

What Parents Need to Know about Reddit

All National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many platforms which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about REDDIT

Reddit describes itself as a social news website where users connect and share stories, opinions and support; debate issues; ask questions; and chat to people with similar interests. Discussion topics are organised into communities (known as subreddits) that are created, run and populated by users, who remain anonymous throughout. Free speech is encouraged, and users – or ‘redditors’ – can vote posts ‘up’ or ‘down’ so they get more (or less) attention. Reddit is free to join, although signing up to Reddit Premium unlocks an advert-free version of the platform.

AGE RATING
13+

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- MINIMAL MODERATION**
As sharing opinions on Reddit is easy (and anonymous), offensive or age-inappropriate content is frequently posted. Moderation by admins and bots does occur, but can't cover every community – so Reddit relies on users voluntarily moderating these spaces. Subreddits marked NSFW (not safe for work) can contain anything from profanity to pornography, so are not suitable for under 18s.
- HARASSMENT AND TROLLING**
If someone on Reddit doesn't agree with your child's opinion, they may feel compelled to act so – in unclear terms. This could lead to a public bombardment of hurtful messages. Likewise, Reddit users are highly likely to encounter trolling (where someone posts a deliberate, inflammatory comment to provoke a reaction) on the platform, which can be distressing.
- FAKE NEWS**
Absolutely anyone can post a story on Reddit, so subreddits are occasionally prone to bias, misinformation and hoaxes being reported as if they are facts. Fake news articles often grab attention with catchy or controversial headlines, and Reddit is no exception. It's important that young people are able to identify fake news and disregard it rather than sharing it.
- GIFTING AND SPENDING**
Users can gift awards to the authors of posts that they like (thereby encouraging their favourite redditors to keep contributing) by spending Reddit Coins. This virtual currency can be bought on demand (with real money) or received as part of the post-for-premium package. Users sending a gift can also leave an anonymous private message, a feature which has been abused by groomers.
- SUPPORTIVE STRANGERS**
By definition, Reddit users interact with strangers in public through their community – but also have the option to do so privately. Groomers could repeatedly up-vote a child's comments or respond encouragingly to their posts to win their trust. Once they've built a rapport, the predator then begins messaging the child in private to discuss personal details or try to see them into meeting in person.
- NEVER-ENDING NOTIFICATIONS**
Reddit's default is for all notifications to be on. There are a total of 26 types of notification on the platform, ranging from chat messages and comments to updates and mentions of usernames. This would lead to a child's device being pinged almost constantly with alerts, frequently causing them to be distracted by incoming notifications rather than being present in the moment.

Advice for Parents & Carers

- SORT THE SETTINGS**
Reddit's user settings can help ensure that minors don't view adult material. Under the 'Feed Settings' tab, switch the Adult Content toggle to 'off' and enable Safe Browsing Mode (this blurs out any explicit images). Also in settings, you can turn off all unnecessary notifications, to prevent your child being distracted by every post or comment on Reddit, allowing them some tech-free time.
- RISE ABOVE IT**
If a person says something critical or offensive to your child on Reddit, it's natural that they'll want to respond. Explain to them, however, that it's society's reaction that you look for, don't give them the satisfaction. Instead, report the comment to Reddit Support for investigation. Blocking a user stops them from messaging or following your child on the platform.
- ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING**
It can often be difficult to tell if something online is real or fake – particularly for young people. It's important to encourage your child to double-check with reputable sources if what they've read is genuine. Remind them to consider what motives might be in the message – and to watch out for scams. Chatting about this regularly helps to develop critical thinking skills and good online habits.
- AVOID PRIVATE MESSAGING**
Through their Reddit profile, young people can control who's able to message them privately – with options including 'no-one' and 'accounts older than 30 days'. These controls help ensure potential groomers can't talk to your child in private, and that Reddit's admins and other users will be able to monitor and report anything they spot which causes them concern.

Meet Our Expert
Dr Claire Butterland is an online safety consultant at BCyberaware. She has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety workshops and policies for schools in Australia and the UK. Claire has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviours of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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Sources: <http://www.reddit.com>, <https://www.reddit.com/r/parentswhodidtheinternet/comments/2020w4a/>

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Over the last ten years, Reddit's monthly user count has grown from 70 million to an estimated 430 million. Around two-thirds of that total are in the 18–29 age bracket, which adds up to a lot of fairly young people discussing ... well, pretty much whatever they want. It's easy to see how that environment might not always be suitable for younger users.

Unsurprisingly, age-inappropriate content is therefore a common risk on Reddit, and – as this week's #WakeUpWednesday guide explains – it's not in isolation. Constant distracting notifications, online harassment and uninvited contact from strangers are also among the threats that young people might encounter through using Reddit.

Most exchanges on Reddit are interesting and entertaining discussions of technology, sport, health or pop culture. The site has attracted controversy and criticism, however, for communities sharing depictions of violence against women, leaked or stolen explicit images (including those of minors) and online hate (particularly racism).

Because of its popularity, links to Reddit frequently turn up among search engine results – so young people may be exposed to the site's content even without purposely looking for it. The relative lack of moderation – especially given the aforementioned subject matter – is just one of the potential issues raised in our #WakeUpWednesday guide to Reddit.

Please [click here](#) to download the guide