



A Guide to Parental Controls, Common Apps & Websites, and Associated Issues

An e-safety resource for parents, Summer 2022

Introduction and Contents

This booklet is a curated set of resources from the National Online Safety Hub – further information on a huge range of safety topics can be found here:

<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/>

The first half of this guide is designed to help you to set up parental controls at home and on devices your child may be using. Parental controls are designed to protect children from accessing inappropriate material and can be tailored to suit the age of your child. It is important however to emphasise that no system is 100% effective so it is important that you talk regularly to your child about their online activity and encourage them to share with you any worrying or concerning content they might come across.

The second half of the guide is information around the most used apps and websites that we see issues with in school, and information regarding the associated issues that occur around the students' use of social media. Although the information regarding issues has been grouped with a relevant app, you will find that most of these issues can occur on any platform.

This guide is not intended to be read as a whole – rather dip into the advice that may be affecting your family as appropriate. The contents table is clickable to take you to the relevant page, and at the bottom of every page you will find a link to return to the menu.

Contents

<i>An e-safety resource for parents, Summer 2022</i>	1
Introduction and Contents.....	2
What do I need to know about home devices?	4
How to set up Parental controls - Operating Systems.....	4
Microsoft Windows.....	4
Mac OS	4
What do I need to know about age-inappropriate content?	5
How to set up Parental controls – Internet Service Providers.....	5
How to set up Parental controls – Mobile Service Providers	5
How to set up parental controls on iPhone & android.....	6
How to use parental controls to limit age-inappropriate content	7
How to use parental controls to protect privacy	8
How to use parental controls on games consoles	9

To return to the main menu click [here](#)

Setting up parental controls – Games Consoles	9
What do I need to know about screen addiction?.....	10
Family Technology Contracts	10
Guide to Common Apps and Websites	11
Facebook (13+).....	11
WhatsApp (16+) & group chats.....	12
Instagram (13+) & friends and followers	13
TikTok (13+) & social pressures linked to ‘likes’	14
Twitter (13+) & fake news.....	15
Snapchat (13+) & sexting	16
Discord (13+) & cross-platform sharing of inappropriate content	17
Omegle (18+) & Online Safety Tips	18
Steam & age ratings	19
Find out more!	20

What do I need to know about home devices?

Smart devices promise to make our lives easier. And in many cases – they do. But these new technologies present risks too. Whether you're using a digital assistant to record your shopping list or controlling your lights through a smart system, many smart functions can be 'hacked' and controlled by someone outside your home. This guide will help you identify some of the ways you can stay alert and protect yourself, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as fraud, online grooming and cyberbullying.

At National Online Safety we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one platform of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, lists and tips for adults.

Smart devices promise to make our lives easier. In many cases - they do, however these new technologies present risks too. Whether you're using a digital assistant to record your shopping list or you're controlling your lights through a smart system, many smart functions can be 'hacked' and controlled by someone outside your home. This guide will help you identify some of the ways you can stay alert and protect yourself.

- KNOW THE RISKS**
The success of any smart device relies on it communicating with other devices using the internet. It's an unavoidable part of using smart devices, but it does expose you to numerous risks. Attackers could use the internet connection to steal your data for identity fraud or to make unauthorised purchases through your devices. There is even potential for more subtle exploitation, such as child grooming or cyber-bullying.
- WHAT IS THE INTERNET OF THINGS?**
This is the term given to all the devices connected to the internet in your home. It includes a new digital download connected to your smartphone, your kettle that boils when you tell it on your tablet or your thermostat that comes on when you wake on your smart watch. The Internet of Things (IoT) is designed to make life easier, but it also opens up your home network to potential cyber attacks. It doesn't mean you can't enjoy the benefits, but it does mean being aware of the potential negatives.
- CHECK ENCRYPTION SETTINGS**
Whenever data is sent over the internet, it is encrypted. This makes it harder to read if it is intercepted. You should look to use a strong encryption setting, such as WPA2, rather than WPA or WEP. You can check your router manual on how to do this.
- KEEP YOUR SOFTWARE UP TO DATE**
Manufacturers constantly update and improve software used in smart devices. Some will automatically alert you to an update, but not all do. To be on the safe side, it's a good idea to set reminders in your calendar. Check the manufacturer's website for any updates and run them if necessary.
- RENAME THE 'GATEWAY' TO YOUR HOME**
Your internet router is the virtual gateway to your home network. It needs protecting. To do this, you should change the default name (the SSID) and password. You can usually find steps to do this in the instruction manual. Don't use your family name. Choose something more obscure, like the password computer you, using upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols. Do this for your router and any other smart devices connected to the internet.
- USE A SEPARATE NETWORK FOR GUESTS**
If your router has a feature that allows you to set up a separate network for guests, you should use it. That way, when guests use your Wi-Fi, they won't have access to your devices.
- SAY GOODBYE TO SIRI AND ALEXA**
It's a good idea to change the activation words on your smart devices or they are always on and your house. This makes it that much harder for people to break into your smart devices.
- DEACTIVATE ANY UNNECESSARY FEATURES**
Though it's a fun idea, you probably don't need to control your kettle from outside the house. In fact, there are often many unnecessary features included on smart devices. Where possible, you should look to disable these. Doing so reduces the ability for people to hack your devices. When someone sees you're actively taken steps to increase security, they're less inclined to try to compromise them.
- TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS**
If you ever feel something is wrong or your network is being exploited, visit the manufacturer's website or ring their technical support department. It's better to be safe than sorry.
- BUILD A WALL**
You could also purchase a dedicated 'firewall' device. This is something that plugs into your network and stops cyber threats reaching your router. Some routers do have a firewall element included, but they are no replacement for the real thing. A firewall device thoroughly analyses information coming in and out of your network and helps stop malicious attacks. A security device is strongly recommended to anyone who works from home or deals with sensitive information.
- SECURE YOUR SMARTPHONE**
If you do use apps on your smartphone to control devices in your home, make sure your smartphone is secure. At the very least, make sure the pin function is enabled, as well as any biometric authentication you have. Where possible, it's also a good idea to download some anti-virus software for your smartphone too.
- REGULARLY AUDIT YOUR DEVICES AND CONSOLES**
Every now and then you should check through all of your smart devices (including games consoles) connected to the internet. Turn them off at the main cut disconnect them from the internet. In fact, it's good practice to disconnect any devices that aren't in use. It's a small thing but really does help, even when you think a device might be in sleep mode. If it's connected to the internet it could still be listening or streaming data.

12 Top Tips To Get Smart About The DEVICES In Your Home

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Meet our expert
Emma was a secondary school Computer Science teacher for more than a decade. Since leaving education, she has been working in a cyber security firm delivering cyber awareness training to businesses and carrying out network testing. She is a mother of a five-year-old and has vast experience of controlling and managing how children access online services and use apps.

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How to set up Parental controls - Operating Systems

Whichever OS you are using on your home computer/laptop, you will find built in parental controls for free. You will need to make sure you have your own account, and so does your child for this to be effective.

Microsoft Windows

The free family safety app allows you to set screen time limits that apply to devices, apps, and games. When screen time runs out, choose to add more or not, based on what's right for you and your family.

- App and game limits (Windows, Xbox, Android)
- Device limits (Windows, Xbox)
- Screen time requests
- Activity summaries

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/family-safety>

Mac OS

You can monitor and control the time your children spend on the Mac and websites they visit. To set up parental controls for your children, follow these steps:

- Turn on parental controls for each child. If you haven't added a user account for your child to your Mac, see [Add a new user to manage with parental controls](#). If you've already added an account for your child, see [Turn on parental controls for a child with an existing account on your Mac](#).
- [Change the restrictions](#) you want for each child. For example, you can decide which websites your child can visit, and how long they can use the Mac each day.
- If you want, [copy the settings for one child](#) and use them for another child.
- When you decide your child is ready, you can [turn off parental controls](#) for them.

To return to the main menu click [here](#)

What do I need to know about age-inappropriate content?

“Inappropriate” means different things to different people. What’s acceptable for one age group, for example, may be unsuitable for a slightly younger audience. Online, young people can chance upon inappropriate content in various way – from pop-up ads to [TikTok videos](#). The increasingly young age at which children become active in the digital world heightens the risk of them innocently running into something that they find upsetting or frightening. Trusted adults need to be able to help children be aware of what to do if they’re exposed to age-inappropriate content. In the guide, you’ll find tips on a number of potential risks such as social media, gaming and adverts.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

“Inappropriate” means different things to different people. What’s acceptable for one age group, for example, may be unsuitable for a slightly younger audience. Online, young people can chance upon inappropriate content in various ways – from pop-up ads to TikTok videos. The increasingly young age at which children become active in the digital world heightens the risk of them innocently running into something that they find upsetting or frightening. Trusted adults need to be able to help children be aware of what to do if they’re exposed to age-inappropriate content.

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

SOCIAL MEDIA
Age-inappropriate content is easily accessible through many social media platforms. For example, it is hugely popular with young people but is arguably best known for clips featuring sexualised dancing or profanity. Some social media users also express hate speech or promote eating disorders and self-harm, which could cause lasting damage to a child’s emotional and mental health.

GAMING
Gaming is an enjoyable source of entertainment, but many popular titles can expose children to inappropriate material such as violence, horror, gambling or sexually explicit content. Playing games unsuitable for their age risks normalising to children what they are seeing. Some games also include in-game chat, where other (usually adult) online players often use language that you probably wouldn’t want your child to hear or repeat.

STREAMING
The range of video streaming services available online means that users can find almost anything they want to watch on demand. Children are therefore at risk of viewing TV shows and movies which contain nudity, drug and alcohol abuse, explicit language and extreme violence. Unfortunately, these streaming platforms can always determine that it’s not an adult who’s watching.

ADVERTS
Online adverts frequently include age-inappropriate content, usually gambling and nudity or partial nudity. Although adverts for alcohol or e-cigarettes are also common, some search engines also feature adverts that are responsive to your search history, so if you’ve recently looked up a new horror movie, shopped for lingerie or ordered alcohol online, then the ads appearing on screen could reflect this the next time your child borrows your device.

18 Advice for Parents & Carers

TALK IT THROUGH
Embarrassment or fear of getting into trouble can make it difficult for children to talk to parents about inappropriate content they’ve watched. Remind your child they can always come to you if they’re troubled by something they’ve seen online, without worrying about consequences. Before offering advice, discuss what they saw, how they felt and how they came to find the content in question.

CONNECT, DON’T CORRECT
If your child’s been particularly distressed by exposure to content that wasn’t suitable for their age, it’s important to offer guidance to prevent them from repeating the same mistake – but it’s equally vital to help them deal with the emotions that the situation has raised. You could tell them about any similar experiences you might have had at their age, and how you dealt with it.

BLOCK, REPORT, CONTROL
After discussing the problem, you and your child can take action together. This could include blocking any inappropriate sites and reporting any content which violates a platform’s rules. To further restrict your child online, set up parental controls on internet-enabled devices they use. This will significantly reduce the chances of your child being exposed to age-inappropriate content in future.

GET SPECIALIST HELP
Age-inappropriate content can potentially have a negative impact on a child’s mental health, which is sometimes displayed through changes in their behaviour. If the problem becomes more severe, you might consider reaching out to a mental health professional or an expert in this field who can provide you and your child with the proper support.

STAY CALM
Even though it is obviously difficult to stay rational in a situation where your child has been put at risk, it’s essential to think before you react. Your child may well have hesitated to open up to you about watching inappropriate content for fear of the consequences, so being calm and supportive will reinforce the notion that it would be easy to talk to you about similar issues in the future.

Meet Our Expert
Cathy Jorgensen is a Registered Counsellor with the Health Professions Council of South Africa and runs a private practice offering counselling to children, teenagers and families. Her main focus is creating awareness and educating the community on the mental health pressures of today’s world, as well as resources and techniques to understand and cope better.

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How to set up Parental controls – Internet Service Providers

The vast majority of ISP’s will provide free tools which will allow you to manage the content that can be accessed via your home internet connection. The specific tools will vary by provider but most offer the opportunity to block specific websites, filter content by age and allow/deny access to the network at specific times or to specific devices.

Remember though that these will only apply while a device is connected to your network, and so mobile devices that use 3G, 4G or 5G mobile data connections will need have parental controls set on the device as well. See [How to set up parental controls on iPhone & android](#)

Links for some of the main providers are given below:

- Virgin Media: <https://www.virginmedia.com/broadband/parental-control>
- Sky: <https://www.sky.com/help/articles/sky-broadband-shield-start>
- Talk Talk: <https://new.talktalk.co.uk/broadband/security>
- BT: <https://www.bt.com/help/security/how-to-keep-your-family-safe-online-with-bt-parental-controls-an>
- Plusnet: <https://www.plus.net/help/broadband/how-to-use-plusnet-safeguard/>
- Now broadband: <https://help.nowtv.com/article/set-up-and-manage-broadband-buddy>

How to set up Parental controls – Mobile Service Providers

OFCOM regulations mean that all SIM cards obtained directly from the UK’s main mobile providers (Vodafone, EE, O2 and Three) should come with age restrictions turned on. Unless this has been actively removed, all sites classified as 18+ should be restricted on a mobile device.

This filtering will only apply when using mobile data, and not WiFi so we advise that parental controls should also be installed on the device rather than relying on this alone.

To return to the main menu click [here](#)

How to set up parental controls on iPhone & android

Most smartphones allow parents and carers to choose which apps and features appear on their child's device and which ones don't – also preventing young people from buying and downloading anything that's unsuitable for their age. These guides to parental controls for managing apps will help you to reduce the chance of your child using a game or app that might not be appropriate for their age.

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How to Set up PARENTAL CONTROLS for APPS iPhone

Apple devices come with built-in apps already available: Mail, FaceTime and Safari, for example. However, you can choose which apps and features appear on your child's device and which ones don't. You can also manipulate the features in Game Centre to enhance your child's safety and privacy when playing games, as well as blocking iTunes or App Store purchases if you wish.

How to Restrict Built-in Apps/Features

- 1 Open Settings
- 2 Tap Screen Time
- 3 Tap Content & Privacy Restrictions
- 4 Tap Allowed Apps (you may need to toggle this to 'on' at the top)
- 5 Enable or disable the apps you wish to appear (or disappear) on your child's device

How to Restrict Game Centre

- 1 Open Settings
- 2 Tap Screen Time
- 3 Tap Content & Privacy Restrictions
- 4 Tap Content Restrictions (you may need to switch the toggle at the top to the 'on' position)
- 5 Scroll down to Game Centre
- 6 Choose between Allow, Don't Allow, or Allow with Friends Only in the settings for each feature

How to Restrict iTunes & App Store Purchases

- 1 Open Settings
- 2 Tap Screen Time
- 3 Tap Content & Privacy Restrictions
- 4 Tap iTunes & App Store Purchases
- 5 Select Allow or Don't Allow for each feature (you can also lock these settings with a password)

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How to Set up PARENTAL CONTROLS for APPS Android Phone

On Android phones, restricting access to particular apps usually requires going onto Google Play. From there, it's fairly easy to navigate your way through the settings to manage the parental controls and authentications relating to any apps on the device. These features can prevent your child from downloading or buying anything unsuitable for their age. Updated versions of apps or games that your child has already installed may occasionally contain something inappropriate, so we've explained how to stop those, too.

How to Block App Downloads (This Also Disables In-app Purchases):

- 1 Open Google Play Store
- 2 Tap the profile icon in the top right
- 3 Tap Settings
- 4 Scroll down to the Family section and tap Parental controls
- 5 Toggle 'Parental controls are off' to 'Parental controls are on'
- 6 Create a PIN and tap OK
- 7 Confirm your PIN and tap OK again
- 8 Tap Apps & Games
- 9 Set the age limit you wish to set
- 10 Tap Save to apply your changes

How to Stop Auto-updates

- 1 Open Google Play Store
- 2 Tap the profile icon in the top right
- 3 Tap Settings
- 4 Tap Auto-Update Apps
- 5 Select 'Don't auto-update apps' and then Tap Done

Restricting Apps Through Google Family Link

- 1 Open Google Play Family Link for parents
- 2 Tap the three horizontal lines in the top left
- 3 Select your child's account
- 4 Tap Manage
- 5 Tap Controls on Google Play
- 6 Tap Apps & Games
- 7 Select the age limit you wish to set

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How to use parental controls to limit age-inappropriate content

The parental controls on smartphones allow you to block or restrict certain apps, features, content, downloads or purchases that might not be suitable for young people. Setting limitations around age ratings, Siri and web searches enables you to filter out age-inappropriate content and vastly reduce the likelihood of your children being exposed to potentially upsetting material and information. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of tips such as sexting, strangers and excessive use.

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How to Set up PARENTAL CONTROLS to limit age-inappropriate CONTENT iPhone

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The parental controls on iPhones allow you to block or restrict certain apps, features, content, downloads, or purchases. Setting limitations on content ratings, Siri and web searches enables you to filter out age-inappropriate content and vastly reduce the likelihood of your children being exposed to unsuitable material and information.

18+ Set up content rating restrictions

Content filters keep your child from viewing unsuitable material. They block apps, films and TV shows with specific age ratings, and music and podcasts with explicit content.

- 1 Open Settings
- 2 Tap Screen Time
- 3 Enable Content & Privacy Restrictions
- 4 Tap Content Restrictions
- 5 Choose the Settings for each feature you wish to restrict

Set up web restrictions

Website content filters restrict age-inappropriate content on Safari. You can also blocklist certain websites or allow access only to approved sites.

- 1 Open Settings
- 2 Tap Screen Time
- 3 Tap Content & Privacy Restrictions
- 4 Tap Content Restrictions
- 5 Choose between Unrestricted Access, Limit Adult Websites and Allowed Websites Only
- 7 Choose which websites you wish to allow/block

Set up Siri web search restrictions

You can screen out explicit language to avoid Siri displaying inappropriate results. You could also disable Siri entirely, so your child can't use it to search the web.

- 1 Open Settings
- 2 Tap Screen Time
- 3 Tap Content & Privacy Restrictions
- 4 Tap Content Restrictions
- 5 Scroll Down to Siri
- 6 Choose to block either or both Web Search Content and Explicit Language

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How to Set up PARENTAL CONTROLS to limit age-inappropriate CONTENT Android Phone

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The settings on an Android device allow you to prescribe certain rules for when your child is using it. For example, you can block specific types of content to reduce the risk of your child being exposed to age-inappropriate material (music with explicit lyrics, for instance, and games, TV shows or movies that are unsuitable for young people). There are two ways to access parental controls on an Android phone: through Google Play or via the Google Family Link app. You can also lock your changes behind a PIN, so your child (or anyone else) can't change them back.

Set up parental controls with Google Play

- 1 Open the Play Store app
- 2 Tap Menu (represented by three horizontal lines)
- 3 Tap Settings
- 4 Tap Parental Controls
- 4 Enable Parental Controls
- 4 Create Pin
- 4 Tap the content you would like to restrict
- 4 Choose how to filter or restrict access

Set up parental controls with Google Family Link

- 1 On your phone, install Google Family Link for Parents
- 2 Tap Open and review the information
- 3 Tap Get Started
- 4 Tap Next to set up your child's device
- 5 On your child's phone, download Google Family Link for Children & Teens and enter the Family Link setup code provided
- 6 On your phone, open the Family Link app
- 7 Tap your child's name
- 8 Tap Manage Settings
- 9 Tap Controls on Google Play
- 10 Tap the content you would like to restrict
- 11 Choose how to filter or restrict access

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How to use parental controls to protect privacy

The privacy settings on your child's smartphone give you control over how the information stored on it can be used. You can turn off location services, for example, to keep their whereabouts private or stop apps from accessing functions of the phone like the camera or microphone. The following step-by-step guides on how to tighten up privacy settings on iPhones and Android phones will give you tips such as how to make changes to the privacy settings and how to prevent changes to other settings and features.

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How to Set up PARENTAL CONTROLS for PRIVACY iPhone

The privacy settings on your child's Apple device give you control over the information stored on it. This allows you to select which apps can access features and information on your child's device: for example, you might wish to block a social networking app from connecting to the camera reel, or specify which apps can use the device's location data.

How to make changes to privacy settings

You can block certain apps from obtaining information from your child's device. You can also prevent your child (or anyone other than you) from altering these settings.

How to prevent changes to other settings/features

You can also stop changes being made to the iPhone's other settings or features by anyone but you. For example, you can prevent your child from altering their passcode, accounts or mobile data settings.

- 1 Open 'Settings'
- 2 Tap 'Screen Time'
- 3 Tap 'Content & Privacy Restrictions'
- 4 Scroll to 'Privacy'
- 5 Choose the settings you wish to restrict
- 6 After you've made any changes, select 'Use Screen Time Passcode' to lock your changes with a PIN

Open 'Settings'

Tap 'Screen Time'

Tap 'Content & Privacy Restrictions'

Scroll to 'Privacy'

Select 'Allow' or 'Don't Allow' on the settings for which you wish to enable or disable changes



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https://support.apple.com/ja-jp/HT203048#est-restrictions

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How to Set up PARENTAL CONTROLS for PRIVACY Android Phone

The settings on an Android device allow you to set certain rules to help safeguard your child's privacy when they are using it. For example, you can turn off location services to keep their whereabouts private, prevent third-party apps and sites from viewing their information, and stop apps from accessing other functions of the phone (like the camera or microphone, for example). We've produced step-by-step guides on how to tighten up an Android phone's privacy settings.

How to manage location services

- 1 Open the Google Family Link app
- 2 Select your child's account
- 3 On the 'Settings' card, tap 'Manage'
- 4 Tap 'Location'
- 5 On the card with the correct device's name, tap 'Settings'
- 6 Tap 'Location Settings'
- 7 Turn 'Device location' to off
- 8 To reactivate location services in future, repeat these steps and turn 'Device location' back on

How to control access for third-party apps and sites

- 1 Sign in to your Google Families account
- 2 Under 'Members', select your child's name
- 3 Select 'Account info' and then 'More'
- 4 Select 'Third-party apps with account access'
- 5 Turn 'Allow third-party apps to access XX account' to off by toggling the switch

How to manage app permissions

- 1 Open the Google Family Link app
- 2 Select your child's account
- 3 On the 'Device' card, tap 'Settings'
- 4 Tap 'App permissions' then choose a permission
- 5 Below your child's device, switch the permission off
- 3 On the 'Apps installed' card, tap 'More'
- 4 On the 'Allowed' list, tap the app you want to change the permissions for
- 5 Tap 'App permissions'
- 6 Switch the permission off

Alternatively, you can manage permissions for individual apps through the Family Link app.



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To return to the main menu click [here](#)

How to use parental controls on games consoles

Much like a television allows you to watch movies or a radio allows you to listen to music, a game console allows you to play video games. The most modern ones are names you might be familiar with – Sony PlayStation, Microsoft Xbox, and Nintendo Switch – and almost all of them can now connect to the internet and be enjoyed online with friends. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as the addictive nature of games consoles, inappropriate online content and online chat.

Setting up parental controls – Games Consoles

Games consoles have parental controls too – most will let you manage screentime, filter content based on your child's age and the PEGI game rating, allow or disallow online purchases and review and monitor who they are communicating with online.

More specific information by console is linked here:

- Nintendo Switch: <https://www.nintendo.co.uk/Nintendo-Switch/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls-1183145.html>
- Xbox: <https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/community/for-everyone/responsible-gaming>
- PS4: <https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/support/account/ps4-parental-controls-and-spending-limits/>
- PS5: <https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/support/account/ps5-parental-controls-spending-limits/>
- Oculus/Meta Quest VR: https://store.facebook.com/gb/quest/safety-center/parental-supervision/?intern_source=blog&intern_content=latest-quest-software-update-makes-your-home-space-more-social-and-adds-important-parental-supervision-tools

If you have reservations about a game your child may want to play, or just want to find out more about what they are playing, the family gaming database at <https://www.taminggaming.com/en-gb/home> contains key information such as age suitability, description of gameplay, screenshots and associated costs for nearly 2,000 games.

What you need to know about... GAMES CONSOLES

What are they?
Games Consoles
Much like a television allows you to watch movies or a radio allows you to listen to music, a games console allows you to play video games. The most modern ones are names you might be familiar with – Sony PlayStation, Microsoft Xbox, and Nintendo Switch – and almost all of them can now connect to the internet and be enjoyed online with friends.

Know the Risks

- Online Content**
While modern consoles don't strictly need to be connected to the internet, many of them do. Double up as an internet browser or provide the ability to stream TV shows and movies. It's important that the appropriate filters and parental controls are in place to restrict children viewing any unsuitable content.
- Addictive nature**
Games consoles require video games, and both can ultimately contribute towards an addictive nature. Playing for long periods and becoming children to become reliant on the good feelings released when playing games, making them more likely to want to play them more frequently, and for longer periods of time.
- Hacking risk**
It's almost impossible to avoid signing up to different services when using modern consoles. Keeping track of all these accounts can be confusing and in a worst case scenario, hackers could gain access to personal information, social media and bank cards by hacking online profiles.
- Online Chat**
Once connected to the internet, players can talk to each other via the over-ear headset or using text chat functions on the console. Without the proper protection in place, children could speak to anyone, many of whom could be strangers with no real identity, and they may be talking to someone who is not who they say they are.

Safety Tips

- Check contacts**
Online predators and hackers often use spy tactics to build relationships with children and then to illicit personal details through gaming platforms or gaming communities. Be on the lookout for suspect communications such as intrusive personal messages or people you suspect might not be who they say they are.
- Look for behaviour changes**
Becoming withdrawn, irritable and anxious when not playing on a games console are trademark symptoms of gaming addiction. If children turn angry when asked to stop playing, that could also be a sign that an intervention is needed.
- Keep details private**
Games consoles will almost exclusively ask you to enter your details securely from the console itself or through a trusted website tied to the console maker. If somebody claiming to be working for Sony, Microsoft or Nintendo asks you to share your passwords or account details, do not give it to them.
- Use parental controls**
Most gaming consoles will have parental controls which can be used to set up things like family management accounts. From here, parents can often set age limits on games and content, spending restrictions, limit play time and set up passwords and authentications to help keep children safe.

Further Support

- Block and report**
If someone has made your child feel uncomfortable, make note of suspect players' usernames. Often, you'll be able to ban or block these players in a game's settings. If you have proof of their response, don't hesitate to contact your local police force or authority with as much information and evidence as you can gather.
- Seek Support**
If you're concerned about your child playing too much on their console and think they may have developed a gaming addiction, try and offer them support. The World Health Organisation has classified gaming disorder as a mental health condition and they may be able to offer you more targeted help.
- Keep IDs safe**
Be sure to talk to your child about the importance of keeping their identity safe. If they ever receive messages claiming to be from companies but something doesn't feel right, tell them not to respond and inform you. Things like data, spelling and grammar can give email addresses, or asking for personal information are tell-tale signs.

Our Expert Mark Foster
Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGBible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.

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What do I need to know about screen addiction?

It can be challenging for parents and carers to know whether children are spending too much time on their devices. Furthermore, it's even more of a challenge to know whether a child is addicted to the internet and social media. As technology is becoming more pervasive, children and young people are experiencing tech – related dependencies. Do we as parents and carers have the knowledge to identify and support children and young people who may be developing an addiction to their devices?

In this guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as health & wellbeing, app addiction and a lack of sleep.

Family Technology Contracts

If you are worried that your child spends too long on their devices, you may find a family technology contract helpful. Family technology contracts help teach proper technology use and set expectations. They allow you to start an open conversation with your child and encourage them to be part of the decision making. By creating a family media contract, your children will know their boundaries and have concrete consequences for breaking them.

There are 4 factors that should be considered within the contract:

- **Time limits** – this may be a maximum time per day, and/or rules around when (and perhaps where) a device can be used.
- **Appropriate content** – this will differ according to the type of contract. For video gaming, consider what age ratings are appropriate. For phones, what apps are (and are not) allowed to be used.
- **Rules about sharing** – discuss what is appropriate to share online. Some topics to discuss are sharing your location, sexting and what can be posted on social sites.
- **Consequences** – make sure your child will know what happens if they break the rules. Make the rules as specific as possible and adjust the consequences based on the item. For example, the consequence for sharing inappropriate content might be different from having a phone at the dinner table.

Some example templates can be found here:

<https://www.pandasecurity.com/en/mediacenter/family-safety/family-media-agreement-printables/>

At National Online Safety we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one topic of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

It can be challenging for parents and carers to know whether children are spending too much time on their devices. Furthermore, it's even more of a challenge to know whether a child is addicted to the internet and social media. As technology is becoming more pervasive, children and young people are experiencing tech - related dependencies. Do we as parents and carers have the knowledge to identify and support children and young people who may be developing an addiction to their devices?

47% of parents said they thought their children spent too much time in front of screens

What parents need to know about SCREEN ADDICTION

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Children as young as 13 are attending 'smartphone rehab' following growing concerns over screen time. There are now help centers in the UK which deal with screen addiction for children and adults showing the seriousness of device addiction. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially recognised gaming addiction as a modern disease. The condition was confirmed as part of their International Classification of Diseases (ICD) which serves as an international standard for diagnosing and treating health conditions.

LOSS OF INTEREST IN OTHER THINGS

Your child may become less interested in anything that does not include their device. You may notice that your child is missing school time and generally being less engaged with other activities in the home. It is important to discuss this with your child as soon as you notice a behaviour change.

CONFIDENCE, SUPPORT & ADVICE

The Children's Commissioner report 'Life in Likes' explored how children aged 8-11 are using social media today. It showed that children are using their devices to speak to their online friends about their problems and seek acceptance and support, removing face to face interactions.

APPS CAN BE ADDICTIVE

Apps have been designed with 'psychological tricks' to constantly keep grabbing your attention. One example of this is on the app Snapchat, where you can gain 'streaks' when interacting with your friends. If you don't respond, you lose the streak. This addictive nature of apps aims to engage children and keep them coming back for more.

LACK OF SLEEP

7 out of 10 children said they had missed out on sleep because of their online habits and 60% said they had neglected school work as a result. It is important that children get the sleep they need in order to focus the next day.

Top Tips for Parents

LIMIT SCREEN TIME

In today's digital age, technology is an important part of a child's development so completely banning them from their device will mean they are missing out on a lot, including conversations and communication with their friends. Rather than banning them from using their devices, we suggest setting a screen time limit. Work out what you think is a suitable and healthy amount of time for your child to be on their device per week. Remember that your child may need to use devices for their school homework so only set screen limits on recreational time on their device. Once you have established this, have the conversation with them to discuss why you are implementing a screen limit. There will be others in your child's friendship group who will not have screen limits set and will be sending messages when they do not have access to their phones.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Children model their behavior on their peers, so if their parents are constantly on their device, they will see this as acceptable. Try limiting your own screen time and follow the same rules you have set for them. If you have asked your child to not use their device at the table, make sure you don't. Try setting house rules that the whole family abide by.

REMOVE DEVICES FROM THEIR BEDROOM

Setting a rule about removing devices from bedrooms will help your child to get the sleep they need and be more focused the next day at school. 20% of teenagers said that they wake up to check their social network accounts on their devices. Even by having a device switched off in their bedroom, they may be tempted to check for notifications.

LESS TIME MEANS LESS EXPOSURE

There are many risks associated with devices, such as cyberbullying, grooming, sexting, viewing inappropriate content etc. Less time spent on a screen means that a child will be less exposed to these risks.

ENCOURAGE ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES

It may seem like an obvious solution, but encouraging children to play with their friends, read a book, or playing outdoors will help them realise they can have fun without their device. Playing football, trampolining, camping, going for a walk or swimming are all healthy replacements for screen time. Try to join them in their outdoor activities to show your support.

MOBILE-FREE MEAL TIMES

Have you tried to settle your child by giving them a tablet at the dinner table or restaurant? This may seem like a quick fix to calm them down but in reality it is encouraging them to use their device as a distraction from conversation and dealing with their emotions. We suggest removing all technology from the dinner table and having conversations with your family about how their day has been.

STATISTICS

52% of children aged 3-4 go online for nearly 9hrs a week
82% of children aged 5-7 go online for nearly 9.5hrs a week
93% of children aged 8-11 go online for nearly 13.5hrs a week
99% of children aged 12-15 go online for nearly 20.5hrs a week

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Guide to Common Apps and Websites

Facebook (13+)

With 2.9 billion users, Facebook, owned by the recently rebranded Meta, is the world's most popular social media platform. It encourages interaction with other people by (among other things) adding them as friends, reacting to or commenting on their content, sharing images and videos, posting status updates, joining groups and playing games. Facebook is free, and anyone over 13 can join – but with no age verification, younger children can easily create an account: it's likely your child is already familiar with the platform, even if they don't yet use it themselves.

In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as cyberbullying, strangers and the addictive nature of Facebook.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about FACEBOOK
AGE RATING 13+

With 2.9 billion users, Facebook, owned by the recently rebranded Meta, is the world's most popular social media platform. It encourages interaction with other people by (among other things) adding them as friends, reacting to or commenting on their content, sharing images and videos, posting status updates, joining groups and playing games. Facebook is free, and anyone over 13 can join – but with no age verification, younger children can easily create an account: it's likely your child is already familiar with the platform, even if they don't yet use it themselves.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- ADDICTIVE NATURE**
Facebook's quick reward cycle of likes and comments on shared posts can be hugely addictive. It encourages users to keep returning to post things and responses. Friends (or people checking out), which leads to people checking out, which means frequently and finding themselves compulsively scrolling through content.
- CYBERBULLYING**
A 2021 Ofcom report found that around one in four UK 12-15 year-olds had been cyberbullied or teased (intentionally antagonised online). On Facebook (this can happen through private messages (on Facebook Messenger), hurtful comments on their profiles and posts, pages or groups set up purposely to torment a victim, or exclusion from pages of posts).
- FUTURE IMPACT**
Like most social media platforms, anything posted on Facebook leaves a 'digital footprint'. This can have future consequences for young people: many universities and employers routinely examine, now review someone's Facebook timeline during the application process.
- CONTACT FROM STRANGERS**
Just like in the offline world, there are people on Facebook with malicious intentions. Ofcom reports, for instance, that 35% of 12-15 year-olds have received a friend request from a stranger. This sadly can include individuals seeking to take advantage of impressionable youngsters.
- OVERSHARING**
Facebook encourages you to post "what's on your mind", but children should be wary of revealing too much about themselves online. Users can give away their location by checking in or using Facebook Live, for example, while some photos can also be traced using file data.
- INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**
Facebook monitors and removes material like hate speech or extreme political views, while adverts on the platform are not screened from anything under its banner on their interests. Offensive content isn't always taken down instantly, however, so there's still a risk of children encountering it.
- VIDEOS AND STREAMING**
Facebook Live lets users stream video live to their friends or watch others' broadcasts. Videos can comment in real time, which is problematic to moderate. Short, user-generated clips called reels can now also be deployed on profiles and feeds. These video features can contain unsuitable material or show children to be caught into doing something on camera that they wouldn't normally do.

Advice for Parents & Carers

- KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE**
In the settings area, you can choose whether a Facebook profile is public or private. By far the safest option is to set your child's profile to private, so they can only interact with people they choose to share with on the platform. Facebook's settings can also prevent your child's personal information (like their contact details, school name or date of birth) from appearing publicly.
- ENCOURAGE SAFE FRIENDING**
Facebook can help your child to stay connected with the people and the things that they care about; however, it's important for them to understand that they should only accept friend requests from people who they know. The key questions to consider are "has your child met them in person?" and "do they know and trust them enough to feel comfortable accepting them as a Facebook friend?"
- LEAD BY EXAMPLE**
Let your child watch you using Facebook – this will demonstrate how it can be used safely and appropriately, reducing the risk of them encountering harmful content themselves. Teach them the habit of thinking before posting anything online and try to follow the same rules that you set for them. If you agree some limits on your child's Facebook use, then you should stick to them, too.
- RESPECT BOUNDARIES**
Once you've talked about Facebook safety with your child, give them some space and trust them to make smart choices. Make it clear, however, that you're always open to discussing social media if they need to. In the early stages, you could occasionally review your child's social media activity with them to put your mind at rest – but take care not to become reliant on checking it every night.
- BLOCK AND REPORT**
On Facebook, you're able to report harmful content and block particular people or groups so they can't contact your child or view their profile, before they take any further serious time on the platform. Show your child how these features work and explain that they might need to be used. Facebook's Bullying Prevention Hub offers advice on dealing with harassment on the platform.

Meet Our Expert
Alex Wright is a former Facebook employee and social media expert with more than 15 years' experience in digital media. He has worked with some of the biggest organisations on the planet and has a vast understanding of how social media platforms work and how they engage their audience.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about FACEBOOK MESSENGER
AGE RATING 13+

Facebook Messenger is a communication app through which users can exchange messages and send photos, stickers, and video and audio files. Messenger allows both one-to-one and group chats, has a stories feature and – via its latest addition Rooms – can host a video call with up to 50 people. As of 2021, the app had 38 million users in the UK alone (more than half the population) among its 1.3 billion users worldwide. Whereas Messenger is integrated into Facebook on desktops and laptops, it has existed as a standalone app for mobile devices since 2011.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- ADDICTIVE NATURE**
Messenger's numerous features can encourage children to spend more time on the app and therefore on their phone, increasing their levels of screen time. It also makes it easy (for users of 13 and over), especially among older children, who will almost certainly have a high proportion of their friends communicating via the app.
- LIVE STREAMING**
The new Rooms feature lets Messenger users hold video calls with up to 50 people. A young person can join any room they see, but the other people in these rooms don't even necessarily need to be Facebook account holders. This live streaming development heightens risk factors around privacy, security and the possibility of exposure to inappropriate content.
- REQUESTS FROM STRANGERS**
If the Facebook profile which accompanies their Messenger app is set to public, there's a possibility that young people will receive message requests from individuals they don't know. There have previously been reports of grooming attempts on Facebook, with predators using fake profiles to engage children in conversation.
- OVERSHARING PERSONAL INFO**
If the app is given access to their device's photo library or location services, young people can inadvertently share sensitive information (private photos, videos, their number or current whereabouts) with people on Messenger who they don't know. Even among friends, shared photos or videos don't always stay private: the recipient(s) could make and re-share them with others.
- CYBERBULLYING**
Like many communication apps, Messenger can be an avenue for cyberbullies or trolls to target children. This might take the form of harassment, abusive messages or being put in group chats. A 2021 Ofcom report revealed that more than half (55%) of 12-15 year-olds who suffered such negative experiences online in the preceding year.
- SECRET CONVERSATIONS**
The Secret Conversations function lets Messenger users have end-to-end encryption that no-one else can read. Unlike regular chats on the app, these can only be targeted to the device being used at the time. Messages can also be set to delete once read (though screenshots can be taken), so a child could chat privately with someone without any record of that conversation having taken place.

Advice for Parents & Carers

- USE ADDITIONAL SECURITY**
Messenger's App Lock feature uses your child's fingerprint or face ID to ensure that nobody else can access their messages without permission. Messenger also offers a variety of optional tools to increase young people's security on the app, including two-factor authentication, login alerts and filtered message requests.
- REPORT INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**
If your child experiences anything negative on Messenger, you can help them report it. Facebook can then take action, such as disabling the offender's account, limiting their ability to send messages or blocking them from contacting your child again. If you report the app, you can also report the user, so they can be removed from the app. If you're online, you can switch off active status in the app's settings.
- DISCUSS LIVE STREAMING**
Talk with your child about safe and secure video calling. When setting up calls on Messenger Rooms, only invite people who your child knows and trusts. Show them how to lock a room if they don't want other people joining – and how to remove anyone they don't want in the call, sending them about believing responsibly during a live stream, even if it's with people they know.
- ENCOURAGE SAFE SHARING**
Ensure your child knows to send pictures and videos only to family and trusted friends, and not to publicly share information such as their location (showing a landmark near home or school) or their number (if they don't want other people joining – and how to remove anyone they don't want in the call, sending them about believing responsibly during a live stream, even if it's with people they know).

Meet Our Expert
Alex Wright is a former Facebook employee and social media expert with more than 15 years' experience in digital media. He has worked with some of the biggest organisations on the planet and has a vast understanding of how social media platforms work and how they engage their audience.

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WhatsApp (16+) & group chats

WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service, with around two billion users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, as well as making voice and video calls. Its end-to-end encryption means messages can only be viewed by the sender and any recipients: not even WhatsApp can read them. Updates to its privacy policy in 2021 (involving sharing data with parent company Facebook) caused millions to leave the app, but the new policy was widely misinterpreted – it only related to WhatsApp's business features, not to personal messages. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as scams, strangers and location sharing.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about WHATSAPP

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UK AND EUROPE 16+ BEST OF THE WORLD

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

SCAMS
Fraudsters occasionally send WhatsApp messages pretending to offer prizes – encouraging the user to click on a link to win. Other common scams involve warning someone that their WhatsApp subscription has run out (claiming to delete them into disclosing payment details) or impersonating a friend or relative and asking for money to be transferred to help with an emergency.

DISAPPEARING MESSAGES
Users can set WhatsApp messages to disappear in 24 hours, 7 days or 90 days by default. Photos and videos can also be instructed to disappear after the recipient has viewed them. These files can't be saved or forwarded – so if your child was sent an inappropriate message, it would be difficult to prove any wrongdoing. However, the receiver can take a screenshot and save that as evidence.

ENABLING FAKE NEWS
WhatsApp has unfortunately been linked to accelerating the spread of dangerous rumors. In India in 2018, some outbreaks of mob violence appear to have been sparked by false allegations being shared on the app. WhatsApp itself took steps to prevent its users circulating hazardous theories and speculation in the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

POTENTIAL CYBERBULLYING
Group chat and video calls are great for connecting with multiple people in WhatsApp, but there is always the potential for someone's feelings to be hurt by an unkind comment or joke. The 'only admin' feature gives the admin(s) of a group control over who can send messages. They can, for example, block people from posting in a chat, which could make a child feel excluded and upset.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS
To start a WhatsApp chat, you only need the mobile number of the person you want to message (this is why it's always best to have the app). WhatsApp can access the address book on someone's device and recognise which of their contacts also use the app. So if your child has ever given their phone number to someone they don't know, their stranger could use it to contact them via WhatsApp.

LOCATION SHARING
The 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, allowing friends to see their movements. WhatsApp describes it as a 'simple and secure way to let people know where you are'. It is a useful method for a young person to let loved ones know they're safe – but if they used it in a chat with people they don't know, they would be exposing their location to them, too.

Advice for Parents & Carers

CREATE A SAFE PROFILE
Even though someone would need a child's phone number to add them as a contact, it's also worth altering a young person's profile settings to restrict who can see their photo and status. The options are 'everyone', 'my contacts' and 'nobody' – choosing one of the latter two ensures that your child's profile is better protected.

EXPLAIN ABOUT BLOCKING
If your child receives spam or offensive messages, calls or files from a contact, they should block them using 'settings' in the chat. Communication from a blocked contact won't show up on their device and stays undelivered. Blocking someone does not remove them from your child's contact list – so they also need to be deleted from the address book.

REPORT POTENTIAL SCAMS
Young people shouldn't engage with any message that looks suspicious or too good to be true. When your child receives a message from an unknown number for the first time, they should be encouraged to report it as spam. If the sender claims to be a friend, your child should verify it's their usual number to verify if really is them, or if it's someone trying to trick your child.

LEAVE A GROUP
If your child is in a group chat that is harassing them (or is uncomfortable, or has been added to a group chat that they don't want to be part of), they can leave. WhatsApp's group settings to leave. If someone exits a group, the admin can add them back in once they leave a second time, it is permanent.

THINK ABOUT LOCATION
If your child needs to use the 'live location' function to show you or one of their friends where they are, advise them to share their location only for as long as they need to. WhatsApp gives a range of 'live location' options, and your child should manually stop sharing their position as soon as it is no longer needed.

DELETE ACCIDENTAL MESSAGES
If your child posts a message they want to delete, WhatsApp allows the user seven minutes to erase a message. Tap and hold on the message, choose 'delete' and then 'delete for everyone'. However, it's important to remember that recipients may have seen (and taken a screenshot of) a message before it was deleted.

CHECK THE FACTS
You can now fact-check WhatsApp messages that you've sent. Tap and hold on the message, tap the magnifying glass icon to the right of the message. From there, your child can launch a Google search and decide for themselves whether the message was true or not.

Meet Our Expert
Parveen Kaur is a social media expert and digital media consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience in the social media arena and is the founder of Kids N Click, a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

Occurring through messaging apps, on social media and in online games, group chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. Involving by definition, three or more individuals, these groups allow users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While they are useful for helping friends, people with shared interests or members of a club to communicate and coordinate activities, they can also leave young people feeling excluded and bullied – as well as providing opportunities for inappropriate content to be shared and viewed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

BULLYING
Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat, allowing and often encouraging others to join in the bullying behaviour. If this content is shared in a group of their peers (especially a larger group), it serves to amplify the hurt, embarrassment, anxiety and isolation that the victim feels.

SHARING GROUP CONTENT
It's important to remember that – while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something your child intended as private becoming public (and potentially going viral) is higher if there are people they don't know well in the group.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION
This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: starting a new group, for instance, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one child doesn't have access to, meaning they aren't involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to plan an event that everyone else but the attendees.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS
Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly toward your child. It's vital for young people to be aware of personal details and stay aware that they have no control over what messages and images they share after they've put them online.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT
Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by your child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function, so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO
A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications. Every time someone in the group messages, your child's device will be pinged, with an alert: potentially, this could mean hundreds of notifications a day. Not only is this highly distracting, but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.

Advice for Parents & Carers

CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS
Group chats are often an arena for young people to gain social status. This could mean that some children, or those with an impulse, which could upset others in the group. Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel if they engaged in this behaviour. If you do act as a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT
Remind your child that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in a group chat, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help to put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. On a related note, you can discuss how to empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

AVOID INVITING STRANGERS
Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things that aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and, especially, to never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS
Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be a massive irritation and distraction, especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to your child that they can still be part of the group chat, but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with the conversation at a time which better suits them.

Meet Our Expert
Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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Instagram (13+) & friends and followers

Instagram is a hugely popular social networking app with over 1 billion users worldwide. The app, which is accessible on iOS and Android devices, allows users to upload images and videos to their feed, create interactive 'stories', exchange private messages or search, explore and follow other accounts they like. Images and videos can be transformed with an array of filters to edit the shot before sharing and anyone with an account can see others' online 'galleries' if their account is not private. To make posts easier to find, users can include searchable hashtags and captions to their uploads. This guide has been created to help parents and carers understand exactly what Instagram is about. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as exposing your child's location, in-app purchases and poor mental wellbeing.

What parents need to know about INSTAGRAM

Instagram is a hugely popular social networking app with over 1 billion users worldwide. The app, which is accessible on iOS and Android devices, allows users to upload images and videos to their feed, create interactive 'stories', exchange private messages or search, explore and follow other accounts they like. Images and videos can be transformed with an array of filters to edit the shot before sharing and anyone with an account can see others' online 'galleries' if their account is not private. To make posts easier to find, users can include searchable hashtags and captions to their uploads. That's why we've created this guide to help parents and carers understand exactly what Instagram is about.

AGE RESTRICTION 13+ (Approved on the basis of 11 on the app assessment)

LOCATION #HASHTAG

HOOKED ON SCROLLING
Many social media platforms, Instagram included, have been designed in a way to keep you scrolling for as long as possible. Behavioural economist, Nir Eyal, calls this the 'Hook Model' and the Instagram feed is a great example of this. Children and adults may find themselves scrolling to try and get a dopamine release. Scrolling to see what's next can be difficult to stop until children find that 'something' they are looking for, quickly losing track of time as they get deeper into their Instagram feed.

SLIDING INTO DMs
Direct messages (DMs) on Instagram allow users to share posts, images, videos, voice messages and calls between each other privately (or in a private group). Even if your child's account is set to private, anyone has the option to message them and send them content. If the person is not on your child's friends list, the message will still be sent to their inbox but the user has to accept their request to see the message.

INFLUENCER CULTURE
Influencers are sometimes paid thousands of pounds to promote a product, service, app and much more on social media. When relatives or influencers become such influencers they should add a disclaimer somewhere in the post which states that they have been paid to do so. Commonly, this is well hidden in the hashtags or in the comments of their post, making it unclear that their photos aren't actually an advert. This can be very misleading to young people who may be influenced into buying products or something promoted by somebody they admire, creating a false sense of reality and potentially affecting their mental health and wellbeing.

LIVE STREAMING TO STRANGERS
Live streaming on Instagram allows users to connect with friends and followers in real time and comment on videos being live streamed. If your child's account is private, only their approved followers can see their only. It's important to note they may have accepted a friend request from someone they don't know, which means they could be live streaming to strangers. Children also risk sharing content they later regret, which could be shared online for years to come. Public accounts allow anybody to view, so we suggest your child knows they don't know, in early 2019, data gathered by the NSPCC found that sex offenders were grooming children on Instagram live streaming.

IN-APP PAYMENTS
Instagram allows payments for products directly through the app. It operates under the same rules as Facebook Payments, which state that if you are under the age of 18, you can only use this feature with the involvement of a parent or guardian.

EXPOSING LOCATION
Public locations can be added to a user's photos/videos and also to their stories. While this may seem like a good idea at the time, it can expose the location of your child. This is particularly more of a risk if it is on their story as it is real time. A photo which includes landmarks in the area, their school uniform, street name, house and even tagging in the location of the photo uploaded to Instagram can expose the child's location, making it easy to locate them. If their account is public, anyone can access their account and see their location.

HJACKED HASHTAGS
Hashtags are an integral part of how Instagram works, but they can come with risks. One person may use a seemingly innocent hashtag with one particular meaning, and before you know it hundreds of people could be using the same hashtag for something inappropriate or dangerous that your child shouldn't be exposed to.

IGTV
Instagram TV (IGTV) works similar to YouTube. Users can watch videos from favourite accounts on the platform or their own channel and post their own videos. It's important to note anyone can create an Instagram TV channel and doesn't have to be a verified user. It's important to follow an account and watch their videos. In 2018, Instagram implemented and removed some of its TV content which featured sexually suggestive imagery of children. As the feature may encourage spending time using the app, it's important to set time limits to avoid children's sleep or education being disturbed.

TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS & CARERS

RESTRICT DIRECT MESSAGES
If your child receives a message from somebody they do not know, encourage them not to accept their message request and 'block' this person. This will stop them from stopping them messaging your child again. Children can also 'tap and hold' the individual message to report it to Instagram as well as reporting the account itself.

LOOK OUT FOR #ADS
In 2019, the UK's Competition and Markets Authority launched an investigation into celebrities who were posting adverts on social media and not declaring that they were paid for those posts. Each year, celebrities are paid for their posts, for example using a hashtag like #ad or #sponsored. Each year, celebrities are paid for their posts, for example using a hashtag like #ad or #sponsored. Each year, celebrities are paid for their posts, for example using a hashtag like #ad or #sponsored.

MANAGE NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS
If your child receives unwanted or negative comments, they can block that account so that they can't interact with their posts, stories and live broadcasts. In addition, your child can turn off comments and direct messages on their posts, stories and live broadcasts. If your child is not comfortable with someone commenting on their posts, stories and live broadcasts, they can block that account so that they can't interact with their posts, stories and live broadcasts.

MANAGE DIGITAL WELLBEING
Instagram now has an in-built utility dashboard that allows users to monitor and control how much time they spend on the app. Users can add a daily reminder for set limits on how much time they want to spend on Instagram, prompting them to consider if they need to take a break. One parent has caught up with all the previous posts since they last logged on to the app. It's a feature that's completely caught up with your child about how much time they are spending on the app and to set healthy time limits.

PROTECT PERSONAL INFORMATION
Your child may unknowingly give away personal information in their posts or in their live streams. Talk to them about what their personal information is and make sure they don't share it. Location, contact details, including their location, to anyone during a live stream, comment, direct message or any other tool for communication on the platform, even to their friends.

USE A PRIVATE ACCOUNT
By default, any image or video your child uploads to Instagram is visible to anyone. A private account means that you have to approve a request if somebody wants to follow you and only people you approve will see your posts and stories. Children should also use a secure password and enable a two-factor authentication to add an extra layer of security to their account.

REMOVE PAYMENT METHODS
If you are happy for your child to have a card associated with their Instagram account, we suggest adding a PIN which needs to be entered before making a purchase. This will also help prevent unauthorised purchases. This can be added in the parent settings tab.

DON'T FORGET TO BE VIGILANT & TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR ONLINE ACTIVITIES!

'NEW FOR 2020' INSTAGRAM REELS
Instagram Reels is the latest update from Instagram that gives users the ability to record and edit 15-second multi-media clips with audio, effects, and new creative tools. It is the app's answer to TikTok and can be accessed by tapping the Reels icon on the bottom right of the home screen. However, if your child has a public account, it could be shared widely via 'Explore' and viewed by millions of strangers online.

Meat your expert
Parvinder Kaur is a social media expert and digital wellbeing consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience working in the social media arena and is the founder of 'Digital Wellbeing for Parents and Children'.

Further Support
Encourage an open dialogue: It's really important that your children know that they can speak to someone about anything they're not sure of online. It's crucial that they know they won't be judged or told off for anything they've done. It's far more important to know they're in danger or worried about something.

Seek additional guidance: If your child wants to spend a lot of time online and is displaying compulsive or addictive behaviour, it's negative. Struggle with schoolwork and reduce real-life interactions may have led to negative interactions online. Speak to them and seek support from their school or local safeguarding team if you think your child is being affected.

Our Expert Emma Davis
Emma Davis is a cyber security expert and former ICT teacher. She delivers cyber awareness training to organisations nationally and has extensive knowledge and experience of managing how children access services and apps online.

Meet your expert
Parvinder Kaur is a social media expert and digital wellbeing consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience working in the social media arena and is the founder of 'Digital Wellbeing for Parents and Children'.

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'
What makes social media actually 'social' are the connections users make with other users on the platforms. Every social networking site handles these connections differently, calling them 'connections', 'friends' and 'followers', amongst others. Having friends and followers is how we find out what other people say and do. Your friends and followers are much more likely to see your online content than those outside of your network, which is why it's important to be mindful of who you connect with and what you share. On some platforms, if two accounts follow each other, this may allow additional communication channels such as private messaging.

Know the Risks

Access to private information
The app includes your child's home address, school, date of birth, phone number and other personal details as well as seeing photos that inadvertently contain sensitive information. It is important to know sensitive information for gaining friends or family but could cause issues in the hands of a criminal.

Check privacy settings
Platforms such as Facebook allow users to modify their privacy settings, which means people who are not friends can't see all your profile information. It's also possible to hide information for some or all of your connections. Always make sure your child's accounts are set to private.

Talk about strangers
Make sure children understand that they should only connect with people that they know or can completely trust. They should be wary of anyone messaging them frequently who they don't know in real life or have never spoken to actually seen online. Catfishing will stick to text-based messaging only to keep their identity secret.

Online bullying
Once a connection is made on social media, there is the potential to send private messages between individuals. This is difficult for social networks and other users to monitor if being used between accounts. This provides an opportunity for bullies to victimise individuals and create a dangerous place of online activity.

Delete old connections
Children should be mindful that everything they share will probably exist online forever and that they shouldn't share anything that gives too much information away. Every now and again, they should delete old connections that they no longer spend time with. Old accounts can easily be hacked, exposing personal information to strangers.

Ellie-May FRIENDS 28 Followers

Oscar FRIENDS 147 Followers

Kumail FRIENDS 63 Followers

Jada FRIENDS 56 Followers

Amelia FRIENDS 45 Followers

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

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Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

Our Expert Emma Davis

Meet your expert

What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

What are they? 'Friends & Followers'

Know the Risks

Access to private information

Check privacy settings

Talk about strangers

Online bullying

Delete old connections

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

Seek additional guidance

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What you need to know about... FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

TikTok (13+) & social pressures linked to 'likes'

TikTok is a video-sharing social media app which lets people create, view and download looping 15-second clips. Typically, these are videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to popular songs or soundbites (often for comic purposes), enhanced with filters, effects and text. Designed with young people in mind, TikTok skyrocketed in popularity in 2019 and has featured near the top of download charts ever since. It now has around 1 billion active users worldwide. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as age-inappropriate content, addiction and in-app spending.

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one app of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about TIKTOK

TIKTOK is a video-sharing social media app which lets people create, view and download looping 15-second clips. Typically, these are videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to popular songs or soundbites (often for comic purposes), enhanced with filters, effects and text. Designed with young people in mind, TikTok skyrocketed in popularity in 2019 and has featured near the top of download charts ever since. It now has around a billion users worldwide.

AGE RESTRICTION 13+

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT
Most videos appearing on a child's feed are light-hearted and amusing. However, some clips have been reported, themes of drug and alcohol abuse, themes of suicide and self-harm, or young teens acting in a sexually suggestive way. The sheer volume of uploads is impossible to moderate entirely – and since TikTok Jump's introduction in mid-2021, users can view third-party content outside the app.

HAZARDOUS VISIBILITY
Connecting with others is simple on TikTok – including commenting on and reacting to users' videos, following their profile and downloading their content. The majority of these interactions are harmless, but because of its abundance of teen users – TikTok has experienced problems with predators contacting young people.

ADDICTIVE NATURE
Like all social media, TikTok is designed to be addictive. It can be highly entertaining but that also makes it hard to put down. As well as the punchy nature of the short video format, the app's ability to keep users intrigued about what's coming next means it's easy for a 5-minute visit to turn into a 15-minute stay.

IN-APP SPENDING
There's an in-app option to purchase 'TikTok coins' which are then converted into digital rewards for sending to content creators that you like. Prices range from 50p to an eye-watering £88 bundle. TikTok is also connected with Shopify, which allows users to buy products through the app.

TIKTOK FAME
The app has created its own celebrities: Charli D'Amelio and Lil Nas X, for example, were catapulted to fame by exposure on TikTok – leading to many more teens attempting to go viral and become 'TikTok famous'. While most aspiring stars hoping to be the next big thing will find it difficult, setbacks may in turn prompt them to go to even more drastic lengths to get noticed.

Advice for Parents & Carers

TALK ABOUT ONLINE CONTENT
Assuming your child is above TikTok's age limit, talk to them about what they've viewed on the app. Ask their opinion on what's appropriate and what isn't. Explain why they shouldn't give out personal details or upload videos which reveal information like their school or home address. In the long run, teaching them to think critically about what they see on TikTok could help them to become social-media savvy.

TAINTAIN PRIVACY SETTINGS
The default setting for all under 18s' accounts to 'private'. Keeping it that way is the safest solution. It means only users who your child approves can watch their videos. The 'ditch' (which lets users splice clips from other people's videos into their own) and 'duet' (where you build on another user's content by recording your own video alongside their original) features are now only available to over 18s. This might clash with your child's ambitions of social media stardom, but it will fortify their account against predators.

LEARN ABOUT REPORTING AND BLOCKING
With the correct privacy settings applied, TikTok is a relatively safe space. However, if you catch something does slip through, make sure your child knows how to recognise and report inappropriate content and get them to come to you for help. Reporting and blocking features are now only available to over 18s. This means TikTok allows users to report anyone breaching its guidelines, while you can also block individual users through their profile.

ENABLE FAMILY PAIRING
'Family Pairing' lets parents and carers link their own TikTok account to their child's. Through your mobile, you can control your child's safety settings remotely – including limiting screen time, managing their ability to exchange messages (and with whom) and blocking a lot of age-inappropriate content. TikTok's Safety Centre also provides resources for parents and carers to support online safety among families. These resources can be found on their website.

USE RESTRICTED MODE
In the app's 'Digital Wellbeing' section, you can filter out inappropriate content (specific content creators or hashtags, for instance) using 'Restricted Mode'. This can then be locked with a PIN. You should note, though, that the algorithm moderating content isn't totally dependable – so it's wise to stay aware of what your child is watching.

Moderate Screen Time
As entertaining as TikTok is, you can help your child to manage their time on it in the 'Digital Wellbeing' section. Under 'Screen Time Management', you can limit the daily permitted time on the app (in increments ranging from 40 minutes to two hours). This preference can also be locked behind a PIN. That way, your child can get their regular dose of TikTok without wasting the whole day.

Meet Our Expert
Parveen Kaur is a social media expert and digital media consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience in the social media arena and is the founder of Kids N' Click, a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.

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SOURCES: TikTok.com

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What parents need to know about SOCIAL PRESSURES LINKED TO 'LIKES'

'Likes' are a simple way for users to show that they like a post on social media. This could be anything from photos and videos to status updates and comments. The feature is widely used on several social media platforms and is extremely popular on Instagram and Facebook. It is often used by children to measure the success of their social media post and gauge opinion. However, it can also bring a number of social pressures, particularly if users start to question their own levels of popularity.

DAMAGING TO SELF-ESTEEM
Your child may use likes to measure their own self-worth, with more likes leading to a greater level of confidence and acceptance amongst their friends and peers. However, children who only receive a small number may in turn feel a sense of rejection or isolation and could potentially suffer from low self-esteem issues, impacting them in other aspects of their life such as at school or in social settings.

AN ADDICTIVE FEATURE
Like features encourage children to stay online for longer. In doing so, your child is likely to engage with app's by longer periods than their otherwise would have wanted, checking their phone more frequently, including at night when they should be asleep. This could contribute towards screen addiction which can cause sleep deprivation and consequently a lack of focus during the next day at school.

UNREAL VIEW OF THE WORLD
Your child may follow celebrities or other popular individuals on social media who receive millions of likes. Not everything on social media is a true reflection of the world and your child may feel pressured into behaving in a similar way in real life or posting unrealistic images to receive so many likes and achieve a similar level of self-worth.

COMPETITIVE CULTURE
Children will often compare the number of likes they receive for their post against their friends or followers, possibly leading to feelings of jealousy or resentment. In a bid to increase their own status and receive more likes, this could lead to a competitive culture in which children try to outdo one another, potentially leading to them engaging in more and more riskier activities.

Safety Tips for Parents

FOLLOW OR BEFRIEND YOUR CHILD ONLINE
Using the same social media sites as your child and connecting with them online will allow you to keep an eye on what their interests are and also help by influencing them. Following their feed will help you build a picture of what your child is being exposed to and what they feel interested in.

MONITOR MENTAL HEALTH
If your child does post on social media, it is important to monitor their feelings and emotions, supporting them and encouraging them to talk to you about what they may be experiencing. Explain to them that not everyone will read and that life is not dictated by how many likes a post may or may not get.

ENCOURAGE HOBBIES OR OTHER ACTIVITIES
Try to help reduce your child's screen time and meet their social needs through encouraging them to do other things such as sport or hobbies or simply playing with friends on weekends. Supporting them to take up other activities that they enjoy can also help build self-esteem and increase their own confidence.

DISCUSS THE REAL WORLD
Talk to your child about online perceptions and about what they feel is and isn't important in their life. Try to establish an open and honest conversation and discuss about what they feel is acceptable to post online and if they feel pressure to conform.

HELP TO BUILD YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM
Try to help build your child's self-esteem through positivity and praise and listening to them if they are struggling with the way they look or feel. Talk to them about the positive aspects of their personality and help them understand that their looks aren't everything. Try not to be too critical or blame your child which could compound any negative thoughts they are already feeling.

Meet our expert
Pete Bath is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has completed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.

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Snapchat (13+) & sexting

Snapchat is a photo- and video-sharing app through which users can chat with friends via text or audio. Images and videos can be shared with specific friends, or as a 'story' (documenting the previous 24 hours) that's visible to a person's entire friend list. Snapchat usage rose during the lockdowns, with many young people utilising it to stay connected with their peers. The app continues to develop features to engage an even larger audience and emulate current trends, rivalling platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as sexting, visible location and strangers.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION 13+

Snapchat is a photo- and video-sharing app which also allows users to chat with friends via text or audio. Users can share images and videos with specific friends, or through a 'story' (documenting the previous 24 hours) visible to their entire friend list. Snapchat usage rose during the pandemic, with many young people utilising it to connect with their peers. The app continues to develop features to engage an even larger audience and emulate current trends, rivalling platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

Even if your child only connects on the app with people they know, they may still receive friend requests from strangers. Snapchat's links with apps such as WhatsApp and Zoom have increased this possibility. Accepting a request means that children are then disclosing personal information through the story, SnapMap and Spotlight features. This could allow predators to gain their trust for sinister purposes.

EXCESSIVE USE

There are many features that are attractive to users and keep them excited about the app. Snap streaks encourage users to send snaps daily. Spotlight challenges give users the chance to obtain money and online fame, and the Spotlight feature's scroll of videos makes it easy for children to spend hours watching content.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some videos and posts on Snapchat are not suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The Discover function lets users swipe through snippets of news stories and trending articles that often include adult content. There is currently no way to turn off this feature.

SEXING

Sexing continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature makes it easy for young people (teens in particular) to share explicit images on impulse. While these pictures do disappear – and the sender is notified – users have found alternative methods to save images, such as taking pictures with a separate device.

DAMAGE TO CONFIDENCE

Snapchat's filters and lenses are a popular way for users to enhance their 'selfie game'. Although many are designed to entertain or amuse, the creative filters on photos can set unrealistic body image expectations and create feelings of inadequacy. Comparing themselves unfavourably against other Snapchat users could threaten a child's confidence or sense of self-worth.

VISIBLE LOCATION

My Places lets users check in and search for popular spots nearby – such as restaurants, parks or shopping centres – and recommend them to their friends. The potential issue with a young person consistently checking into locations on Snapchat is that it allows other users in their friends list (even people they have only ever met online) to see where they currently are and where they regularly go.

Advice for Parents & Carers

TURN OFF QUICK ADD

The Quick Add function helps people find each other on the app. This function works based on mutual friends or whether someone's name is in your child's contacts list. Explain to your child that you would not want to make their profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add as done in the settings (accessed via the cog icon).

CHOOSE GOOD CONNECTIONS

Snapchat has recently announced that it is rolling out a new safety feature: users will receive notifications reminding them of the importance of maintaining connections with people they actually know well, as opposed to strangers. This 'Friend Check Up' encourages users to delete connections with users they rarely communicate with, to maintain their online safety and privacy.

KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Profiles are private by default, but children may make them public to gain more followers. Your child can send Snaps directly to friends, but Stories are visible to everyone they have added, unless they change the settings. If they use SnapMaps, their location is visible unless 'Ghost Mode' is enabled (again via settings). It's prudent to emphasise the importance of not allowing people they don't know in real life. This is particularly important with the addition of My Places, which allows other Snapchatters to see the places your child regularly visits and checks in. Additionally, it's important to be cautious about shared stories as this allows people who are not on your contact list access to the post.

TALK ABOUT SEXING

It may feel like an awkward conversation (and one that young people can be reluctant to have) but it is important to talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting, the legal implications of sending, receiving or sharing explicit images or videos, the possible emotional impact, emphasise that your child should never feel pressured into sexting – and that if they receive unwanted explicit images, they should tell a trusted adult straight away.

BE READY TO BLOCK AND REPORT

If a stranger does connect with your child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending explicit images to them, your child can select the three dots on their contact's profile and choose report or block. There are options to state why they are reporting their user (such as 'harassment or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example').

CHAT ABOUT CONTENT

Talk to your child about what is and isn't wise to share on Snapchat (e.g. don't post explicit images or videos, or display identifiable details like their school uniform). Remind them that once something is online, the creator loses control over where it might end up – and who sees it. Snapchat's 'Spotlight' feature has a 'challenge like TikTok': it's vital that your child understands the potentially harmful consequences of taking part in these challenges.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools and has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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What parents need to know about SEXING

18+

Sexing involves sending, receiving or forwarding explicit messages, images, or videos of a sexual nature. Although mobile phones are the most common vehicle for sexting, the term can also apply to sending sexually explicit messages through any digital media such as email, instant messaging, and/or social media sites. They can be sent to or from a friend, boyfriend, girlfriend, or someone your child has met online. Sexting is often described as the new flirting for children, but it is illegal for anyone under the age of 18. Some of the main platforms it occurs on are Snapchat, Tinder, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram and Kik.

IT IS ILLEGAL

Sexing is illegal if you share, make, take, or distribute an indecent image or video of a child under the age of 18. It is an offence under the Protection of Children Act (1978), the Criminal Justice Act (1988), and under section 47 of the Serious Crime Act (2015). Sexting or 'youth produced sexual imagery' between children is still illegal, even if they are in a relationship and any images are shared consensually.

FEELINGS OF REGRET

Although some children willingly exchange messages, images, or videos, many may regret sharing them after they've been sent. Once it's out there, there's no going back and your child may feel ashamed, vulnerable, or anxious about the imagery resurfacing later, especially if they are in a relationship or friendship has broken down.

PERCEIVED AS 'BANTER'

Many young people under 18 see sexting as 'banter' and an easy way to show someone that they like and trust them. Whilst it is a criminal offence, the reasons for taking and sharing can be very innocent and all part of growing up. Understanding this, however, whilst most images and videos are taken and shared willingly, there can be unintentional consequences, embarrassment, humiliation, and emotional hurt.

NO CONTROL

Once a photo or video is out there, there's no way of knowing how many people have saved it, tagged it, or shared it. Children like to show off to their peers and, suddenly, an image has gone beyond its intended recipient to disinterested friends, and even strangers. Once an image or video has been shared, it can be difficult to control. It may be archived and repeatedly shared.

ONLINE BLACKMAIL OR BULLYING

Sexing can also expose young adults to the risk of being exploited by paedophiles or sexual predators, who then use images to extort additional photos, sexual favours, and sometimes money from victims. Your child may also feel pressured into sexting as they don't come across as boring, or think it's a way to show someone they care for them. They may feel under pressure to give in to repeated requests or feel obliged to share sexual messages and imagery which could then be used against them as a form of bullying or intimidation.

Safety tips for parents

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THINK ABOUT LANGUAGE USE

Teenagers often prefer to use the word 'nudie' to 'sexting'. One reason for this is the normalising of this behaviour; another is that most children always feel a sense of embarrassment when discussing any issue with the word 'nudie' in it. Sexting an image could also be described as an 'inappropriate selfie'. Using this term with your child might make the discussion less embarrassing.

BLOCK & PARENTAL CONTROLS

Show your child how to use the block button on their devices and favourite apps to stop people sending them unwanted messages. You can also set up parental controls with your internet service provider or on your child's phone to stop them from accessing harmful content.

EXPLAIN THE REPERCUSSIONS

Let your child know that once they have sent a message, they are no longer in control of it and the message, images and videos that they may intend to share with one individual may end up where the whole world can have access to them. Even if they completely trust someone, other people using their phone might accidentally see it. And, later in life, it may affect their online reputation, especially if universities, employers or future partners access the imagery.

TALK TO YOUR CHILD

Encourage open dialogue about appropriate information to share with others, both online and offline. Show that you understand that sexting can be about finding out about nudity, bodies and exploring their sexuality, but explain why it's important to think twice before sharing something. Show that you are approachable and understanding and discuss what a healthy and trusting relationship with a partner looks like.

DISCUSS THE LEGALITIES

Children and young people may not realise that what they are doing is illegal. Ensure that your child understands that when they are aged under 18, it is against the law for anyone to take or have a sexual photo of them – even if it is a selfie and even when the activity is consensual.

LEARN HOW TO RESPOND

If an image has already been shared, either your child or you should speak to the person that the image was shared with and ask them to delete it. You can also use the report button on a website where the image was posted. Speak to your child's school as they may be able to confiscate phones if they know that they have sexual imagery stored. If you believe the child was forced into sending the message, report this to the police. You or your child can also report the content to a child protection adviser at the CEOP.

Meet our expert

Jonathan Taylor is an online safety expert and former Coventry Internet Investigator for the Metropolitan Police. He is a specialist in online grooming and exploitation and has worked extensively with both UK and international schools in delivering training and guidance around the latest online dangers, social media apps and platforms.

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Discord (13+) & cross-platform sharing of inappropriate content

Discord is a free app which allows users to communicate in real time via text, video or voice chat. Available on desktop and mobile devices, it was originally designed to help gamers cooperate – but has evolved into a more general networking platform for a range of online communities, discussing topics like TV series, music, Web3 and more. Discord is organised around closed groups, referred to as ‘servers’. To join a server, users must be invited or provided with a unique link. It’s a space for users to interact with friends, meet others with shared interests and collaborate in private online – but it’s also a place where young people can be exposed to risks if the right precautions aren’t taken. In the guide, you’ll find tips on a number of potential risks such as cyberbullying, predators and inappropriate content.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about DISCORD

Discord is a free app which allows users to communicate in real time via text, video or voice chat. Available on desktop and mobile devices, it was originally designed to help gamers cooperate – but has evolved into a more general networking platform for a range of online communities, discussing topics like TV series, music, Web3 and more. Discord is organised around closed groups, referred to as ‘servers’. To join a server, users must be invited or provided with a unique link. It’s a space for users to interact with friends, meet others with shared interests and collaborate privately online – but it’s also a place where young people can be exposed to risks if the right precautions aren’t taken.

AGE RATING 13+
Parents and carers are advised to check the age rating of any app or game before allowing their child to use it.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

CYBERBULLYING
Discord’s easy accessibility and connectivity, unfortunately, makes it an ideal place for cyberbullying to occur – especially as audio and video streams disappear once they’ve ended, meaning that bullying can take place without leaving any evidence. Closed groups can also be created, giving parents the opportunity to exclude their peers or send cruel messages without adult oversight.

DIFFICULT TO MODERATE
Like many private communication apps, Discord’s real-time messaging can be difficult to control. The system enables content moderation through each individual server – as server groups can set their own rules for what’s acceptable and some groups may not monitor for unsuitable content. Anything that happens in an audio or video stream is also virtually untraceable once the stream has concluded.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT
Discord mainly hosts private groups, making it easier for inappropriate content to be shared on channels. Pornography, racism and inappropriate language can be found in some groups. Server owners are required to add an age-restriction gate to channels where all content is being shared – but this solution isn’t foolproof, as the platform doesn’t always verify users’ ages when they sign up.

ACCESSIBLE TO PREDATORS
On many chat platforms, users can lie about their age or true identity – and Discord is no exception. Predators have attempted to abuse the platform by using it to contact and communicate with underage users – by initially chatting with a child on an app, they can then move to other platforms. While Discord has improved its safety settings, some users will still try to bypass them for malicious reasons.

CRIMINAL ACTIVITY
Discord does have strict Terms of Service and community guidelines to protect its users – but, sadly, not everyone follows them. Criminal activity, including grooming, sexting, harassment, exploitative content, doxing and illegal content material, have all been found on Discord servers over the last two years. In 2020, Discord received almost 27,000 reports of illegal activity on the platform.

Advice for Parents & Carers

REVIEW SAFETY SETTINGS
Discord has a series of safety settings, enabling users to choose who can direct message them or send them friend requests. Your child’s experience on Discord will be much safer if the app’s privacy and safety settings are configured to only allow messages or friend requests from server members. This will minimise the chances of potential predators from outside the group contacting them.

EXPLAIN AGE FILTERING
While Discord requires users to be at least 13 to sign up, many servers geared towards older users are flagged as 18+ (not safe for work), which indicates they probably contain material that’s inappropriate for children. It can be easy to click through settings without properly reviewing them, so ensure your child understands why age filtering is important and that it’s there to protect them.

SCREEN OUT EXPLICIT CONTENT
In the privacy and safety settings, Discord users are offered the ability to filter direct messages for inappropriate content; a setting that should be enabled if your child uses the platform. Discord automatically tries to flag images that are explicit, but the setting must be manually enabled for text. If a young user is sent explicit content in a direct message, Discord will scan and (if necessary) delete it.

MONITOR ONLINE ACTIVITY
It’s wise to regularly review your child’s activity on Discord. This can include checking their safety settings and seeing how they’re interacting, talking about which servers they’ve joined and reviewing some of their friends and direct messages. Ask if anything has made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Things can change quickly online, so plan routine check-ins and follow up frequently.

DISCUSS GOOD ONLINE BEHAVIOUR
The anonymity offered by the internet often leads people to communicate more openly online and behave differently than they would at school or home. It’s crucial to bear in mind, though, that every online user is still a real person. Talk to your child about the severe and lasting consequences that cyberbullying or exchanging inappropriate material online can have in the real world.

HAVE CANDID CONVERSATIONS
It can sometimes be awkward to discuss topics like grooming, pornography, racism or explicit content with your child – but it’s important to ensure they’re aware of the harms these things can pose. Talking openly about these subjects is a great way to help your child feel more comfortable about coming to you if they experience an unwanted encounter on Discord (or anywhere else online).

Meet Our Expert
Carol Briggs has a cybereducation London-based tech journalist at pguid.com, a website specialising in all things Web3, gaming and VR (extended reality). With a focus on trends and culture, she researches and writes about the ways that our current innovations – including the metaverse and Web3 – are impacting people, places and settings.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about CROSS-PLATFORM SHARING OF INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Creepy characters like Slender Man or Huggy Wuggy, Dangerous online challenges, Songs or videos that aren’t suitable for youngsters. When things like these begin trending online, it can be difficult to prevent children accidentally stumbling across them – especially if they use a range of platforms, like online games, social media, streaming sites or messaging apps. A trend can originate in one online space and rapidly spread to other platforms or via chat apps. The frightening Huggy Wuggy character, for instance, first emerged as part of a game on Steam; now there are parody songs on TikTok, videos on YouTube and more than 45,000 results for #huggywuggy on Instagram.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

UNSUITABLE VIDEOS AND IMAGES
Anyone can upload footage to a video-sharing platform, which has resulted in clips that appear age-appropriate but actually aren’t so. The audience for Peppa Pig, for instance, is very young – but there have been reports of Peppa cartoons with extreme violence spliced into them. Likewise, footage of the popular online game character Huggy Wuggy has been inserted into numerous child-friendly videos (even on YouTube Kids), scaring many young viewers.

INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE
On a similar theme, there is always the possibility that user-uploaded video content could include language that’s really hard to hear for children. The on-screen imagery may look child-friendly, but if your child is wearing headphones, then you’ll remain unaware of what is being said. Some videos have featured songs containing explicit language or characters explicitly describing violence.

COPIES OF LIVE STREAMS
Social media and messaging apps can inadvertently spread extremely harmful content (such as footage of violent attacks, such as the recent Buffalo supermarket shootings), which can be viewed on multiple platforms as people start to share the video. Moderators try to react swiftly to remove upsetting content, but the rate at which it goes viral makes it difficult to prevent the spread completely.

ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE
Even if your child doesn’t have access to social media platforms or video-streaming platforms (where the majority of issues arise), they might still use messaging apps to communicate with family and friends. There is always going to be a risk, therefore, of them seeing something which isn’t child-friendly either shared by one of their peers or sent accidentally by a relative.

Advice for Parents & Carers

USE SAFETY FEATURES
Enable safety settings like Google SafeSearch and the optional restrictions on video-sharing platforms like YouTube. Whenever possible, stick to YouTube Kids for young children, as the software will help to filter out unsuitable content. Remember that filters aren’t always enough to block all inappropriate material – especially when child-friendly videos are being edited maliciously.

LESS IS BEST
Manage the number of online platforms your child has access to, based on their age and maturity. Just because they’re watching videos or playing online games on their devices, it doesn’t mean your child must have it all. Follow the age guidelines for games and apps, and check regularly that privacy settings are in place.

KEEP IT COMMUNAL
Encourage your child to stay in a communal family space when they’re watching videos or playing online games on their devices, without headphones, if possible. This will make it far easier for you to keep one eye (and ear) on what they are seeing and hearing while they’re online.

AVOID FAN-MADE CONTENT
If your child watches cartoons and shows on YouTube, spend time with them reviewing a range of videos that you’re comfortable with them watching. Always source content from official channels, as opposed to fan-made content; you can never be completely confident about content that another user has created or uploaded.

REACT CALMLY
If you hear or see anything unsuitable on your child’s device, calmly ask them to turn off the game or video in question. Explain that they haven’t done anything wrong, but that you don’t like what you saw or heard and you would much rather they watched or played something else instead.

SUPPORT AND REASSURE
Remind your child regularly that anyone can post anything online – and that not everything online is done to entertain them. If they’re upset or worried about what they’ve seen, then it’s fine to ask them to show you. Watch it together, then praise them for coming to you and talk about what upset them. Reassure a break from their device to do something which helps them feel calm and happy.

Meet Our Expert
Dr Claire Stubbins is an online safety consultant at CyberAware, who has developed anti-bullying and cyber-safety workshops and policies for schools in Australia and the UK. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government concerning the internet use and sexting behaviours of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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Omegle (18+) & Online Safety Tips

Omegle is a website that pairs random strangers for live text or video chats. It –first launched in 2009 and its slogan is “Talk to strangers!” There is an option for adult (18+) content and a section for people aged 13+ with parental permission. Anyone can use the site. Users simply go to Omegle.com and then choose ‘Text’ or ‘Video’ chat and the page states how many users are currently online. Depending on the time of day this can be hundreds of thousands. Omegle markets itself as a great way to meet new friends however has been known to feature pornography and inappropriate content within chats, so it is important parents are aware of the risks associated with the site. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as pornographic content, cyberbullying and the chats being unmoderated.

All National Online Safety believes in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one platform of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, facts and tips for adults.

What parents need to know about OMEGLE

AGE RESTRICTION
18+ Under 18, supervision of a parent/carer required

Omegle is a website that pairs random strangers for live text or video chats. It first launched in 2009 and its slogan is “Talk to strangers!” There is an option for adult (18+) content and a section for people aged 13+ with parental permission. Anyone can use the site. Users simply go to Omegle.com and then choose ‘Text’ or ‘Video’ chat and the page states how many users are currently online. Depending on the time of day this can be hundreds of thousands. Omegle markets itself as a great way to meet new friends however has been known to feature pornography and inappropriate content within chats, so it’s important parents are aware of the risks associated with the site.

NO AGE VERIFICATION MEASURES Omegle is completely free to use and allows users to communicate with strangers without the need to register, supply an email address or provide a profile. This means that anyone can lead almost anywhere including discussing about their lives. It’s hard to trust who your children are talking to and it’s difficult to enforce age verification measures and other than using the site for a short period of time, children can easily start online engagement with strangers and potentially access more adult-themed content.	RISK OF CYBERBULLYING The anonymity of Omegle can increase the risk of cyberbullying. Engaging in chat with strangers means that people can be cruel and insulting. Children can be teased and bullied. This can lead to emotional and personal information. With the anonymity of Omegle, children can be teased and bullied. This can lead to emotional and personal information. With the anonymity of Omegle, children can be teased and bullied. This can lead to emotional and personal information.	UNMODERATED CHAT Omegle encourages video chat as much as it can, prompting users during their chat to turn on their webcams. At any time of the day, there can be thousands of users online. This means that your child could come across people who post inappropriate images or media. Omegle currently offers a feature for users to report inappropriate behaviour on its site and enable only offers adults to please be careful in its content. On Omegle you can only post. Disconnect if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable.
PRIVACY RISK VIA FACEBOOK Omegle can be linked to a user's Facebook account to meet their friends and chat with other users. The more that Omegle can access your child's basic Facebook information, and Facebook friends may potentially view Omegle activity. In addition, users can see the chat log and share the link without the other user's knowledge. It's not uncommon then for users to request being added to their Facebook, Messenger or WhatsApp for further interaction, moving the conversation into a more personal setting.	RISK OF EXPLOITATION Omegle chat picks another user at random and leaves it very little, or no, warning when your child may be chatting to. This can lead to a number of risks including sharing information to someone who is not of similar age, identity theft, users eliciting information to commit fraud, and sexual psychological grooming, users coercing others to act in a way or do something they wouldn't normally do.	ADULT THEMED CONTENT Unfortunately, Omegle is notorious for its pornographic content and its poor moderation for users to report themselves or engage in sexual acts. It is a user selection video chat, but the chat on the website will automatically be switched on before the chat is even started. There is also no preview in smaller thumbnails. As video chat is easy to access, it means that unwanted viewing more content, inappropriate or even digital images can return, inappropriate or even digital images can return, inappropriate or even digital images can return.

Safety Tips For Parents

DISCUSS RISKS WITH YOUR CHILD
It's important to speak to your child about the dangers of Omegle. Gaining and interacting young children for fun or entertainment (including the possibility of Omegle being used to share inappropriate content) that Omegle is not completely anonymous and that other users can see the chat log and share the link without the other user's knowledge. It's not uncommon then for users to request being added to their Facebook, Messenger or WhatsApp for further interaction, moving the conversation into a more personal setting.

PROTECT PERSONAL INFORMATION
Omegle does not provide advice about how to protect your personal information so it's important that children are aware of what they should and shouldn't share online and with whom. If they use Omegle, always advise against sharing any personal information such as their real name, age, phone number, address or any other personal identifiable information. This also includes details of their social media accounts or gaming IDs. You should also advise your child's Facebook settings to control what information is shared with Omegle.

REPORT CONCERNS
If your child comes across any inappropriate content or something which upsets them on Omegle, there's important that they are able to report it. If you think the content is illegal, then it must be reported to the police.

DISCOURAGE VIDEO CHAT
Try to discourage your child from using video chat on Omegle. Not only is there no filter or moderation in place, but children may be exposed to, and share intimate images or videos of themselves, which is illegal if they are under 18 and may be used against them. Omegle does not have a degree of moderation controlled by Omegle through software and several actual moderators. In the software, identifies and prevents certain words and sequences of words to try and prevent bullying and grooming however is still not a 100% failure.

TRY OMEGLE YOURSELF
It's always an excellent idea to get a feel for the website or app your child is using. This will help you understand the issues and risks for yourself. Most importantly, you will also provide you with first-hand experience of the risks and dangers. When you decide to speak to your child about Omegle and what they need to be aware of.

USE PARENTAL CONTROLS
Omegle is a website that services children who only access the chat on their phone and would need access to a PC or laptop to engage in video chat. You have control over Omegle and don't wish your child to access the site, you can use your computer to install and use parental control software and block access to the site. However, it's important to remember that Omegle can still be used on a web browser on an iPad, tablet, smart TV or gaming device and similar controls would need to be implemented on each of these devices separately.

Meet our expert
Jonathan Taylor is an online safety expert and former Coventry Police Investigator for the Metropolitan Police. He is a specialist in online grooming and exploitation and has worked extensively with both UK and international schools in delivering training and guidance against the latest online dangers, social media apps and platforms.

Source: <http://www.omegle.com>

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NOS National Online Safety #WakeUpWednesday

12 Social Media Online Safety Tips FOR CHILDREN WITH NEW DEVICES

With Christmas only a few weeks away, many of you will be using social media to share your excitement with friends and family. Being active on social media is a great way to show others how much fun you're having, but it's important that you know how to use these apps safely and securely so that bad things don't happen. By following our safety tips below, you can make sure that your personal information stays private, your postings are positive and that your social media use overall is responsible, healthy and most of all enjoyable.

- DON'T ACCEPT FRIEND REQUESTS FROM STRANGERS**
Make sure that you set your profile to private so that people you don't know can't find you online. Always tell a trusted adult if a stranger or somebody you don't know sends you a message or a friend request.
- NEVER SHARE YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION WITH PEOPLE YOU DON'T KNOW**
Keep your personal information personal. Sometimes people online aren't always who they say they are and might ask you to share things that you don't feel comfortable sharing.
- DON'T SHARE EMBARRASSING PHOTOS OR VIDEOS OF OTHERS ONLINE**
This could really upset them and could get you into a lot of trouble. Always think twice before posting anything on social media and treat people online as you would in real-life.
- NEVER SEND NAKED PICTURES OF YOURSELF TO OTHERS**
This is illegal if you are under 18 and you could get into trouble with the Police. If you are being pressured by someone, always say no and tell a trusted adult. Even if you think it's innocent fun, the photo could be shared with other people and you won't be able to control who else sees it.
- CREATE A POSITIVE ONLINE REPUTATION**
Always be kind and polite when posting comments on social media and only upload pictures and videos of things you are proud of. This forms part of your digital footprint. Everything you do online can be tracked and monitored and could affect what people think of you in real-life. If it's negative.
- LIMIT YOUR SCREEN TIME**
Social media can be addictive, and it is easy to keep checking newsfeeds or your notifications every 5 minutes which can affect your behaviour and stop you from doing other things. Remember to only use your phone at certain times of the day, turn notifications off at bedtime and go out and have as fun as much as possible. This will keep you fit and healthy and make you appreciate there's more to life than just what's on social media.
- BLOCK ONLINE BULLIES**
Sometimes people might say nasty things to you online or post offensive comments on your pictures or videos. If this happens, always tell a trusted adult who will help you block them from your profile and support you in taking further action.
- REPORT INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**
If you see something on social media is not what you expect, offends you or upsets you, you should always report it to a trusted adult. You should also report it to the social media app who will be able to remove the content if it is against their user policy and can block the person who posted it.
- ONLY USE APPS WHICH YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH TO USE**
Before downloading any new social media app, always check the age rating. If you need help, ask your parent or carer to make sure that the app is safe for you to use and never download anything which you are too young for as it may contain content that isn't safe for you to see.
- ALWAYS SECURE ALL YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES WITH A PASSWORD**
This will help to keep your private information safe and won't allow others to access your profiles without your permission. Make sure your passwords are memorable and personal to you but something which other people can't guess, and always share them with your parents just in case you forget them.
- ASK PARENTS TO SET-UP 'PARENTAL CONTROLS' FOR SOCIAL MEDIA**
When you download a social media app, you should always ask a trusted adult to help you set it up for the first time. This will help you control who sees what you post, who can contact you and make sure you are able to enjoy using the app safely and securely.
- ALWAYS TALK TO YOUR TRUSTED ADULT IF SOCIAL MEDIA IS MAKING YOU UNHAPPY**
Sometimes, social media can make us feel bad about ourselves or sad that we aren't the same as someone else or doing the same things as someone else. Remember, if you ever feel this way, it's really important to talk to your trusted adult (like your parents, carers, other adult family members or a teacher, all of whom will be able to support you and discuss your feelings with you to help make you feel better).

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Steam & age ratings

Steam is a computer gaming digital distribution platform and storefront. It is the biggest platform for desktop- or laptop-based gaming, with a range of more than 30,000 games available. The platform has become a lively social environment for many gamers, and allows people to trade, sell and buy gaming items for real money. Valve, the developers behind Steam, have also released different hardware that works with the platform, including the Steam Deck – a hand-held console that lets users play their favourite games while away from their computer. In the guide, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as potential scams, contact with strangers and in-app purchases.

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many platforms which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about STEAM

Steam is a computer gaming digital distribution platform and storefront. It is the biggest platform for desktop- or laptop-based gaming, with a range of more than 30,000 games available. The platform has become a lively social environment for many gamers, and allows people to trade, sell and buy gaming items for real money. Valve, the developers behind Steam, have also released different hardware that works with the platform, including the Steam Deck – a hand-held console that lets users play their favourite games while away from their computer.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

UNSUITABLE GAMES

Among the 30,000+ games on the platform, there are plenty that aren't appropriate for children. Individuals can view and download games featuring adult content if they verify their age – but, of course, it's easy to enter a false date of birth online. This can lead to children and young people finding games that they shouldn't have access to, featuring violence or profanity, for example.

SPENDING SPREES

Steam hosts regular sales – including some where game prices are reduced by up to 50%. Some sales promotions also include a mini-game or event which encourages users to spend more money. The sale can be an excellent time for young gamers to purchase the titles they've been wanting, but the attractive discounts can also prompt impulsive buys driven by the fear of missing out.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

Steam isn't a social media site, but it certainly shows some of the elements. Users can add other people as 'friends', for example (whether they know them in real life or not), and then communicate privately with them using text or voice chat. The platform also hosts public discussions and groups for socialising. Steam users can also leave comments on the profiles of other players.

ENABLE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Steam does have some limited parental controls that can restrict exactly what games someone's account can view and access. This can be set up by navigating to the 'Family' tab in View. The platform then allows parents and carers to share a steam account with their child and limit them to age-appropriate games.

SHARE A LIBRARY

Using Family Library Sharing lets everyone at home share game accounts. (It still means their accounts are separate.) The entire game library from each account is shared with the other account holders – a great way to avoid having to purchase a different copy of the game for each of your children. However, if two users want to play the same game separately, you would need to buy it twice.

SAFE MODDING

Modifying a game to customise it or to introduce new content – known as 'modding' – is common on Steam. However, installing the wrong mods can be disastrous: they can stop games from working properly, or all Steam's mods are unlikely to contain viruses or malware, but it's still possible – so ensure your child reads the mod's reviews first to avoid anything dangerous.

POTENTIAL SCAMS

Sadly, Steam's immense popularity has made it a lucrative destination for internet scammers. The most common rule is phishing: scammers send links to other users, aiming to trick them into entering their login details – which are then stolen. Once in control of the account, the scammer sends messages to alert each of the victim's friend's list, in an attempt to hijack their accounts too.

SHADY TRADERS

The Steam Community Market is a built-in trading area where players can trade resources for their games on the platform. Gamers can exchange items, or buy and sell them for real-world currency. It's possible for unscrupulous users to be scammed through bad trade deals, and Steam doesn't usually get involved when this happens. There are also third-party trading websites, which can be risky to use.

SPARSE AGE RATINGS

Steam is a digital distribution platform for games of all kinds, including ones not rated by regulatory bodies. Getting a game rated takes a long time, and can be expensive, so developers only tend to follow that process when releasing a title that will be physically sold in shops. Most games on Steam, therefore, don't have an advisory age rating on the store page.

Advice for Parents & Carers

USE GIFT CARDS

Having payment methods (like card details or PayPal) linked to a Steam account makes it very easy for a child to purchase new games or spend money on items in the marketplace. An excellent alternative would be to buy a Steam gift card and let your child make their purchases with that instead – putting a management cap on how much they can spend on the platform.

APPLY STEAM GUARD

Steam Guard is an optional additional layer of security that protect accounts. Enabling it ensures that anyone attempting to 'log in' to that account also needs to provide an authentication code that only you would be able to provide. The computer that your child uses Steam on can be authorised so that you can provide separate authentication for each login.

Meet Our Expert
 Gem Odoon (aka Gemma) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2010, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Gamergirls and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.

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bbfc

What parents need to know about AGE RATINGS

PEGI

If you have children, it is understandable to have concerns about the films and TV shows they watch, as well as the games they play. In this guide, we take a look at the two official ways you can assess if a particular title is suitable for your child. Both the BBFC and PEGI have search facilities on their websites that can be used to look up individual titles so you can check their ratings.

RATINGS FOR FILMS, TV & MUSIC VIDEOS

Since 1912, the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) has informed UK residents of the age suitability of films, TV and music videos – providing parents with the information needed to assess whether or not it is appropriate for their child's age. This applies to cinema releases, DVDs and streaming video services such as Netflix.

WHAT ARE THE BBFC RATINGS?

BBFC ratings are broken down into seven age categories:

- U**: Universal, suitable for all ages
- PG**: Parental Guidance required
- 12**: Suitable for people aged 12 and over
- 12A**: Suitable for people aged 12 and over, cinema accompanied by an adult
- 15**: Suitable for people aged 15 and over
- 18**: Suitable for people aged 18 and over
- R18**: Adult content only available in specially licensed cinemas and specialist retailers

WHAT ELSE CAN BBFC REVEAL?

Accompanied with the age suitability rating, BBFC also provide an additional warning regarding the content and what to expect, such as swearing, sexual content, violence and anything you may consider to be inappropriate for your child. In addition to this, the content is also rated in three levels: frequent, mild or strong.

LIMITATIONS OF BBFC RATINGS

It's important to note that there is no obligation on streaming video services to use or display BBFC ratings. Due to this, we advise that you check the rating before your child streams the content. It may also be a good idea to watch the content first yourself or discuss it with other parents to help you decide whether or not it is suitable for your child.

Source: www.bbfc.co.uk

RATINGS FOR GAMES

PEGI (Pan European Game Information) is a content rating system that ensures all video games are labelled with a minimum age recommendation. These age recommendations are based on the types of content featured within a game. With each game, PEGI also provide a content descriptor that indicates the potential issues and concerns, including sex, violence, bad language and drugs.

WHAT ARE THE PEGI RATINGS?

PEGI ratings are split into age restriction and content descriptors. Additional content descriptors help parents and children to understand the type of content featured within a particular game, including sex, fear, bad language, discrimination, gambling, drugs, violence, and in-game purchases. In combination, the two different ratings can provide a good level of information to help make informed decisions regarding the suitability for your child.

PEGI age ratings are broken down into five categories:

- 3**: www.pegi.info
- 7**: www.pegi.info
- 12**: www.pegi.info
- 16**: www.pegi.info
- 18**: www.pegi.info

PEGI content descriptors are broken down into eight categories:

- DRUGS
- SEX
- LANGUAGE
- DISCRIMINATION
- IN-GAME PURCHASES
- VEG
- RELIGION
- SMOKING

LIMITATIONS OF PEGI RATINGS

It's possible for young people to buy games online without a required proof of age, opening them up to age-inappropriate content without you knowing. We advise that you regularly monitor your child's gaming activities and maintain a honest and healthy dialogue with them about the online world.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

It is a good idea to put in place parental controls for all online accounts which your child may use to purchase or download online games e.g. The App Store, Google Play Store, PlayStation Store and Microsoft Xbox Store etc.

Source: www.pegi.info

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Find out more!

Useful links for more safety information:



CEOP provide information for both parents and young people

- Parents:
<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>
- Young people:
https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_18/

Their #AskTheAwkward campaign helps you to prepare for regular conversations with your child about online relationships and related topics. It also offers advice on how to keep conversations positive and what to do if your child tells you something that worries you.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/ask-the-awkward/>

You can also report concerns around grooming and sexual abuse directly to CEOP.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Get-help/Reporting-an-incident/>

childline

ONLINE,
ON THE PHONE,
ANYTIME

childline.org.uk
0800 1111

Does your child need someone else to talk to?

If your child needs someone to talk to because of anything which has upset them, it could be that they are being bullied or that they have seen something online which they wish they hadn't, they can speak free and confidentially to Childline.

Children can ring Childline on **0800 1111** and speak to trained counsellors about any problems they may face. Childline is run by the NSPCC and is there to help your child.

The [Childline website](#) also offers excellent help and advice on a whole range of issues.



Seen child sexual abuse content online?

If you have come across child sexual abuse images or videos online, report to the [Internet Watch Foundation \(IWF\)](#). Reporting is quick, easy and anonymous. It can lead to the removal of criminal content and even the rescue of a child from further abuse.

An under 18 year old worried their nudes have been shared online?

If an under 18 year old has had a nude or semi-nude image of themselves shared online, they can report to [IWF and Childline's Report Remove tool](#). They will work to try and remove the image.

Want to know more about keeping you and your devices safer?

Get Safe Online gives practical advice on how to protect yourself, your computers and mobiles device against fraud, identity theft, viruses and many other problems encountered online.

Find out more at: [Get Safe Online](#).



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