

Online Safety News

October 2025



New DM Rules: What Parents Need to Know

TikTok has just updated Direct Messages (DMs). These changes mean that teens over 16 can now send voice notes and up to nine images or videos privately to friends, either from their camera or photo gallery. Previously, TikTok DMs were limited to videos, text, gifts and stickers.

Here are the main changes:

- Users can now send voice notes in DMs, up to 60 seconds long.
- You can share up to nine images or videos at once in a DM, either taken with the camera or selected from the phone's gallery.
- Images and videos can be edited before sending.

It's important to remember that many children do not sign up with their correct date of birth. This means the feature may be accessible to them, potentially exposing them to risks such as sextortion, inappropriate content, and contact from predators.

What to do:



- Delay access to social media.
- Ensure your child's account is set up with their correct date of birth.
- Use parental controls
- Talk about image sharing, what's ok, what's not
- Remind your child how not everyone online is who they say they are and only to ever connect with people they have met and know in real life.

Age checks online – what parents need to know



Under the Online Safety Act, websites that host pornographic or harmful content must use age checks (such as ID verification or age estimation) to block under-18s.

This is a positive step, but it is not foolproof – and it's important that we don't rely on these measures alone to keep children and young people safe online.

Remember, pornographic material can be found in many places – even on Spotify. Social media and gaming platforms are also full of sexual and graphic content.

What can you do as a parent?

- Use parental controls on your broadband, devices and apps.
- Keep having open, ongoing conversations about what your child is seeing online.
- Build digital resilience – talk through what to do if something upsetting appears, so they know how to handle it and feel confident coming to you.

Age checks are one helpful layer of protection, but your involvement and connection with your child will always be the strongest safeguard.

New School Year, New Online “Friends”

At the start of a new school year, many children make new friends — and often add new contacts online. The risk is that not everyone behind a profile is who they claim to be. With AI tools, it's now easier than ever to create fake profiles and images that appear completely real. These two people don't exist — they're AI-generated images.

Show your child how easy it is to be tricked using this-person-does-not-exist.com. Every refresh creates a new “face” — none of them belong to real people.



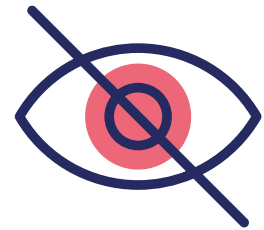
TOP TIP:



Keep the conversation open. Ask, “How do you know this person?” and remind your child that a profile picture alone is never proof that someone is who they claim to be.

In today's digital world, building critical thinking skills is just as important as setting up parental controls.

If children learn early on that not everything — or everyone — online is real, they'll be far better prepared to spot red flags and come to you when something feels wrong.



How to support your child if they see distressing content online.

In recent weeks it has been highlighted again how fast and easily really distressing content can spread online. This is not new unfortunately. Even if your child doesn't have social media or a phone, they may still be shown upsetting content by friends or told what to search for online.

Here's how to support them:

- **Talk to them directly.** Explain that a very disturbing video is going viral, and if anyone sends it or mentions the name of a particular person or event, they should avoid watching.
- **Check in.** Many children may have already seen it but not said anything. Changes in mood or behaviour could be them trying to process what they've seen.
- **Remind them not to share.** Stress why it's harmful to spread content like this. If you see the video yourself, report it and then focus on supporting your child.
- **Stay calm.** Anger or panic will only make them less likely to come to you next time.
- **Reassure them.** It's not their fault if someone sent it to them or they came across it online.

Even if platforms eventually remove this type of content, it's already been shared widely. This is another reminder that social media companies do not prioritise child safety — and why conversations at home matter most.