

Keep your child safe from cyber-flashing

What is it?

Cyber-flashing happens when a stranger sends an explicit picture, uninvited, to a device (such as a phone or tablet) via WiFi or Bluetooth. It's sexual harassment. It's most likely to happen on public transport or in crowded places.

The file-sharing app AirDrop for iPhone and iPads is most commonly associated with cyber-flashing, but there are lots of different file-sharing apps out there. With AirDrop, it can be easy for anyone to send unsolicited images. The automatic preview feature means you also see images without actually opening them. Under the Online Safety Act 2023, cyber-flashing is a criminal offence. It's illegal for anyone to send or show a photo or film of any person's genitals to cause alarm, distress or humiliation, or for the purpose of their own sexual gratification. Offenders can face up to 2 years in prison.

3 steps to keep your child safe

1. Restrict who can send files to your child's phone

Most file-sharing apps allow users to restrict who can send files to them by WiFi or Bluetooth.

Find out which apps your child uses, then make sure your child knows how to use these settings.

For AirDrop on iPhones:

- Go to Settings > General > AirDrop
- Select 'Contacts Only', or 'Receiving Off' (to not receive AirDrop requests) Alternatively, you can:
 - Open 'Control Centre' (swipe down from the upper-right corner or up from the bottom of the screen, depending on the model)
 - Press firmly on the network settings card (this is in the shape of a square) in the upper-left corner. This will open more connectivity controls
- Tap and hold the AirDrop icon
- Select 'Contacts Only', or 'Receiving Off' (to not receive AirDrop requests) Some of the other most popular file-transfer apps include:

- Google Drive
- Dropbox
- Microsoft OneDrive
- AirDroid
- Zapyra

Make sure your child knows to only accept files from people they know.

2. Turn off Bluetooth when not using it

Otherwise, it can be easy for strangers nearby to send images to your child's phone. To do this on iPhone, open 'Control Centre' (see above), then tap the Bluetooth icon (it looks like a 'B'). The icon dims when it's off.

On Android, swipe down from the top (you might need to do this twice or scroll across). Then tap the Bluetooth 'B' icon to turn it off. It will be grey when Bluetooth is off.

3. Make sure your child knows what to do if it happens to them

If your child doesn't feel in immediate danger, they should take a screenshot and report the incident to the police using the non-emergency numbers:

- If it happens on public transport, text 61016 or call 0800 40 50 40
- If it happens anywhere else, call 101
- If your child feels scared or is in immediate danger, they should call 999. They should also move to a safe place – and find someone in authority to talk to, such as platform staff, a security guard or a shop manager.
- If it happens in school, your child should talk to a trusted adult immediately. If it has happened outside of school, you or your child can still ask the school for support.

It can be difficult for children to tell someone about sexual harassment

If your child tells you about being a victim of an incident of cyber-flashing, make sure you:

- Listen to them carefully
- Reassure them that you'll support them
- Remain non-judgmental