What is the Com network?

Guidance for parents & carers

Understand it. Spot changes. Take action.

The Com is a loose network of online communities where some people treat violence and harm as entertainment or a way to gain attention and status.

Young people may be targeted, groomed or drawn into these communities. Knowing how it can happen will help you start conversations and take action early.

"The Com" is short for "the community". It is not one organised group or a single website. It is a broad online subculture made up of different groups and individuals.

Some groups connected to the Com encourage or carry out:

- Online grooming and blackmail
- Sexual coercion or sextortion
- Cybercrime, doxxing and swatting
- Self-harm, violence and other harmful acts

Important: Some young people who appear to be taking part may have first been groomed, threatened or coerced themselves.

Know how it can happen

The journey can start in ordinary online spaces.

Connect
Someone offers friendship, attention, support or a sense of belonging.

Move
They encourage the young person to move from a game or social platform into a private chat or closed group.

Collect
They ask for personal information, secrets, images or videos.

Coerce
They use threats, pressure or blackmail to demand more harmful actions.

It can happen on popular games, social media and messaging apps. The platform itself is not the cause, and most people use these spaces safely.

Spot changes

Look for a pattern, not one single sign.

You might notice:

- New or **unusual secrecy** around their online life
- New accounts, deleted messages or **unfamiliar apps**
- **Distress when they receive messages** or lose access to a device
- Withdrawal, anxiety, irritability or sudden mood changes
- **Changes in sleep, eating,** friendships or everyday routines
- **Unexplained gifts** or digital currency
- Someone online knowing personal information about them
- **Signs of self-harm** or unexplained injuries



These changes do not necessarily mean your child is involved with the Com. They are reasons to check in calmly and offer support.

Start the conversation

Be curious, not confrontational.



Try asking:

- "What online communities are you part of at the moment?"
- "What do people have to do to fit in?"
- "Has anyone asked you to move to a private chat?"
- "Has anyone online asked you to keep a secret or do something that made you uncomfortable?"
- "What would make it easier for you to tell me if something went wrong?"

Tell your child clearly:
"You won't be in trouble for telling me. Whatever has happened, we will deal with it together."

Take practical steps

Talk regularly
Make conversations about their online life part of everyday family life, not something that only happens when there is a problem.

Check together
Use privacy settings, strong passwords, two-step verification and age-appropriate parental controls. Agree boundaries together wherever possible.

Strengthen their safety
Use privacy settings, strong passwords, two-step verification and age-appropriate parental controls. Agree boundaries together wherever possible.

Build their confidence
Remind them that they can leave a chat, refuse a request, block someone and ask for help. They never have to comply with a threat.

If you are concerned

- Stay calm and **listen without blame or judgement.**
- Reassure your child that your priority is keeping them safe.
- **Help them stop contact** with the person or group.
- **Keep** usernames, **profile links, messages** and other evidence.
- **Do not delete accounts** or messages, as they may be needed by the police.
- **Do not save or share sexual images** of a child.
- **Report the account or content** to the platform.
- Seek professional support, particularly if there are threats, blackmail, sexual abuse or risks of harm.

If a **child is in immediate danger, call 999.**
For non-emergency police advice, call 101.

Need more help?

Scan the QR code to learn more about **The Com**, warning signs and how to protect your child.

Helplines in the UK
CEOP | NSPCC: 0808 800 5000 | **Childline:** 0800 1111 |
ACT Early: 0800 011 3764

Visit **internetmatters.org** for more support.

internet matters.org