As both a police officer and parent, I am concerned about the growing trend to sexually exploit young people online.

Being young hasn’t changed, but technology certainly has. It has changed the way young people communicate with each other. It has given them new opportunities for social interactions, and most importantly, more ways to learn about the world and express themselves.

Young people are constantly navigating the challenges that we never had to deal with.

Last week’s news concerning a website hosting explicit images of young women also includes stories of women being encouraged to share sexual images of themselves.

With Australians being more connected than ever before, it has become critical for parents to talk to their children about the importance of respectful relationships, both on and offline.

This type of online behaviour is not new to law enforcement. Working as a Superintendent in Child Protection Operations, I have seen criminals prey on our children too many times. I know all the things that can go wrong online. I also think technology is one of the greatest assets our children have.

This website highlights we all need to discuss the serious implications of posting or sending sexualised images online or through text messages.

And while sex and relationships can be an uncomfortable conversation for many parents to have with their children, this issue brings light to the fact this is an issue we cannot ignore.

The reality is this—once you send an image or post one online, you lose total control of where it ends up. Unfortunately, what goes online stays online.

This website is unfortunately proof that criminals prey on this.

I want young people to be aware that once they send or post something online,
they have lost total control over where that image ends up.

While they may think they are just sending a photo to a friend, the image may one day end up in someone else’s hands.

Young people need to be aware that they may be committing a crime when taking, receiving or forwarding sexual images of themselves or friends who are minors. This applies even if all participants are willing.

Offensive and illegal content can also be reported to the Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner, who can investigate and take action on content that is likely to be prohibited under law.