicide", we mean any time someone has experienced self-harm or suicide or known someone else who has. These experiences will be different for each person but can include young people who have engaged in self-harm or had suicidal thoughts, feelings or behaviour themselves, as well as young people who have seen or heard about other people having these experiences. These experiences can happen online or offline.

When might a parent talk to their young person about self-harm or suicide?

There are several reasons why you might want to talk to your young person about self-harm or suicide. Some of these might include:

- You are worried about them and their safety,
- You are worried about one of their friends or someone they know,
- A suicide has occurred in your local community or at your young person's school,
- A public figure or celebrity has died by suicide and is being discussed in the media,
- Information about self-harm or suicide is being shared in your community or on social media,
- A school text covers the topic of self-harm or suicide, or
- A TV show or movie that your young person has seen mentioned self-harm or suicide or includes a character who engages in self-harm or dies by suicide.

When these things happen, it is important that you feel comfortable and confident talking about self-harm or suicide with your young person. Ignoring information about self-harm and suicide, or not talking about these topics when they arise, can increase stigma around these topics. This may lead young people to think that they should also avoid talking about self-harm or suicide (10), which might prevent them from seeking help when they need it, and limits the opportunity to have helpful and safe conversations about these topics.

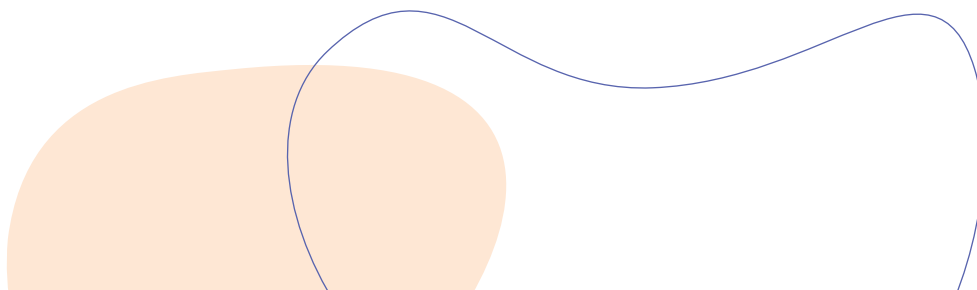
Here are some things you can do when talking to a young person about self-harm or suicide:

- **Be calm and consider what you would like to say first.** It might help to write down your thoughts or feelings, and things you would like to talk about before starting the conversation.
- **Be honest.** It is okay to tell the young person if you feel like the conversation is awkward or uncomfortable. They may also feel that way, so by talking about your feelings, you can show them it is also safe for them to be vulnerable and honest. There is a reason why you would like to start this conversation, so be honest about what that reason is.
- **Be clear and direct in your language.** Avoid using vague language that might make it difficult for your young person to understand what you are trying to say.
- **Give them time to express themselves in a non-judgmental environment.** Ask them how they are feeling and if there is anything they would like to get off their chest. Remember, they might not be ready to talk right away, so if you decide to delay the conversation, let them know you will come back to it at another time. Let them know you will be ready to listen when they are ready to talk.
- **Try not to be reactive or panic.** Your young person might say something that makes you worry or feel concerned. Try to stay in that moment with them and show that you are there for them and that you are willing to listen. Remember that it is also okay if you feel stuck and do not know what to do.
- **You do not need to have a solution.** Young people have told the #chatsafe team that sometimes it helps just to talk to an adult who simply listens without judgment. Often, young people might not need an answer to their problems to feel some relief. Simply having an adult listen to them, show they care and not jump to solutions can be helpful.
- **Provide information.**
- **Let them know about support services and resources that can help.**
- **Make a plan together about what you will do next, if it is appropriate.** Remember you can speak to support services yourself for advice about how to best support your young person.

- **If you are worried about your young person, ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide.** If you are concerned that they might be experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings, it is important to ask them in a clear and upfront way.
- **Leave the conversation in a supportive way.** Let your young person know that you appreciate them sharing their feelings, or that you will be there to listen when they feel ready to share. Validate their experience by reminding them that it is courageous to talk about difficult feelings. It is also a good idea to agree on a time to check in with each other again and let them know that you are there for them when they need it.

Providing a safe space

When you communicate openly with your young person about self-harm or suicide, you are providing a safe space for them to share their thoughts and feelings with you. You are also showing them that they can talk to you if they are worried about themselves, or someone else. Creating this kind of open communication is a valuable way of providing support to young people and can help keep them safe.



Myths about self-harm and suicide

It is important to acknowledge and challenge some common myths and misconceptions about self-harm and suicide.



Table 1. Myths and facts about self-harm and suicide

Myth...	Fact...
Self-harm is an attempt at suicide or means that the person is suicidal.	Self-harm is often a coping mechanism, and people self-harm for a range of reasons. It is not necessarily a suicide attempt, and does not always mean the person is thinking about suicide; however, there is an association between self-harm and suicide. People who self-harm are at higher risk of future suicide. A person can also accidentally harm themselves more seriously than they intended, which can put their life at risk.
Self-harm is attention seeking.	Most people who self-harm are not trying to get attention. In fact, many people try very hard to hide their self-harm behaviour.
People who self-harm have a mental disorder.	While self-harm is more common in people with mental ill-health, anyone can think about or engage in self-harm. Self-harm is a behaviour, not a disorder.
It is not a good idea to ask someone if they are feeling suicidal.	Using the word 'suicide' and asking a person directly about suicidal thoughts or attempts does not increase feelings of distress or risk of harm.
Talking about suicide will put the idea in someone's head or encourage them to attempt suicide.	Talking about suicide safely does not put ideas into someone's head or increase the likelihood of suicidal thoughts or behaviours, and avoiding talking about suicide does not make it go away. In fact, giving a person the opportunity to talk about their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours related to suicide can be helpful for them, and can reduce the risk of harm.
It's fine to say whatever we want to about suicide.	<p>Certain language or content about suicide can be unhelpful and distressing. Using unsafe language or sharing content that depicts a suicide attempt, location, or method can increase the risk of harm to people who may see it.</p> <p>It is important to use safe language when talking about suicide online, and to ensure that unsafe content is reported or removed.</p>
Only certain people will feel suicidal in their lifetime, for example, people experiencing mental ill-health.	While lots of factors can make a person vulnerable to suicidal thoughts or behaviours, suicide can affect anyone.

Table continued on next page

Myth...	Fact...
It's easy to tell if someone is feeling suicidal online.	It can be hard to tell if someone is suicidal online. Many people will not directly tell anyone that they are having thoughts of suicide, and warning signs may be overlooked as they can be difficult to identify online.
People who talk about having suicidal thoughts or plans online are just looking for attention and will never attempt or die by suicide.	Feelings of severe distress or hopelessness are common in people who experience suicidal thoughts, and may lead them to think that suicide is their only option. It is important to take all warning signs or conversations about suicide seriously, and to use non-judgemental language when communicating online.
Suicide is the result of a single cause or event.	Suicide is a complex issue and cannot be explained by any single cause or event. Most often, several risk factors contribute to a person's vulnerability to suicide. These risk factors will impact each person differently, and a risk factor for one person may not be the same for someone else.
People who experience suicidal thoughts or attempts are determined to die.	Sometimes people who experience suicidal thoughts or make a suicide attempt do not necessarily want to die. Instead, they may believe that they have no other options or ways to cope. Getting support at the right time can reduce this distress and prevent suicide.
There is nothing anyone can do to stop suicide. Suicide attempts and death happen without warning.	Suicide is preventable. Appropriate help is very effective at preventing suicide attempts and deaths. It is important to know how to recognise when a person is at risk, and to be able to support them to seek help.

Social media can be an important source of support for young people

Young people are spending an increasing amount of time on social media, and we know that they often see social media platforms as safe places to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

Young people have told us that social media:

- Allows them to build a sense of community and social connection,
- Provides an accessible and appropriate way to seek help and find information, and
- Is a platform for them to discuss their feelings in a non-stigmatised way.

Because of this, some young people may turn to social media to communicate about self-harm and suicide.

We know that exposure to self-harm and suicide content online can pose a risk to young people, especially if information is shared in an unsafe or unhelpful way. For example, content that includes graphic information or images may cause distress or lead young people to imitate what they see or read about (11). However, research has shown that suicide rates can reduce when information about suicide in mainstream media is shared responsibly and sensitively. For this reason, the #chatsafe guidelines were created to help young people have these conversations safely online and to encourage them to create and share information in a safe and responsible way.



2

**What does safe
online communication
about self-harm
and suicide look like?**



Safe online communication refers to the language young people use, the verbal and visual online content young people create and consume, and the support young people can provide to each other online.

It is helpful for parents and carers to know the difference between safe and unsafe language, and to practice safe communication themselves – both online and offline. This is because young people might copy the language we use, and while safe communication can reduce stigma around self-harm and suicide, unsafe language can reinforce harmful stigma (12). Unsafe language can also unintentionally send the message to someone that we are not a safe person to talk to about self-harm and suicide. It is important for adults to model language that opens up conversation and invites young people to reach out if they are feeling unsafe.

How you can use this information

This section provides information about how your young person can safely create and respond to online content about self-harm and suicide, including telling their own story, reaching out to someone they are worried about, and remembering someone who has died by suicide. Parents and carers can use this information to model safe behaviour and to support their young person to stay safe online. You may wish to use this as a starting point for conversations with your young person about how they engage with self-harm and suicide content online, or as a guide to refer to before, during and after these conversations.



Words and visuals matter

#chatsafe encourages parents and carers to use safe language when speaking to their young person about self-harm and suicide. It is also a good idea for parents and carers to help their young person understand the importance of safe communication and to encourage them to use safe language when communicating with their peers about self-harm and suicide.

While some parents and carers might feel worried about their young person communicating online about self-harm or suicide, these conversations do happen, and can be helpful for the young person if they communicate safely.

It is important to use non-stigmatising language, and focus on stories of hope, recovery and help-seeking. By encouraging your young person to talk about their feelings with someone they trust, focusing on self-harm and suicide being preventable, and reminding them that help is always available, you can provide them with the skills to have these conversations safely.

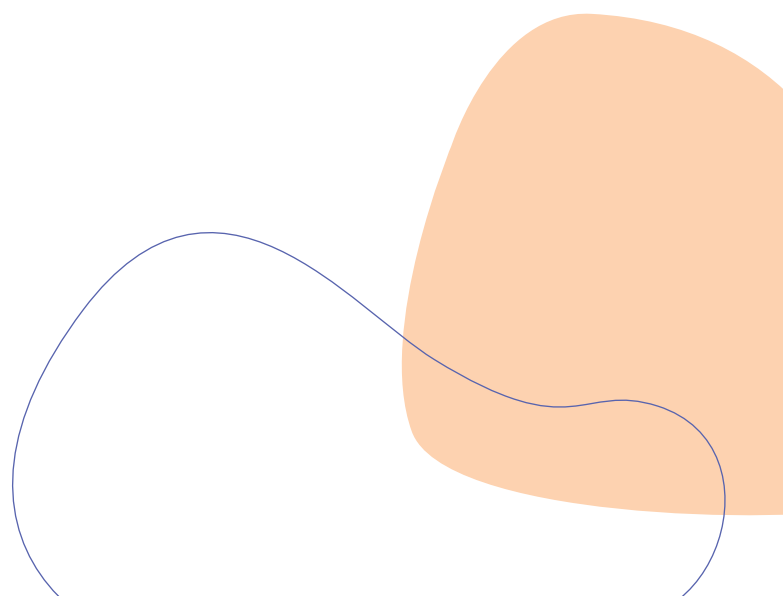
Examples of safe and unsafe language are included in the table below. We know that in some places it is very common for people to use language that we have listed below as being unsafe, and that it can be difficult to change these habits. We encourage parents and carers to use safe language when talking about these topics as much as possible. Being aware of these alternatives and understanding why language is important can be a valuable first step.

Table 2. Unsafe and safe language

Unsafe language	Safe alternatives	Why?
Describing suicide as criminal or sinful, for example, “committed suicide”.	Use non-judgemental language, for example, “took their own life”, “died by suicide”, or “suicide death”.	Describing suicide as criminal or sinful increases stigma for those with lived experience of suicide thoughts or attempts, and for people who have lost someone to suicide. This can also be isolating for people who are at risk and may discourage them from seeking help.
Describing suicide as a “solution” to life problems, stressors, or mental health disorders. For example, “they are in a better place now” or “their suffering has ended”.	Emphasise help, hope, and recovery. Be clear that suicide is preventable and not inevitable.	Describing suicide as a “solution” can make it appealing. This can also encourage people who are at risk to see suicide as a real option, instead of using coping strategies, support, and professional help.
Describing suicide as glamorous, romantic, or appealing, for example, “joining a loved one”.	Use neutral language, for example, “suicide attempt” or “suicide death”.	Glamourising suicide can influence people who are at risk to think it is appealing. Talking about someone who has died by suicide using this unsafe language may encourage others to imitate their suicide behaviour or attempt.
Talking about suicide in ways that make it seem like it is not serious and complex. For example, blaming a suicide death on one single event or implying suicide was the result of a single cause, such as bullying or depression.	Talk about warning signs for suicide and remind people that there is no single cause. Be mindful not to speculate about the specific causes or risk factors that may have led to a particular suicide death. Gossiping in this context can be intrusive and harmful.	Suicide is a complex issue and is rarely the result of a single cause. Oversimplifying suicide can contribute to harmful stereotypes and make it more difficult for people to become aware of different warning signs and risk factors. Simplifying causes of suicide can also put people who identify with a specific cause at increased risk.
Sensationalising suicide, for example, “suicide epidemic”, or “skyrocketing rates” or “everyone is killing themselves”.	Use more neutral and accurate language, for example, “increasing rates of suicide”. Emphasise that suicide is preventable.	Exaggerated or sensationalising language can make suicide feel like an expected or unstoppable outcome, which may create a sense of hopelessness for people who are at risk.
Being judgemental and repeating myths, stigma, or stereotypes. For example, “suicide is for cowards”, or “it is a trend, fashion, or emo or goth thing”.	Use non-judgemental language and provide facts about suicide to combat myths or stereotypes.	Myths and stereotypes about suicide can stop you from recognising when someone is actually at risk. Stigma also contributes to harmful ideas about people who are vulnerable to suicide risk and may make them feel isolated or discouraged from seeking help.

Table continued on next page

Unsafe language	Safe alternatives	Why?
<p>Providing detailed information about a suicide or suicide attempt. For example, information about the method or location.</p>	<p>Reconsider whether it is necessary to mention any details about a suicide death or suicide attempt. Use broad or general terms instead.</p>	<p>Detailed information about self-harm or suicide can be upsetting to people who view it. It may also lead some people to copy or imitate what they see.</p>
<p>Describing suicide as a desired outcome, for example, “successful”, “unsuccessful”, or “failed attempts”.</p>	<p>Use neutral language such as “died by suicide”, “suicide attempt” or “non-fatal attempt”.</p>	<p>Saying that a suicide was “successful” suggests that something positive has been achieved, even though suicide is a tragic outcome. On the other hand, “unsuccessful” or “failed attempts” suggests that the person has not achieved a desired outcome, which can lead to people using more lethal methods.</p>
<p>Labelling the person. For example, as an “attention seeker” or “liar”.</p> <p>Making judgemental or minimising comments, for example, “not again” or “stop attention seeking”.</p>	<p>Take conversations about suicide seriously and use non-judgemental language when talking about someone who has made a suicide attempt.</p>	<p>People who talk about suicide are often experiencing severe distress or hopelessness. Stigmatising or judgemental language can make people who are at risk feel more isolated, but support at the right time can prevent a suicide attempt.</p>
<p>Encouraging self-harm or suicide, for example, “just do it”, or “what are you waiting for?”</p>	<p>Be empathetic and encourage the person to seek help.</p>	<p>Expressions of self-harm and suicide should always be taken seriously. A vulnerable person may act on comments encouraging self-harm or suicide behaviour, which could lead to injury or death. Encouraging help-seeking behaviour can prevent self-harm and suicide.</p>



Like words, certain visual content can also be harmful

Visual content refers to photos, videos, pre-recorded and live streams, GIFS, memes, stories, reels, animations, emojis, stickers, and other image-based content.

Box 1 below includes types of visual content that may have a negative effect on those who are shown in the content, as well as those who view them. For example, unsafe images can violate privacy, cause distress, promote certain methods or locations of self-harm and suicide, and influence people who are at risk to copy self-harm or suicide behaviours.

When posting visual content, you or your young person may want to consider captions or description boxes to provide context, for example, background information.

Box 1. Visual communication

Unsafe content

Content that depicts the location of self-harm or suicide. For example, when and where a specific incident occurred.

Content that depicts the method, process, or lead up to self-harm or suicide. For example, what a person did or how they did it.

Instructional content that describes how to engage in self-harm or suicide behaviour.

Content that depicts the outcome or result of self-harm or suicide. This can include content showing a person or place before and after self-harm or suicide behaviour occurred. For example, photos or videos that compare individuals or specific parts of a person's body before and after they have engaged in self-harm behaviour.

Content that depicts grieving family members or friends of a person who has died by suicide, without their permission.

Photos or videos of the deceased person's body, for example, at the location of their death, or from a funeral viewing.

Content that depicts anything described above in a way that is blurred or censored, but also includes unsafe details in the accompanying text. For example, descriptions of a specific method or location in the caption, description box, or hashtags.

How your young person can safely create content about their own experience

The #chatsafe guidelines encourage young people to stop and take some time to think about what content they are posting online and why they are posting it. It can also be helpful to remind them to think about how their content could affect themselves and other people, and whether there is a different way to communicate that might be safer or more helpful.

Reminders about online communication

If your young person is going to create and post online content related to self-harm or suicide, it's important to remind them of the following:

- They might not be able to control who sees their content, and anyone and everyone could possibly see their content. Other people may also share, download, screenshot, screen record, or alter their content. This can have long-lasting effects, and may negatively impact them, their relationships, and their career.
- Inaccurate, stigmatising or unsafe content could have a negative impact on others.
- The internet can be permanent: 'once on the internet, always on the internet'.
- Their social media algorithms could be influenced by their posts, meaning that they may see more self-harm and suicide content.
- To pause and reflect before posting.
- To have a plan in place, in case they don't feel good after creating and posting their own content.

Posting about themselves

Before your young person posts about themselves

If your young person would like to post content online about their own experiences of self-harm or suicide, here are some questions that might be helpful to ask them:

- How will sharing your experience online make you feel? Would it help to ask a friend or family member to read it first?
- Why are you posting?
- What do you hope to achieve by sharing your experience? Do you want to raise awareness or are you looking for support? Are there more effective ways of achieving those things?
- Do you need help? Who is the best person to help you? Do you think you would benefit from speaking to a mental health professional about your current or previous experience with suicidal thoughts, feelings or behaviours? What resources, people or friends are available to you?
- What do you feel comfortable sharing? What would you prefer to leave out or keep private?
- Who will see your post? For example, are you posting on a professional mental health site, an anonymous forum or a public platform?
- How might your post affect your friends, other family members and peers?
- Will people who read your post know how to help themselves or their loved ones after reading about your experience? If not, it could be helpful to provide some suggestions about what has helped you in the past.
- Are there any other consequences of sharing? Do the pros outweigh the cons?
- How can you look after yourself after you have posted?

If they need help

If your young person is posting because they need help, encourage them to send a private or direct message to someone they know such as another family member, or friend whom they trust and who can help them, instead of posting publicly. In the message, they should make it clear that they need help. It is helpful to remind them that friends are not responsible for their safety.

If they are posting for other reasons

If they choose to create and post content about their own experiences for other reasons, for example, if they want to share their story, they can use their content to emphasise help, hope, and recovery. For example, they could include:

- Things that stopped them from acting on their thoughts or urges.
- The people, places, strategies, and personal strengths that helped them cope.
- Things they have achieved.
- Positive experiences of help-seeking, for example, talking to a friend or family member.
- That recovery is an up and down process and can look different for everyone.
- Messages that encourage help-seeking.
- Links to helplines.

This content can be private or public. Before they post content, your young person should decide if they will allow comments. If they allow comments, it is important that they regularly monitor and moderate the comments. Unsafe comments can be deleted and reported. If people who interact with your young person's content need help, helpline details can be provided. If your young person is unwilling or unable to frequently monitor and moderate comments, they should turn off commenting for their post at the start.



Things to avoid

To reduce the risk of negative effects to others, they should exclude or avoid the following:

- Current or previous self-harm or suicide plans or attempts, such as what, how, when, and where.
- Information about or instructions on how to self-harm or die by suicide.
- Information on how to self-harm more severely.
- Promoting self-harm or suicide.
- Encouraging others to engage in self-harm or die by suicide.
- Encouraging others to copy or imitate self-harm or suicide acts.
- Providing links to pro-self-harm or pro-suicide websites or communities.
- Suicide notes or goodbye messages.
- Graphic content depicting self-harm or suicide.
- Before and after self-harm or suicide content.
- Content depicting self-harm or suicide acts in-progress.
- Content depicting a method of self-harm, for example, items used.
- Content depicting the location of self-harm or suicide.
- Including hashtags that promote self-harm or suicide.
- Including emojis that depict methods of self-harm or suicide.
- Making other people feel responsible for their safety.

Posting about someone else

It is important to respect other people's privacy and consent. Encourage your young person not to post about someone else's story without their permission.

If they post about someone else, remind them to avoid:

- Making fun of the person or their self-harm or suicidal thoughts, feelings, or behaviours.
- Using humour. Even if it is with good intentions or if there is an inside joke, humour can come across as insensitive and others may not get it.
- Expressing support for self-harm or suicide acts.
- Posting other people's suicide notes or goodbye messages.



Supporting young people to reach out to someone that they're worried about

If your young person is concerned about someone because of something they posted online, encourage them to always take it seriously and decide if they feel comfortable responding. If your young person chooses not to respond, there are other things they can do to help, for example, reporting the content to the platform.

Some young people might avoid reporting content if they worry that it will get someone else in trouble. You can remind them that this is not the case, and that reporting content can help the person get support, as well as keeping other people safe. More information about reporting is included in Part 4.

It would also be helpful for your young person to inform a trusted adult, for example, yourself, another parent/family member, or a teacher. If available, they can also seek advice from a professional, such as from a clinician, or call a helpline.

If you know that your young person is worried about someone, and they are having online conversations about self-harm and suicide, below are some things to remind them of.

Before your young person checks in on a friend

Reaching out to others online can be an important source of validation, connection and support for many. Make sure you inform your young person to always take any content that suggests a person may be thinking about suicide seriously, but to also make sure that they are setting boundaries about the type of support they can offer and when they can offer it.

Before reaching out, the #chatsafe guidelines encourage young people to check in with themselves and how they are feeling. You may wish to explore the following questions with your young person:

- How are you feeling?
- Are you able to provide support to this person?
- Do you know where to seek support or where to find more comprehensive support if it's needed?
- Will this make you feel unsafe or upset?

If the content they see is distressing or if your young person does not feel comfortable responding, that's okay.

Young people must recognise the limits of the support they can provide and understand that someone else's safety is not their responsibility. Providing support without boundaries can feel like a heavy burden for a young person, especially if a friend or peer is messaging them privately or asking them to keep it a secret.

As a parent or carer, you can support your young person by reminding them that they can:

- Come to you for help, and to inform a trusted adult such as yourself or someone else,
- Decide if they feel able and willing to respond: it is okay if they do not, or if they feel they cannot do this alone,
- Seek professional advice, and
- Report content to the relevant platform.

What should they do next?

If your young person is worried about a person who seems to be at immediate risk of suicide or is in the process of making a suicide attempt, they should do the following:

- If they are already talking to the person, they could encourage them to call emergency services themselves.
- If they are not talking to the person, if the person is not open to receiving help, or if there is no time to spare, call 999 immediately.
- Contact the person's family to let them know.

If the person is not at immediate risk of suicide, and your young person decides to respond, encourage them to:

- Set boundaries for themselves regarding how much time they have available and the type of support they can and cannot offer.
- Pick a way of communicating that they feel most comfortable with and is most appropriate for the relationship they have with the person. For example, public comments, private messages, phone or video call, or an offline visit. They could also ask the person who is at risk how they would prefer to be contacted.
- Avoid using reactions or emojis that might reinforce unsafe self-harm or suicide content, or that could be interpreted as ridiculing self-harm or suicide.

Opening, continuing, and ending the conversation

Your young person could start the conversation by:

- Acknowledging the other person's feelings, and telling the other person why they are worried about them based on what is in their content.
- Telling the person that they care.

During the conversation, your young person could:

- Let the other person explain their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own words.
- Respond without judgement, assumptions, or interruptions.

During the conversation, your young person should avoid:

- Encouraging or endorsing self-harm or suicide behaviours, for example, asking for a joint suicide, encouraging them to take their life, giving advice on how to self-harm or die by suicide, complimenting methods.
- Using emojis that encourage or ridicule self-harm or suicide.
- Comparing the person's distress to something else. For example, saying that there are worse things happening in the world or that someone else's situation is better or worse.
- Accusing the person of lying or attention seeking.
- Saying anything that your young person would not say directly to them in-person.
- Mocking or making fun of the person.
- Expressing support for self-harm and suicide.
- Using humour when discussing self-harm and suicide, even if they have good intentions. However, this may depend on the specific context and your young person's relationship with the other person. If they are having a one-on-one conversation, are close with the person, and it is appropriate to their dynamic, humour may be helpful.

To end the conversation, your young person could:

- Encourage the person they are supporting to call a helpline or seek professional help.
- Provide links to national helplines or local support services.

Check in

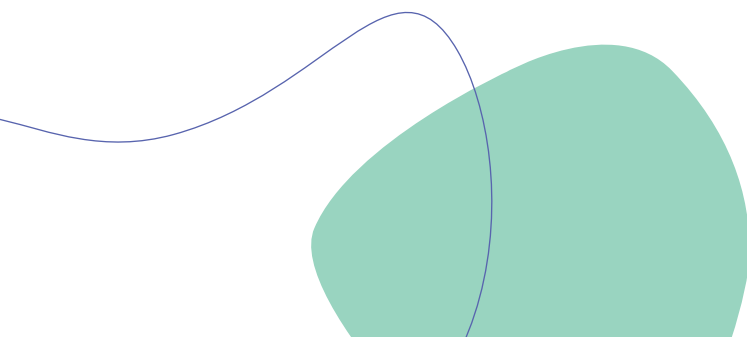
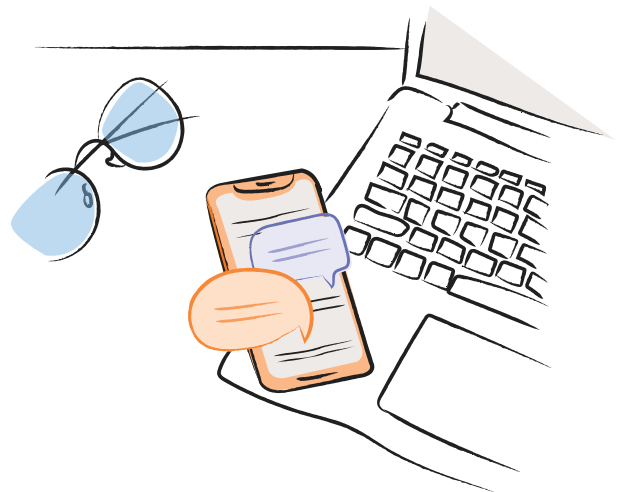
If they feel comfortable, your young person could follow up and check in with the person later to see how they are doing.

The conversation tips above would apply again here.

Safe disengagement

Depending on the platform, there may be options for you and your young person to limit or remove content from your feed, for example, by "muting", "snoozing", or "hiding" posts.

Your young person can also unfollow, delete, or block users or accounts that they no longer want to see. If you or your young person are concerned that a post is unsafe, you can report it to the platform.



Interactions about self-harm

People self-harm in different ways and for different reasons. Although some people who self-harm may be suicidal, some are not. However, self-harm can result in accidental death.

If someone has posted about self-harm, they may not necessarily be in immediate danger, but might need information and support.

If your young person is communicating with someone about self-harm, the conversation tips above still apply, but here are some additional helpful things that your young person could do:

- Encourage the person to keep trying to avoid self-harming.
- If appropriate, encourage the person to seek professional help for any injuries.
- Suggest alternatives to self-harm, for example, self-soothing strategies.
- Suggest distractions, for example, talking to a friend.
- Suggest wider coping strategies for dealing with the underlying problem, for example, engage with a psychologist.
- Share educational information, for example, what self-harm is and how people can stop self-harming.
- Remind the person that lapses or relapses are normal and can be part of the recovery process.
- Praise the person's milestones and progress.

Some things that your young person should avoid:

- Complimenting photos or videos of self-harm injuries.
- Encouraging others to share photos of their self-harm injuries.
- Celebrating or admiring self-harm.
- Supporting self-harm behaviours.
- Comparing self-harm scars or injuries.
- Competing with other people who self-harm.
- Suggesting self-harm methods or techniques.
- Posting advice on how to self-harm more severely.
- Mocking or making fun of those who have self-harmed.
- Using humour when someone has self-harmed.

Communicating safely after a suicide has occurred

When remembering someone who has died by suicide, it can be hard to know what to say or how to talk about the situation safely. Here are some things to remember:

These conversations are likely to be happening online

Information shared online can reach tens of thousands of people extremely quickly. If there is a suicide death within your community or in the public eye, young people are likely to come across this information online.

Young people often tell researchers that informal sources of support, such as websites or social media, are where they are likely to turn for information or to discuss their own experiences of suicide (13).

These conversations can be overwhelming, but they can also be safe

Many adults feel overwhelmed when approaching conversations about suicide and social media use with young people. This is understandable and it's okay to feel worried about how your young person might respond. However, there is no such thing as a 'perfect' conversation, and it is much more important to start the conversation and show your young person that you care and are willing to listen than to say 'the right thing'. Remember you don't have to have all the answers, and that you can reach out to a support service for further advice on how to help your young person.

There are helpful ways to facilitate these conversations

When talking about self-harm and suicide with young people, parents and carers might:

- Model safe language,
- Encourage young people to talk about what they are feeling, and
- Remind them that support is always available.

These conversations can be helpful

Remind young people that if they are communicating online about someone who has died by suicide, there are ways they can create a safe space where they can share positive stories and memories. This can be a helpful way for your young person to share their feelings and encourage positive conversations.

These conversations can be important for your young person's wellbeing and, when done safely, can help to prevent further suicidal behaviour

Although social media can provide an opportunity for young people to talk about their feelings, it is important this is done in a safe way because social media also has the potential to cause harm. For example, misinformation and rumours can spread quickly online, and content that portrays suicide in either a positive or stigmatising way can lead to negative outcomes.

If a suicide death has occurred in your community, there are steps that the community can take to ensure that conversations and information shared on social media are appropriate and helpful. The #chatsafe guide for communities is a helpful resource for communities who have lost a young person to suicide and provides important information for keeping other young people safe. Please visit our website to download the communities guide: orygen.org.au/chatsafe.

If your young person wants to post about someone who has died by suicide

Helpful things they could do include:

- Posting and sharing only what they know to be true, for example, that the person has died, without sharing any graphic details about how and where.
- Correcting untrue information.
- Asking others to show respect and empathy when communicating about the person who has died.
- Providing links to helplines.
- Posting or sharing content that educates others about suicide prevention. For example, that help is available, suicide is preventable, and many people have experienced suicidal thoughts that have later stopped or reduced, or never acted on them.

Additional helpful things that you, your young person, and others in your community could do include:

- Encouraging others to post only what they know to be true, for example, to avoid speculating about how and why the person died. Talking to others and trying to make sense of what has happened is part of the grieving process, and it can be helpful to do this offline and in safe spaces.
- Reminding others to be mindful of the impact their comments may have on people who see them.

To reduce the risk of accidentally causing distress or negative effects when posting or sharing online content about a person who has died by suicide, avoid:

- Posting or sharing inaccurate or unverified information.
- Posting or sharing content that shows or includes how, when, where or with whom the person died.
- Encouraging other people to die by suicide or imitate how the person died.
- Speculating or forming theories without any evidence about why the person took their life, or making guesses about what the person was thinking, feeling or doing in the lead-up to the suicide.
- Using humour when talking about the suicide.



3

Livestreams, games, pacts, hoaxes, and communities



Livestreams

A livestream is a video and other content that is shared online in real time. Livestreams are not edited, and show live events at the same time as they are happening. This means that if the person creating the livestream shows distressing content, such as death or injury, people who are watching might see this content even if they do not want to. When people watch, share, or comment on livestreams, this can also unintentionally make the livestream available to more people via social media algorithms.

There is also a risk that the person who has created the livestream may show or talk about content in that moment, which they would not want to share if they were not live, and they may not be able to control who sees their content.

Avoid creating livestreams that depict self-harm or suicide

Because of the potential risk of harm to any person who creates a livestream, and anyone who might see it, acts of self-harm or suicide should not be livestreamed.

Avoid interacting

If your young person comes across a livestream that shows acts of self-harm or suicide, they should not interact with it, such as reacting, commenting, or sharing. Instead, they could:

- Report it to the platform immediately.
- If the person in the livestream is at immediate risk, and if your young person has enough information, they can call emergency services (999). Once they have called and connected with the switchboard, they can select to be connected to the ambulance service.
- If appropriate and known, contact the person's family and/or friends and notify them.

Anyone who encounters a livestream showing self-harm or suicide should avoid promoting the livestream before, during, or after the event, for example, by sharing it or tagging others.

Games and pacts

Suicide or self-harm games, also known as challenges, trends, or dares, consist of a series of tasks that a person is required to complete over a set period of time, which might seem harmless at first but eventually can include self-harm or suicide.

A self-harm or suicide pact is where two or more people make an agreement to self-harm or die by suicide together.

Suicide games and pacts are harmful to people who create and consume this content.

Self-harm or suicide games or pacts should not be created or shared

Things to avoid include:

- Coordinating a self-harm or suicide game or pact. For example, selecting tasks, picking a location, identifying methods, or assigning roles.
- Creating or sharing content that asks others to join and engage in suicide or self-harm games or pacts.
- Creating or sharing information or instructions on self-harm or suicide games and pacts.

If your young person comes across a self-harm or suicide game or pact, they should not join, or interact with the content in any way. They should report it to the platform.



Hoaxes

A suicide hoax is a deliberate false report of a suicide death, or a self-harm or suicide game or pact, that is later proven to be untrue. This type of content is also called 'fake news', misinformation, or disinformation.

Hoaxes can be distressing and harmful. Interacting with this content, even to spread awareness or provide correct information, could increase how many people see it.

Your young person should not create or share suicide hoaxes.

If your young person becomes aware of a hoax, they should report it to the platform.

They should avoid:

- Interacting with it.
- Promoting it.

Self-harm and suicide communities

The information in this section applies to accounts, channels, forums, groups, and any other online community environments regardless of their format or size.

Online communities can provide a sense of belonging, as well as being sources of support and information. However, they can become unhelpful, and can lead to harms such as emotional distress and interference with recovery.

If your young person wants to join a self-harm or suicide community

Before joining an online community, it might be helpful for your young person to think about whether this will be beneficial for them at this time. They could also speak with a professional for advice. If they notice that an online community is unhelpful or harmful, they can choose to stop engaging with it and leave at any time.

If your young person is a member of a self-harm or suicide community

If they happen to find themselves in a pro-self-harm or pro-suicide community and they recognise that it is unhelpful or harmful, they do not have to stay and participate, and they can leave at any time. They can also report the community to the platform.

If your young person is member of an online community, they should avoid doing the following:

- Self-harming to remain part of an online community.
- Copying, screenshotting, screen recording, sharing, forwarding, or distributing content without permission from the content creator.
- Encouraging or coordinating self-harm or suicide, for example, assigning roles to people or informing them of which tools to bring or use.
- Hosting or engaging in online self-harm social activities, for example, self-harming as a group.



4

Looking after yourself and your young person



Self-care and taking control of the content that you see online

It is important to practice self-care and be aware of your own wellbeing. This applies for young people themselves, but also their parents and carers. Self-care can include things such as:

- **Notice the signs that indicate your online activity is negatively impacting you.** These can look different for each person, but common signs include comparing yourself unfavourably with others online, experiencing online abuse, spending too much time online at the expense of doing other things, anxiety, lower mood, feeling overwhelmed by what other people are posting, and feeling stuck in conversations.
- **Reduce your time online.** This can involve taking a break and physically stepping away for a while, limiting time spent online, turning off or muting notifications, logging out of apps, or temporarily turning off devices.
- **Limit exposure to unhelpful or harmful content.** You can unfollow, unfriend, mute, hide, block, or delete people/content. Follow accounts that make you feel good about yourself. These actions will also inform social media algorithms that you do not want to see certain types of content.
- **Take some time to engage in self-care activities.** Helpful behaviours include getting enough sleep, eating nutritious meals, moving your body, spending time in nature, spending time with friends, and doing activities you enjoy.
- **Connect with others.** It might be helpful to talk or spend some time with your friends and family, online or offline.
- **Consider engaging in professional help.** You may also need some extra support from a clinician such as a doctor or psychologist.

Reporting

Most social media companies have safety policies and procedures, and their platforms have reporting features as well as safety or help centers. Some of these are included in the list below.

If you or your young person come across unsafe content, report it

Reporting can be helpful because it will alert the platform to content that they may need to review, and allows them to take action. Platforms may send resources to the person who created the content, such as information about helplines or services, or may remove content that is potentially harmful, which can prevent others from seeing it.

Social media platform help centers may include information about each platform's safety and reporting functions, their policies and procedures, or additional resources. They can be accessed here:

BeReal help center:

<https://help.bereal.com/hc/en-us>

Discord help center:

<https://support.discord.com/hc/en-us>

Facebook help center:

<https://www.facebook.com/help>

Instagram help center:

<https://help.instagram.com/>

Messenger help center:

<https://www.facebook.com/help/messenger-app>

Pinterest help center:

<https://help.pinterest.com/en>

Reddit help center:

<https://reddit.zendesk.com/hc/en-us>

Snapchat help center:

<https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-us>

TikTok help center:

<https://support.tiktok.com/en/>

Tumblr help center:

<https://help.tumblr.com/hc/en-us>

Twitter help center:

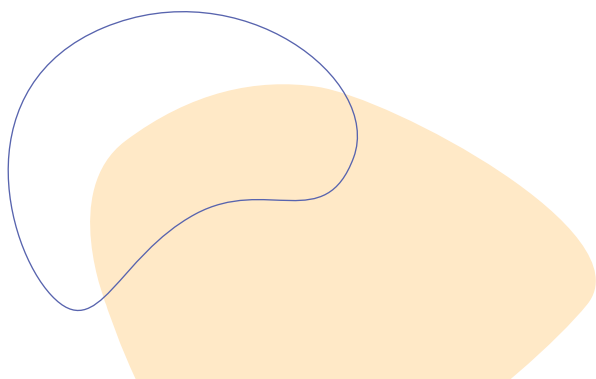
<https://help.twitter.com/en>

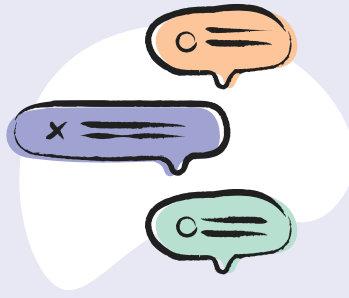
WhatsApp help center:

<https://faq.whatsapp.com/>

YouTube help center:

<https://support.google.com/youtube/?hl=en#topic=9257498>





What young people want their parents and carers to know

We spoke with young people about what they want their parents and carers to know when talking about self-harm, suicide and social media. This is what they told us.

Keep an open mind

Social media isn't all bad, and in some ways, it can provide me with some refuge.

Sit down and listen

Take time to understand.

Validate my feelings

Don't minimise what I'm going through, even if I'm being emotional.

Don't force me to share before I'm ready

Don't panic!

It is much easier to share difficult things when I can feel that you are calm.

Build trust

If I trust you, I'm much more likely to reach out to you for help. Please do not secretly follow my activity online – if you have questions, ask me directly.

Remind me of my strengths

Encourage me to draw on them to help get through tough times.

You don't need to have all the answers or fix my problems

When I'm struggling, having you simply listen to me without judgment can be so nice.

If you're worried that I may be suicidal, ask me directly and non-judgementally

You might say, "Sometimes when people feel this way, they might think about suicide. Are you having thoughts of suicide?"

Help me to understand the risks and benefits of social media

Understand that removing my access to social media is removing an important part of my life

Point me towards helpful resources and let me know where to get professional help

If or when I need it – this might include online mental health services. Let me know about safe spaces, such as LGBTIQ+ affirmative community groups, or help me access a mental health professional or a general practitioner.

If you're unsure how you can help, ask me!

You might simply say, "Is there anything I can do to help you right now?"

Consider your own use of social media

We all struggle with the amount of time we spend on our phone. Instead of focusing only on my screen time, it helps if you can shift the conversation from, "You should do this" to "This has been really helpful for me, what do you think might help you?"

Support services

If you or a young person you know needs support, reaching out for help can feel daunting. However, there are a range of services that are there to support you, and reaching out is often the first step towards feeling better.

It is important to take care of your own mental health and think about how you can practice healthy and responsible use of social media. This will allow you to show and support your young person to do the same.

If at any point you or somebody else is at immediate risk of harm, call 999. You can also attend your local hospital emergency department for urgent support.

We have included the details of a few helplines and services below. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a starting point. For more services, you could search the 'find a helpline' website: <https://findahelpline.com/>

Services for everyone:

South African Depression and Anxiety Group

Provides a 24-hour suicide crisis hotline and a range of support groups, including for young people (aged 18–35), parents or family members, people who identify as LGBTI+, and those who have experienced grief and bereavement.
Call: 0800 567 567 (toll-free, available 24/7).
Text: 31393
Visit: <https://www.sadag.org/>

Lifeline National Counselling Line

Call: 0861 322 322 (toll-free, available 24/7).
Visit: <https://lifelinesa.co.za/>

Befrienders South Africa

Offers phone and chat-based support for anyone experiencing distress or thoughts of suicide.
Call: +27 (051) 444 5000 (toll-free, available 24/7).
WhatsApp: +27 (076) 513 8671
Visit: <https://befrienders.co.za/>

The Triangle project

Provides confidential counselling, support, and a crisis helpline for people of all ages who identify as LGBTIQ+, as well as parents of LGBTIQ+ young people.
Call: (021) 712 6699 daily from 1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The counsellor will then call you back.
Visit: <https://triangle.org.za/>

Services for parents:

Childline South Africa

Provides information, resources and counselling for parents.
Call: 116 (available 24/7, free from all networks).
Visit: <https://www.childlinesa.org.za/parents/for-parents/>

Services for young people:

Childline South Africa

Provides information, resources and counselling for children and teenagers.
Call: 116 (available 24/7, free from all networks).
Visit: <https://www.childlinesa.org.za/>

Waves for Change

Provides child-friendly mental health services to children and young people in under-resourced communities.
Visit: <https://waves-for-change.org/>

Extra self-harm resources that you might find helpful:

Coping with self-harm: A guide for parents and carers.

Link: <https://www.orygen.org.au/copingwithselfharm>

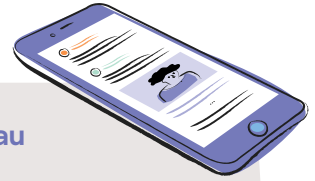
SA Federation for Mental Health

Provides information and resources about youth mental health and available support services.
Link: <https://www.safmh.org/>

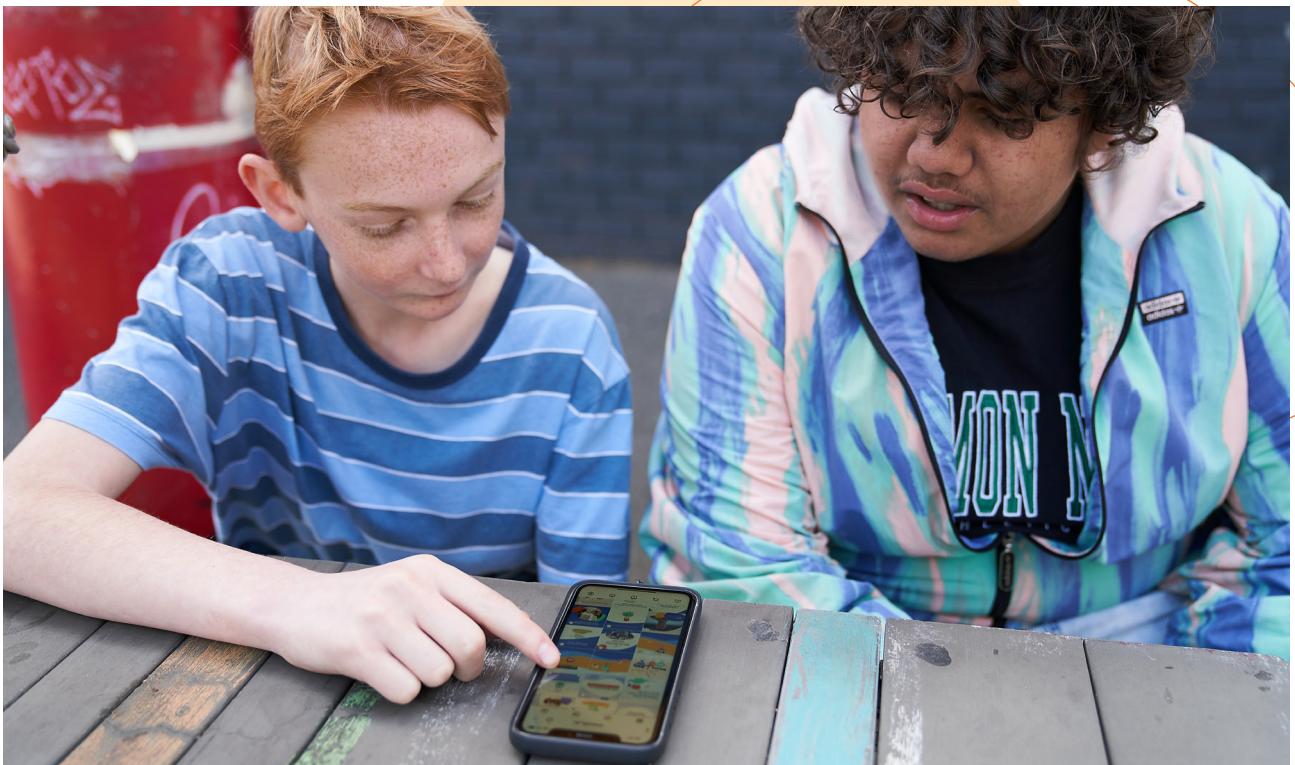
Keep up to date with #chatsafe

At #chatsafe, we constantly aim to support young people and the adults in their lives to the best of our ability, with updated evidence and the latest research. To stay up to date with the work we do at #chatsafe and the resources available to you, keep an eye on our website: www.orygen.org.au/chatsafe.

We also regularly update our social media pages with information for young people, which you might want to share with your young person or use as a conversation starter. You can follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.



-  @chatsafe_au
-  @chatsafe.online
-  @chatsafe_au
-  #chatsafe AU



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