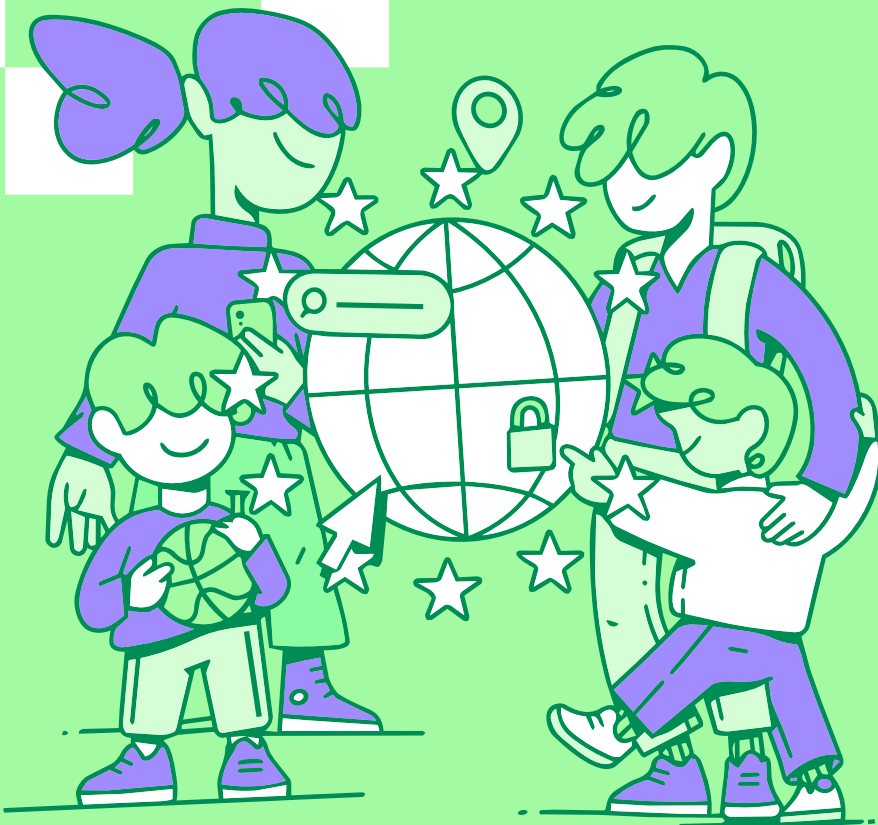


Your digital world: staying safe, happy and in control online

A GUIDE FOR KIDS AND TEENS TO THE REPORT
ON CHILD SAFETY ONLINE: PROTECTING AND
EMPOWERING MINORS IN A DIGITAL WORLD



Why a panel about child safety online?

The internet is an amazing place. You can learn new things, talk to friends, play games, watch videos, create art, and discover new interests.

But the internet also has its problems. Some apps and websites are designed to keep people online for as long as possible. Some people behave badly online. Sometimes children see things that are upsetting or harmful.

Because of this, Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission asked a group of experts – including young people – to think about how to make the internet a safer and better place for children and teenagers. We call this group of experts ‘the special panel on child safety online’.

This document explains their main ideas and how you can stay safer online.



Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission (middle), receives the report from the co-chairs of the special panel on child safety online, Professor Doctor Jörg M. Fegert (left) and Doctor Maria Melchior (right), Brussels, Belgium, 13 July 2026.

Guide to words and phrases

WORD OR PHRASE	WHAT IT MEANS
 CHILD SAFETY ONLINE	Making sure children stay safe and know what to do when they use the internet.
 AGE RESTRICTIONS	Rules about how old you need to be to do or use certain things. They help keep children and young people safe. Companies should make sure their apps, games and websites are safe for children before they use them.
 SOCIAL MEDIA+	Social media apps and other online places like games, video sites, and websites that can cause problems, like keeping kids and teens scrolling or playing for too long, showing them things that are not right for their age, or letting strangers talk to them.
 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)	Technology that can create texts, pictures, videos or conversations. AI can help people learn and create new things. But it can also create fake pictures or videos that look real, spread false information, or pretend to be a person. That's why it is important to think carefully before believing or sharing something online.
 ALGORITHM	A set of computer instructions that decide what you see online. For example, if you watch lots of football videos, an app may show you more football videos. But algorithms can also show content that is unhealthy and even dangerous.
 SCROLLING	Moving up or down on a screen to see more content, such as posts, pictures or videos. “Unlimited scrolling” means new content keeps appearing without reaching the end, making it easy to lose track of time spent online.

What is good about being online?

BEING ONLINE ALLOWS YOU TO:



STAY IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

LEARN NEW SKILLS

FIND INFORMATION QUICKLY

EXPRESS YOUR CREATIVITY

JOIN GROUPS THAT SHARE YOUR INTERESTS

HAVE FUN



The report says these good things are important and should be protected.

What problems can children have online?

NOT EVERYTHING IS SAFE IN THE DIGITAL WORLD.
SOME YOUNG PEOPLE MAY EXPERIENCE:



BULLYING OR MEAN MESSAGES

PRESSURE TO LOOK OR ACT A CERTAIN WAY

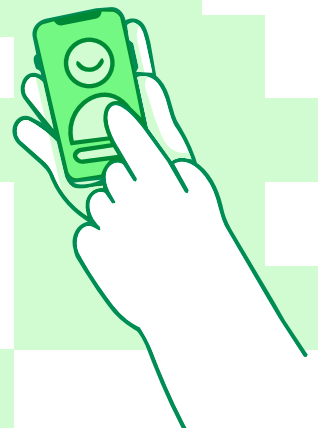
VIDEOS OR PICTURES THAT ARE FRIGHTENING OR UPSETTING

PEOPLE PRETENDING TO BE SOMEONE ELSE

SCAMS THAT TRY TO STEAL MONEY OR INFORMATION

STRANGERS TRYING TO BECOME "FRIENDS" FOR THE WRONG REASONS

**APPS THAT ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO SPEND
LOTS OF TIME SCROLLING WITHOUT NOTICING**



Why do some apps keep you glued to the screen?

**MANY APPS MAKE MONEY WHEN
PEOPLE SPEND LOTS OF TIME USING THEM**

THEY MAY USE FEATURES LIKE:



ENDLESS SCROLLING THROUGH PICTURES AND VIDEOS

VIDEOS THAT PLAY AUTOMATICALLY

NOTIFICATIONS THAT MAKE YOU WANT TO COME BACK

ALGORITHMS THAT LEARN WHAT KEEPS YOUR ATTENTION

6 ideas for a better digital world

The experts who wrote the report believe that making the internet safer is not just about fixing problems after they happen. It is about building a digital world that helps you and other children and teenagers learn, grow and stay safe from the very beginning.

SIX IDEAS THAT HELP MAKE THE INTERNET SAFER AND BETTER FOR KIDS AND TEENS.



- 1 Put children and teenagers first



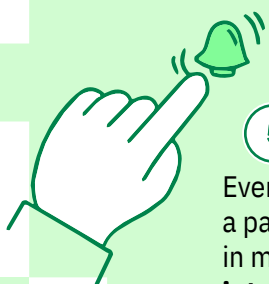
- 2 Make sure **everyone** gets help and support when they need it

- 3 Build safe online spaces



- 4

- Companies should do **the right thing** and protect children



- 5 Everyone has a part to play in making the **internet safer**



- 6

- Help children **become active and responsible** in the digital world

What do the experts recommend?

1. Put children and teenagers first

Whenever adults make decisions about websites, apps or games, they should always ask one important question: "**Is this good for children?**" Young people deserve online spaces where they can learn, play and connect with others safely and with respect.

Children and teenagers grow and learn at different stages. That is why the experts say that **online rules and protections should match a child's age**. As children grow, they should gradually have more independence, while still having the support they need to stay safe online.

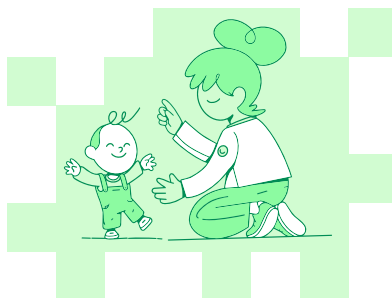
Until an app or website has proven to be safe enough, it should not be accessible by children.

What's right for different age groups?

THE EXPERTS WHO WROTE THE REPORT RECOMMEND...

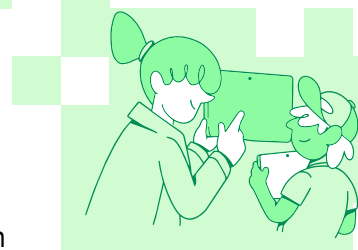
0 TO 2 YEARS OLD

... learning from playing, cuddling, listening and interacting with parents and caregivers. **Screens should be avoided** and parents should try not to use their own phones and screens during time together, to set a good example.



3 TO 12 YEARS OLD

... being allowed to use online devices **only with adult supervision** and **time limits**. **Parents or caregivers** should supervise and support children when they spend time online. **Teachers** should supervise children's use of safe devices to learn **digital skills** and limit the amount of time children spend online at school. And while being online can be fun, and useful, it's still important to make time for **offline fun** too - like hobbies, sport, friends, and relaxing away from screens.



13 TO 18 YEARS OLD

... having more freedom to use social media and online services. These should be **safe and suitable for teenagers**, and make sure they don't see harmful content, or spend too much time scrolling. It's important to **keep talking with trusted adults** about online experiences. Teenagers should also know how to get help, to report problems, and help others use social media safely.



2. Make sure everyone gets help and support

Every child's online world can be a little different. **Some children and teens may face more problems** on the internet and social media+ because of their age, background, or personal needs. For example, some children may get mean comments about their looks or feel pushed to share private information or images. Children from different cultures or communities might be bullied or treated badly online. Some children with disabilities may also need more help to stay safe.

What matters most is that **every child gets the care and support they need** so they can enjoy the internet safely and confidently.

Set the same minimum age of 13 for social media and other online services across the EU, so that all children have the same protection - wherever they live and whatever their background.

3. Build safe online spaces

Social media+ and other online spaces should be **safe, fun and made with children and teenagers in mind**. Apps and websites should help protect them from things that can harm them or be upsetting, such as frightening content, tricks that make it hard to stop scrolling, or very serious illegal activity.

Make it easy for children and teenagers to report problems online. Companies should take these reports seriously and quickly remove harmful content to help keep young people safe.

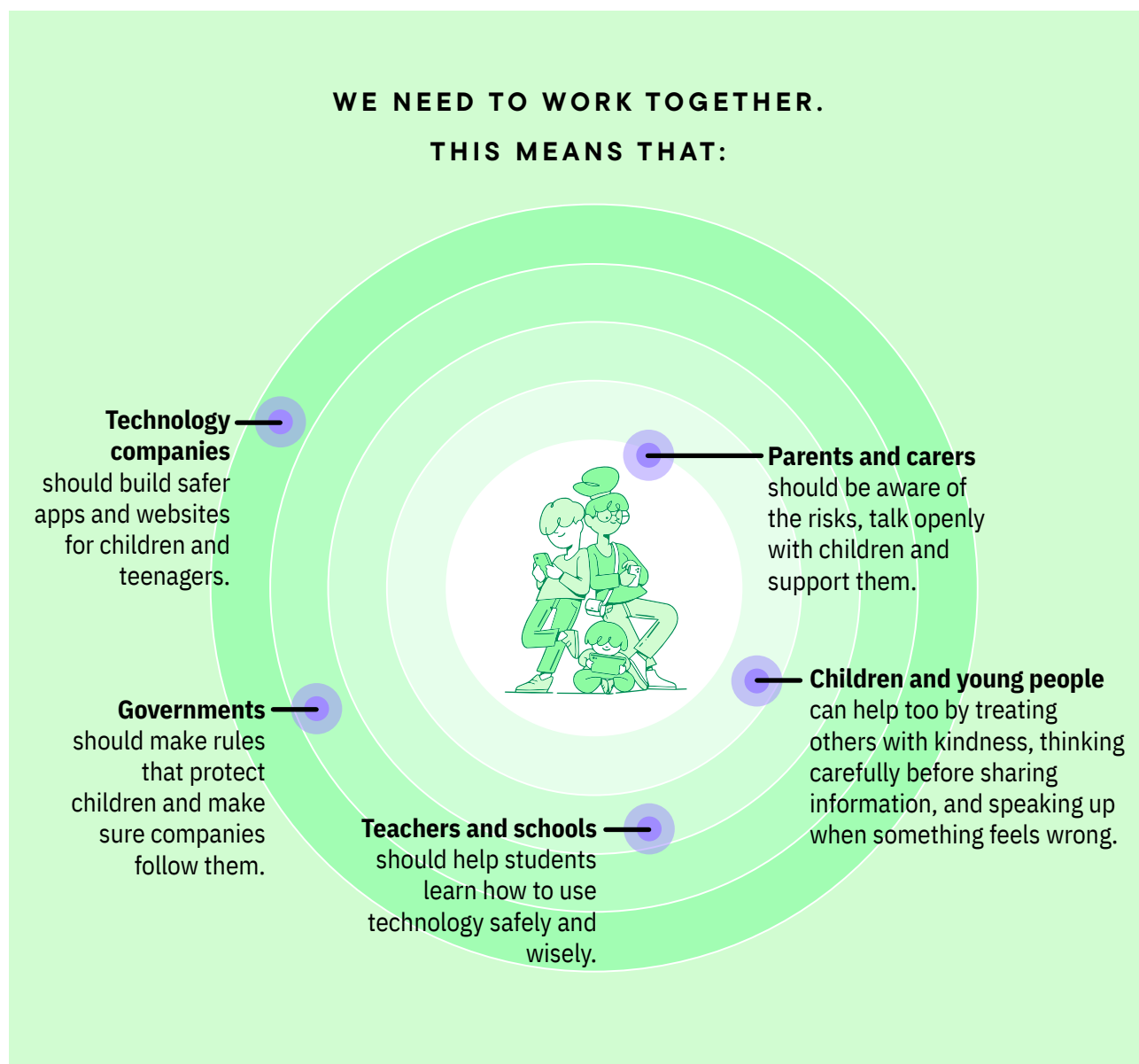
4. Companies should do the right thing and protect children

Social media, apps and other online websites must make safety part of their service from the very beginning. They must follow rules that protect young people.

Before children use a service, companies should have to show that it is safe and will not harm kids. **It should be the company's job to prove this**, and not for a child to discover unsafe and harmful things only after using the service.

Companies should make sure that safety is built into their social media+ and apps from the start - not added later.

5. Everyone has a part to play in a safer internet



When everyone works together, children are better protected.

Make digital skills part of education at all ages. Young people, parents, carers and teachers should learn how to use technology safely, understand what they see online, and stay healthy in the digital world.

6. Help children become active and responsible in the digital world

Children and teenagers have rights wherever they are - including online. They should be listened to and **involved in decisions that affect them**. Their needs should be treated with respect. Children's ideas and experiences help adults make **better decisions on online safety**. Rules to protect children online should respect their rights, fit their age and needs, and only last as long as needed. Children of all ages should also have good chances to learn, play and spend time together offline.

The goal is not to stop children from using technology - it is to help them use it with **confidence, curiosity and care**.

Give children and teenagers more opportunities to share their ideas and help shape social media and online safety rules. Their voices should be heard when creating policies, tools and school learning.

What comes next?

The European Commission has listened to parents, teachers, experts, and young people like you, and learned from what works in different countries.

Now, the Commission will carefully look at the report's ideas and use them to help develop new EU rules to better protect and support children and teenagers online.

This report will help shape the next steps towards a safer digital life in Europe.



What can you do to stay safe online?

SIMPLE WAYS TO STAY SAFE, SMART AND KIND ONLINE

These simple tips can help you make good choices, protect yourself and help build a better digital world.



Know your rights – remember that you have the right to be safe and respected online.



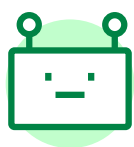
Be kind to others online – social media and gaming should be a positive experience for everyone. Treat others with the respect you would like to be treated with.



Think before you post – photos, videos and comments can stay online forever. Share now only what you would be comfortable with others seeing years later.



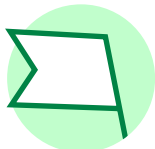
Protect your personal information – do not share private details such as your full name, address, school, phone number, passwords, or live location online.



Remember that AI is a tool, not a real person – AI can make mistakes and create false information, fake images, videos, voices and messages.



Check before you trust or share – not everything online is true. Always question information, especially surprising stories, videos, or messages, and check reliable sources before sharing.



Recognise danger – stop and think about strange requests from 'friends of friends', 'too good to be true' offers, or messages trying to pressure you into a decision.



Do not accept photos or chat requests from strangers – if you doubt someone's age or identity, ask an adult to check who it is (or tell them that 'your dad/mum is next to you' and see the reaction).



Use privacy and security settings – keep your accounts private, use strong passwords, and turn on extra security features whenever possible.



Do not share private images – never share intimate photos or videos, even if someone pressures you (especially if you're under 18). Once shared, they're out of your control.



Block, report and save evidence – if someone online is bullying, scamming, threatening, or making you feel uncomfortable, report and block them, and keep screenshots or messages.



Tell an adult you trust if something feels wrong – you are not being silly and you are not in trouble for asking for help.



Help make the internet a safer place – learn how apps, games, websites, algorithms and AI work, and help others to stay safe too.

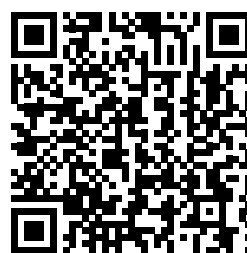


Use your voice – get involved and shape the future of the digital world.

Do you want to learn more about the report or need help?



Special panel on child safety online



Need help? No problem is too big or too small!
Friendly, expert teams at Safer Internet Centres
across Europe are here to help.

THIS SUMMARY HAS BEEN PREPARED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON THE BASIS OF THE REPORT “CHILD SAFETY ONLINE: PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING MINORS IN A DIGITAL WORLD”, PRESENTED IN JULY 2026 BY THE CO-CHAIRS OF THE SPECIAL PANEL ON CHILD SAFETY ONLINE.

