Online safety and sexual development guidance

Australian Government

eSafety Commissioner

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Child sexual development and sexual behaviours

As children grow, they learn language, develop motor skills and advance cognitively. Sexual development is also a natural part of their growth and learning. 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 the types of families they grow up in, school circumstances, community cultures and values, social attitudes, and more. In today's world, the impact of children's digital experiences on their development must also be considered. From their infancy, children's parents and carers interact with internet-enabled devices on a daily basis, and many of children's early learning, communications and play experiences are mediated by and through online interactions. The internet holds a wealth of information, opportunity, misinformation and disinformation about sex, relationships, and sexuality. Children may access a wide range of content accidentally or on purpose. While there are opportunities for children to access helpful, positive sexual education resources online, there are also risks that they will encounter harmful content. It is vital that parents and carers understand how the wide range of opportunities and risks online affect children's understanding of gender, sexuality and respectful relationships, and their skills in navigating online safety as they grow.

Child sexual development tables

Explaining child sexual development involves understanding what may be expected at different stages of a child's growth. One valuable aspect of providing information using a sequenced developmental continuum is to reassure parents and carers that the sexual behaviours exhibited by children and young people are an expected part of growing up, and to establish contexts for providing children and young people with education that meets their individual needs. The developmental continuum is presented as a series of tables that provide advice on typical behaviours, as well as those that may require further investigation or intervention. Surprisingly, there is little supportive guidance available for parents and carers that outlines children's sexual development alongside other general developmental behaviours. For parents and carers seeking culturally appropriate advice, or information that addresses the needs of children and young people with disability, or diverse sexual and/or gender identities, the available resources are even scarcer.

Most advice about promoting children's and young people's sexual development and safety refers to creating warm and open relationships and 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.' Parents and carers are generally aware of the importance of talking in positive ways about relationships and sexuality with children and young people and intend to do so, however, family and community cultures and values play an important role in deciding if and when these conversations take place. Some parents and carers may be uncertain how to initiate conversations (Walsh 2018). Fathers can be even less likely to do so (Miller et al 1998), yet they have a very important role to play in raising children and young people and establishing protective behaviours. eSafety research found that fathers were significantly more aware of their children's negative online experiences than mothers, but were less likely to take protective measures.

When talking and yarning about sex and relationships with children, parents and carers should take care that the conversations are appropriate to their child's developmental stage and maturity. The tables below use age ranges as a proxy for developmental stages, however, eSafety acknowledges that many factors contribute to children's development, and children may fall outside the age-based descriptions provided here. Parents and carers are the experts in their own children's development, and can draw from the table according to the unique needs of their children.

The perception that we should protect children's innocence makes it harder to communicate about relationships and sexuality. Rather than withholding information from children to preserve their innocence, today's world instead 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.

One of the reasons there are few developmental guides available is that contextual factors, such as community, culture, and family can significantly shape a child's understanding of and attitudes towards relationships and sexuality. Affluence, ability, and geographical location are some of the factors that might determine access to educational resources such as children's books (still a reliable form of sexuality education for young children), the internet, and health services. 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 (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.

Digital technologies play a large part in children's everyday lives. They provide access to media for connection, education, entertainment, creation, and understanding the world and themselves, as well as raising issues associated with online safety. Children who were historically (and perhaps still) excluded from relationships and sexuality education and experienced social isolation now have accessible and private ways to make connections with others that are of great importance to them. It is also important to note that some families continue to face digital exclusion (Sanders 2020), for example due to financial disadvantage or being located in rural or remote areas without access to reliable internet connections. 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.

Digital technologies can also be a source of great concern, given the availability of violent, aggressive and exploitative content, and the potential for sexually abusive and exploitative contact. These exposures have potential negative impacts on children's sense of self, relationships, and sexual development. There are also more insidious forms of misinformation and disinformation about sex, relationships, and sexuality that may at first appear benign, such as wellness bloggers, relationship podcasts, and misogynistic 'manosphere' or 'incel' ('involuntary celibate') material on video platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

In developing this online safety and sexual development resource, we have drawn from the following evidence-based guidelines:

1. **UNESCO (2018) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education - An Evidence-Informed Approach**

The UNESCO *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (ITGSE) (2018) is an important international framework that is implemented worldwide. It provides an extensive literature review and evidence base for what and why comprehensive sexuality education is important: namely to equip 'children and young people with the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will empower them to realize their health, well-being, and dignity; consider the well-being 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 for ages 5-18 years.

The ITGSE identifies key knowledge, skills, and attitudes that children should learn about relationships and sexuality 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).

2. 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*; 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. This also acknowledges the implications of the #MeToo Movement and the call from Chanel Contos, leading Teach Us Consent, to improve consent and respectful relationships education following 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 Department of Education.

3. 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 tables was informed by this work, and it continues to be a robust underlying part of the evidence base in later versions.

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. *Talk soon. Talk often* also underpins the purpose of the developmental continuum, which is 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.

Child and adolescent sexual behaviours

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

- Accidental/non-accidental access to sexually explicit material such as online pornography, or other forms of pornography
- Unhealthy peer pressure
- Exposure to adult sexual activity
- Physical abuse and emotional neglect (cumulative harm)
- Being exposed to and experiencing family violence
- Re-enacting child sexual abuse experiences
- Loss of significant others.

When children engage in sexual activity online that endangers themselves or is harmful to others, it is often best for the family to seek support together. Incidents of harmful sexual behaviour by children tend to be impulsive rather than premeditated. If they receive professional support, they are unlikely to continue with the harmful behaviour as adults. 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). It is important to note however that the research literature on the sexual development of adolescents who have engaged in harmful sexual behaviour is limited, and studies have produced mixed results. There is also a notable gap in research regarding the age at which harmful sexual behaviours are most likely to emerge, and the risk factors associated with sexual developmental history and experiences of abuse. However, 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 one in ten (10.4%) of Australians experienced peer sexual harassment during childhood, and that 18.2% of Australians aged 16 to 24 (nearly 1 in 5) experienced sexual abuse by an adolescent before age 18. (Hunt et al 2024).

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 the development of 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. Those priority groups include:

- 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.

Child sexual abuse online

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. Online child sexual abuse 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 and young people under 18 is also against the law, though there are some defences or exceptions if it happens between young people 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, and understand that they can tell a trusted adult if they encounter something online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. However, 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 may be more vulnerable to child sexual abuse because they are dependent on caregivers.
- 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 non-Indigenous children, or if other 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.
- 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.

Sexual development tables

The first table below, detailing 'Sexual development and sexual behaviour,' describes the overall sexual development of children. Where applicable, this information is specifically contextualised to online behaviour and considerations of online safety. This table is separate from the more detailed domain tables that follow, as it underpins the information in each. This table also explicitly notes concerning and very concerning behaviours.

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)	• 80% of children aged 4 years are using the internet and 30% have their own devices (Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation 2020). • Children may start playing games or watching videos made for children on electronic devices under supervision (low risk of experiencing online child sexual abuse). • Children may begin to show different online play preferences based on their gender from around age 3 years. **May require investigation** • 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.	• Exploration with peers: '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, or who may observe their communications (for example, other adults who may be present with the person your child is primarily communicating with). • Children may encounter sexual language online, such as through other people's usernames, and may mimic that language. • Likely to have little or no understanding of how to recognise predatory or grooming behaviours. Parents and carers can support children to understand what these might look like. In later years: • Engaging in online social activities such as gaming, or dress-up games via video call. • Using photos and videos to document their lives. • Using 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.	• 33% of Australian children aged 6 to 13 years own a mobile phone (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2020). • Children may begin to show an interest in communicating with others online, including accessing social media sites. Parents and carers should maintain an awareness of any age restrictions on platforms children wish to access. • Many children compare their bodies to images they see in media, and to others offline. • Using photos and videos to record their life. This may include taking (but not necessarily sending/sharing) photos or videos of themselves in a sexual way. • Playing games online with people they know well and new people they have met online. • 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	• 28% of young people go online to get emotional support from friends. • 48% of 14 to 17-year olds go online to find sexual health information. • Two in five (39%) children first encountered online pornography before the age of 13, while 70% of 14 to 17-year olds had 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. • May view sexual content accidentally or unintentionally. • May view sexual content intentionally for arousal and/or pleasure. • Parents and carers may start to reduce their usage of parental controls on devices, online accounts, etc as children develop digital skills, independence, responsibility and maturity. • Young people who don't conform to traditional gender norms may face added pressure and lack of support, including during online experiences (Waling et al 2019). • Children may have trouble navigating unexpected sexual attention 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.	• Australian research found that one in four young adults aged 16 to 17 years were victim-survivors of online sexual harassment in 2018 (Warren & Swami 2018). Further, European research with 3,000 young people found that sexual harassment was embedded in their online lives and to some extent normalised (Project deSHAME 2017). • May have own social media accounts and use these to communicate with friends. • Australian data shows that males aged 15 to 17 are most at risk of sexual extortion ('sextortion'). • Digital technologies can enable young people to explore different aspects of identity. Young people may create multiple personas and accounts to explore different interests and ways of belonging. • 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 what 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. • Some young people may start exploring dating apps, although these

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
		May require investigation • Secrecy around online activities. • Long 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.	pop-up ads, may be upsetting for a child but does not constitute concerning behaviour. However, 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 investigation** • 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. • Using sexually suggestive language, avatars or usernames. • Long periods of intentional viewing of online pornography or sexually explicit images online. **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 use over other activities.	• May send and/or receive 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 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 investigation** • Deliberately seeking out online pornography involving sexual aggression and/or violence. 23% of children have seen violent sexual content online. • Using AI to create, collect and/or distribute sexualised images of others. **May require intervention** • Participation in online groups dedicated to violent, homophobic, or misogynistic ideas, such as sites that 'rate' female classmates on sexual attractiveness. • Taking sexual images or videos of others to exploit or extort them. • Storing multiple nude images and/or videos of self or others as this places themselves at risk of exploitation or extortion. • Taking and/or sharing sexual images of someone without their consent. • Viewing and then engaging in harmful sexual behaviours normalised in mainstream pornography, for example choking, restraining, forcing, or not using condoms. • Grooming younger children online for the purpose of sexually abusing them.	are restricted to people aged 18 and over. • Gendered assumptions such as blaming girls for 'getting themselves in the situation' or presuming males' 'entitlements' to female bodies can mask and complicate young people's understandings 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 that women are 'begging to be raped' (Gotell & Dutton 2016). • May develop a stronger understanding of image-based abuse and sexual harassment online. **May require investigation** • Taking sexual or nude pictures without consent, such as secretly recording sex, or taking a picture of breasts or underwear without the subject's knowledge. • Engaging in sexual behaviour, including online behaviour such as livestreamed sexual activities, sharing nudes or sexual conversations with someone more than 2 years older/younger. • 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. **May require intervention** • Photographing others' genitals without consent. • Creating sexual content online for financial or material reward (such as

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
			• Taking and/or sharing sexual images or videos of someone else without their permission. • Taking and/or sharing of images or videos of others engaged in private activities such as bathing, showering, toileting without their permission.		money, gift vouchers or gaming credits). • 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). • Taking and/or sharing sexual images of someone else without their consent.
Sexual development and behaviour (General focus)	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 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.	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. **May require investigation** Concerning behaviours for this age group include 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. **May require intervention** A child persistently touching or rubbing their genitals in public, or engaging in aggressive or forced sexual play, is very concerning behaviour, particularly if the behaviour appears compulsive and is not responsive to redirection.	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. 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 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. **May require investigation** Mutual masturbation with a sibling, peer or group is cause for concern as it extends beyond the usual curiosity at this stage.	Children at this age may seek greater independence from family, while at the same time struggling to understand and manage big emotions. Friends and classmates may be important sources of peer support. 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). **May require 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. Sexualised behaviour towards siblings or other family members is very concerning.	Young people 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. Young people may experience closer relationships with their peers than with their parents and carers. However, young people often value and want to understand their parents and carers' beliefs about relationships. While there may be generational differences in views, talking about them openly can support strong family relationships. Young people 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 young people at this age had not had sex, and were happy with their decision. 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. However, 93.2% reported that their most recent sexual event was wanted (Project deSHAME 2017). More than half of transgender and gender diverse Australians have been victims of sexual violence or coercion – almost 4

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	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 investigation** 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. Excessive or persistent masturbation or sexual touching of others may also be cause for concern. **May require 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.				times the rate of the general population (Callander et al 2019). Young people with disabilities may be more vulnerable to sexual abuse and assault. Similarly, young people in out of home care may also be more vulnerable too. Sexual assault in these settings is not always perpetrated by an older person, and there is increasing concern around sexual abuse of adolescents by other adolescents (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017). **May require investigation** Spying on others who are nude or engaged in private or sexual activity is concerning behaviour. **May require intervention** 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.

The following table forms the main body of the continuum and is organised in four domains. These domains provide more detailed Information about specific areas of development in sexuality and relationships, and how these are impacted by growing up in an online world. Each domain is covered specifically in relation to online matters, followed by a discussion of more general themes relating to the domain. Each domain includes information about expected behaviour of children and young people at each age group, and activities, conversations and interventions that parents and carers can engage in to help ensure that children experience healthy sexual development, and minimise harmful or risky behaviour.

The four domains covered in the continuum are:

- Culture, social norms and sexuality
- Bodies, consent, and privacy
- Relationships
- Sexual literacy

Note for parents and carers:

The advice contained in the developmental continuum is based on current research evidence as at publication. However, the advice should be considered general. Parents and carers should consider their child's individual needs and development in relation to any of the developmental advice provided.

Discussions listed at lower age groups can be continued at higher ages, even where not explicitly mentioned in the continuum.

The inclusion of any particular activity at a given age level does not suggest that it is suitable for every child. It simply indicates that 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.

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	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.	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, and express support for the rights of others online	Children may: • Participate in and be exposed to more complex online spaces and activities, e.g., following 'influencers,' 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.	Young people 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. • 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.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	• 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 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 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.	• 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. • Use critical thinking skills to 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. • 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 by parents or carers and children respond with possible solutions and receive feedback on their solutions. • 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	that everyone has, e.g. safety, freedom. • Acknowledge that online sources can impact 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 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 and abilities. • 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.	• 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. • 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.	• 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 and racism, including safely and assertively standing up for them in online spaces. • Develop an understanding that harms such as sexual harassment that happen online impact people's offline lives. Parents and carers can: • Continue to build young people's understanding of how laws support human and digital rights in online environments and encourage young people 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 young people may feel like they have more freedom to be and express themselves. • Encourage and support young people to share their own ideas about what influences their values and online behaviours. • Help young people 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
		with child-friendly online communities. • Model, encourage, and support help-seeking behaviour when something goes wrong. • 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 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.	• 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. • Unpack with children how algorithms affect (and even control!) online experiences, especially on social media.		

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 • 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 family members and others. This can include being playmates and role models for children, including online play. Children rely on parents and carers to provide safe physical spaces for imaginative and creative play. Parents and carers can support children to begin developing their identities by considering play that does not adhere to rigid structures of gender. Children at this age may observe different family types and structures, and parents and carers can model talking about and interacting kindly and politely with others. Parents and carers can also provide positive role models of masculine, feminine and LGBTQIA+ identities. They can 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. It is important to 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.	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 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 or feminine gender identity. Parents and carers can support children by talking and yarning with them about people in their community who are trusted sources of information and learning, particularly about sex and relationships. Children should be encouraged to talk and yarn about why these sources are trustworthy and asked if they can think of others. Parents and carers can help children understand social and cultural norms, and	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. Parents and carers can support the development of these understandings by talking 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.	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 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. They can 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. Parents and carers can also remind children that whatever a person's values are, discrimination based on those values is unlawful. Social norms around gender and sexuality may also extend to and impact body image. It may be important for parents and carers to 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.	Young people 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 and racism, including safely and assertively standing up for them. Parents and carers can encourage young people to share their own ideas about what influences their values and behaviours, and learn about their children's world without judgement. Parents and carers can help young people 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 young people 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 young people 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
		media portrayals, surrounding sex, gender and relationships. It can be helpful to access parents' spaces such as online groups to learn about other parents and carers' approaches to talking about sex and relationships with their children. Talk about the impacts of shame and fear on being able to have those discussions. However, be alert that some online groups promote unhelpful and/or extreme beliefs.			
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 difference 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, and 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.	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 to 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.	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 maintain their	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.	Young people 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 young people to regularly check in with others about the sharing of their images and information online. • Help young people 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 that young people have real-life skills and knowledge. For example, 'What advice would you give

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	• 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. • Report image-based abuse and child sexual abuse material (at all ages).	• 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 to them how this allows them to have more freedom while keeping them safe. • 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 the type of online activities that are public, and that it isn't socially acceptable to show private body parts in public spaces. • Use examples to consider 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.	privacy, such as not sharing passwords with others, and counter unwanted sexual attention, including online, such as through instant messaging or comments on photos. Children may delete and/or report sexual comments on their posts, photos and/or videos. Parents and carers can: • Ask children how they feel before taking and sharing images of them 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	• 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.' 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 is 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.	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) young people find out online about sex and relationships, and discuss and yarn about knowledge that might be missing, such as information around sexual health, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), abortion services and affirmative consent. • Support young people to understand that online pornography shows extreme and stereotypical representations of gender, and often surgically enhanced features. Parents and carers can remind young people 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
		• Help children to 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. • Understand that gender-diverse children, children from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and children with disability face increased risks of harm online.	or videos, or send nude or sexualised pictures, videos or comments.	• 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 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	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.	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	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 understand and express that sexual activity is a choice, but may also be at	Young people 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

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	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 not accepted within cultural norms around privacy and consent. Parents and carers can help their 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. It's also important to help children build their social and emotional vocabularies so they are better able to name and express their feelings. Children at this age learn about safety in a variety of contexts, so it's important that parents and carers support this by respecting children's feelings and consent, particularly with regard to physical affection and touch. Parents and carers can show, as well as teach, that a child's 'no' will be respected. They can also help children understand what touch is necessary for caregiving. Parents and carers can also model respect for privacy by asking for and respecting consent when taking photos or videos of children. They can also help children understand that it is never okay for anyone to look at, touch or take photos of their private parts without their consent. They can provide children with the language to express when situations make them uncomfortable, and with the	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. Parents and carers can 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. The right to say no to physical affection also extends to other interactions, such as participating in video calls. Parents and carers can help children understand the difference between public and private spaces, and that different activities are socially acceptable for each. Parents and carers can 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. As well as having their own safety supported, parents and carers can support children to respect the safety and rights of others, including through a shared language around acceptable behaviours. Parents and carers can 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).	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 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 support children at this age by helping them 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 girls developing breasts, may constitute sexual harassment; and that sexual harassment is never okay, whether from peers or adults. Parents and carers can also 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. It can also be useful to help children find information about the law with regard to	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. They are also more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Parents and carers should consistently reinforce that their child is worthy of care and respect, and that children have the right to set and communicate their own boundaries. Children may need support to understand how power dynamics can contribute to pressure and compliance around sexual and other activity, including risk-taking behaviours. Parents and carers can 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) within relationships. This may lead to discussion of, and yarning about warning signs and negative behaviours (red flags) that indicate violence and/or abuse in relationships, and how they can support others who may be experiencing abuse. Neurodiverse people may struggle with social cues and relationships, and this may make them more vulnerable to experiencing or using harmful sexual behaviour, so it is important that parents and carers understand this and support children to develop healthy relationships, both sexual and non-sexual.	proficiency and positions of authority. 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. There are legal boundaries to when consent can and cannot be given. There are also ethical boundaries that may vary from person to person. Young people 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. Young people 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. Parents and carers can continue to help young people 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. The importance of navigating consent should always be emphasised, including the understanding that it must be affirmative, and not coerced or reluctant. Parents and carers can discuss and yarn with young people 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 that indicate violence and abuse in relationships. Parents and carers can support young people to maintain their privacy while accessing medical services, including helping them access Medicare cards. They can also support young people to understand the range of services that can provide assistance if they need it, for

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	assurance that they will never be punished for seeking help in situations where they do feel uncomfortable.		consent and safety, and to understand that the law is there to protect them and others. Parents and carers can support children to understand that if they choose to have a romantic or sexual relationship, 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 young cousin), and explicit information about what sexual abuse is. Parents and carers can 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. While parents and carers should be explicit about their concerns, they should also help children identify green flags and positive behaviours that indicate that a relationship is safe, supportive and respectful. Children in this age group may 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. If your child is being cyberbullied, it is important to let them know that it is not their fault, 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.		example, if they are experiencing dating violence.
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.	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.	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 online comments, and	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.	Young people 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

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	• 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. • Ensure children's online interactions are with known people only.	• 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. • 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.	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'). 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	• 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. • Develop sexual feelings/attraction and follow or interact with people they are attracted to online, such as via Facebook pages or TikTok. • 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. 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,	(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. • Have an emerging understanding of online dating platforms. • Describe disrespectful, unhealthy, 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 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 with young people 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).

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
		• 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.	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. • Help children identify grooming and 'sextortion' behaviours online, and to recognise and articulate when other behaviours make them feel uncomfortable.	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.	• Support young people 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 young people to seek help to not perpetrate online sexual harassment, and/or to seek help if it happens to them.
Relationships • Families, and how different families approach online activities and experiences • Friendship, love and romantic relationships • Inclusion and respect	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	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.	Children's friendships may change at this age, alongside their interests. 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	Children at this age may become more independent from parents and carers and family. 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	Young people 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.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
• Norms and peer influence on behaviour • Decision-making • Communication, refusal and negotiation skills	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. Parents and carers can also help children be aware of others' personal space.	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. They may discuss and yarn with children about who makes them feel good, and who makes them feel uncomfortable. Parents and carers can 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. Parents and carers can also help children manage rejection, such as when a friend or sibling doesn't want to play with them. Children's privacy should be respected, such as when they are in the bathroom.	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 offense 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 support children by exploring ways that inequality affects personal relationships and interactions (such as age, gender, or even different gaming skills). They can talk and yarn about the different contexts in which friendships develop, and the differences in experiences of knowing people online and offline. They can 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.	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. They can teach children that being pressured or guilted into doing a sexual activity they are uncertain about is not a sign that the person cares about their feelings, and that gender stereotypes can contribute to these pressures. Parents and carers can 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. It is important to 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. Parents and carers can 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	Young people 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. Young people may develop their own ethical guidelines for managing or engaging in sexual relationships, as well as understanding legal responsibilities. Parents and carers can support young people by responding to their questions and concerns with curiosity and empathy, rather than criticism. They can encourage young people to be curious and ask questions. It can be helpful to continue to take an interest in young people's lives outside the family, including their online lives. Young people may continue to need help in navigating change in their relationships and identity. It can be helpful for parents and carers to be curious about the language being used to describe people and relationships, as this may be different to when they were younger. Parents and carers can support young people to feel more comfortable having real conversations with their sexual partner/s about comfort, consent and pleasure.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
				the age difference, the wider/larger the power imbalance is likely to be. They may also unpack how some sexual narratives may mask discriminatory attitudes such as racism, for example by fetishising people of certain ethnicities.	
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. 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.	Children may: • Engage in self-directed 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. • 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 relying on online pornography use, especially for young children, for example, misinformation about how sex and bodies work. Clearly articulate	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. • 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.	Young people 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 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 young people 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

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
			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 adults are not allowed to send sexual pictures or videos to children, or ask for sexual pictures or videos from children.		receiving unwanted 'nudes' and 'dick pics.' • Use scenarios and examples to talk and yarn about the ways young people learn about sex online. • Encourage young people to understand the benefits and risks of accessing sexual content online including information, pornography and support groups. • Support young people to have realistic expectations about what sex is life 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 young people 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 young people 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 and/or gender identity, and living in isolated areas or isolated communities (including communities that may be culturally isolated, rather than geographically isolated). • Support young people to recognise bigotry, discrimination and gender-based violence online, such as in online pornography.
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	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.	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	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.	Young people 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. At this age, they may know where to find trusted information about sexual health including STIs, conception, contraception, and access to abortion.

Focus area	0 to 4 years	5 to 7 years	8 to 12 years	13 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
	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 communities provide access to engaging sexual health resources.	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. It may also be helpful to have discussions about arousal and that normalise self-touch, while including that this is a private behaviour, not a public one. While parents and carers may encourage children to come to them with questions, they may need to be proactive about starting conversations, as children may be reluctant to do so themselves. Parents and carers can provide information about bodies and sex that is accurate, and inclusive of LGBTQIA+ identities.	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 yarning about their own experiences, such as periods or wet dreams. Children may need support to understand why some things are made for adults but not for children, such as sexually explicit media. It can be helpful to answer complex questions and problem-solve with children as they navigate puberty. It can be helpful to explain 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 discussion 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. Include in discussions 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 young people, not get them into trouble.** Parents and carers can also help children understand unsafe and unwanted sexual behaviour, and support them to report it.	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. They can also 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. Conversations can focus on intimacy, pleasure and joy, and emphasise that sexual relationships must be consensual. Discussions about sex can also include contraception options and how to access their effectiveness, and the use of abortion services in the case of unplanned pregnancy.	Parents and carers can support young people 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. Young people may also continue to need support to develop healthy relationships and gender roles, including setting and respecting healthy sexual boundaries. Young people may need further information about the law in regard to sexual activity. Parents and carers can seek to understand different social groups or movements (such as 'incels' or 'involuntary celibates') that young people might be interested in and discuss positive and negative social impacts.

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