

Online Safety News

MAY 2026

Real or Fake? Why It's Getting Harder to Tell

AI-generated images are now so realistic that even adults struggle to tell the difference.

This matters because children are growing up in a world where:

- Not everything ,or everyone, they see online is real
- Images can be created or edited in seconds
- Fake content can influence what they believe, feel, and trust

Steps to take



- ✓ Remind children: "Not everything online is real – even if it looks it"
- ✓ Encourage them to question what they see, not just accept it
- ✓ Talk about how images can be edited, filtered or completely generated

The best way – test yourselves together.

BBC Bitesize has created a simple, interactive quiz to test how easy it is to be fooled:

[The monthly AI or Real quiz: March 2026 – BBC Bitesize](#)

It's a great way to start a conversation – and most people are surprised by how tricky it is.

What is Looksmaxxing?

You may not have heard the term yet, but your teenager probably has. Looksmaxxing is the act of improving one's looks, sometimes by extreme means, and originated on incel messaging boards where it prioritises appearance above all else.

It has since gone mainstream via TikTok and YouTube and a high percentage of teen boys regularly encounter masculinity-related content pushed into their feeds by algorithms – whether they go looking for it or not.

While some aspects such as skincare or fitness can be part of a healthy routine, looksmaxxing taken too far promotes the message that appearance equals worth – leading to anxiety, obsessive comparison, disordered eating, body dysmorphia and increasingly extreme behaviours.

Although it primarily targets boys, girls are not immune.



What can I do?

- Regular open, calm conversations make it easier for young people to share what they're seeing online.
- Watch out for signs like an obsession with appearance, rigid self-improvement routines, or withdrawal from social activities.
- Know which apps your child is accessing and ask them who they like to follow and why.

For more guidance, visit: www.internetmatters.org

Sextortion reports from teens are rising. This tool is here to help.



Reports to the Childline and the Internet Watch Foundation about sextortion are increasing significantly.

Sextortion involves young people being coerced or blackmailed into sharing intimate videos or images of themselves usually by a fake account posing as a young teenage girl.

Once the image or video has been shared the threats of sharing these with friends, family or school begin, unless the victim sends money or more content.

Report Remove is a free, confidential tool for any child or young person in the UK to report nude or sexual images of themselves online, with the IWF working to have them removed and Childline providing emotional support throughout. It can be accessed here: [Report Remove | Childline](#)

Tell your teenager about Report Remove before they need it and have lots of conversations about the risks and consequences of sharing intimate images online.

The law says that creating or sharing sexual images or videos of a child under 18 is illegal, even if the person sharing is a child. This includes consensual creation and sharing between two teens. The legislation is there to protect children from abuse.

It's important to remind your child that if an illegal image or video gets sent to them they must not forward on or share that image elsewhere.

Your child's digital footprint – why it matters now



Many children and teens think deleting a post makes it disappear. It's important that they understand, it doesn't. Everything they post, comment on, tag or share leaves a trail – and even private accounts can show up in search results.

As teens start to explore next steps after school, their digital footprint becomes critically important. Universities and employers search social media. Screenshots exist long after content is deleted. And what feels like a throwaway comment to a teenager can look very different to someone who doesn't know them.



Try this together this week: Google your teenager's full name, then their name alongside their school. Look at their most public posts and comments together

Ask: "Would you be happy if a university admissions/future employer saw this?"

Let them see the results. Most teens are genuinely surprised – and that surprise can be the best conversation starter you'll get.

Instead of asking "why did you post that?" –

Try:

"what do you want people to think of you?" and

"what impact do you think that might have later in life?"

It's never too early to start talking about digital identity and responsibility and getting young people to think critically about their online actions.

There can be long term consequences that impact both them and others.