



Stay safe in chat rooms

What is a chat room?

A chat room is a place on the internet where people with similar interests can meet and communicate together by typing messages on their computer. The vast majority of people in chat rooms are there for genuine reasons and there is an incredible amount of learning and sharing occurring each minute of each day on a global basis. Chat rooms are a preferred method of communication for young people and present effective communication channels for groups such as the disabled and the confined.

The messages in a chat room usually appear instantly to everybody who is participating in the chat.

Some chat rooms are moderated however, meaning certain messages are not broadcast because they do not conform to the standards set up by the operator of the service.

Reasons for this may include: discussion off the topic, bad language or repeat messaging especially of undesirable or obscene text, known as flaming. The majority of chat rooms however, remain open where messages are posted automatically with no human intervention.

People can often enter a chat room without any verification of who they are.

Potential dangers of chat rooms for children

While there are many benefits in children using chat rooms, there are a few issues that can cause concern.

Children can often waste time chatting, letting other responsibilities go by the wayside, such as homework or tasks around the house. Children can also be in danger of under-developing their social skills by relying on internet chat as their primary source of communication.

Addiction can be an outcome that needs monitoring by parents or carers.

There is, however, a greater danger that potentially can occur with children using chat rooms—while 'stranger danger' is a term most young people are familiar with, it needs to be reinforced in relation to the internet. Children can feel removed and safe in what they consider to be a virtual world. However, the distance between the virtual and the real worlds is not as big as some might consider.

Participants in chat rooms will sometimes attempt to entice children into talking about sex in one form or another. Paedophiles have been found in chat rooms in jurisdictions all over the world. There have been cases where children have met up with these people and as a consequence, have been seriously abused or worse.

About NetAlert

NetAlert is the Australian Government's online safety program, set up to protect Australian families online. NetAlert is part of the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). It offers independent, sensible, helpful and reliable advice and information about potential problems, dangers and threats on the internet and ways to minimise or avoid these problems.

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