

# KEEPING UNDER FIVES SAFE ONLINE



Children of all ages enjoy using technology. We now see young children going online to play games, talk to family, watch videos and even learn to use voice enabled tech like Alexa and Siri to find out about their world.



Ofcom's latest research has shown that 86% of 3-4 year olds have access to a tablet at home and 21% have their own tablet. When over half of 3-4 year olds (53%) and over three quarters of 5-7 year olds (79%) go online there are real advantages in making sure that children are supported in their internet use right from the start.



These eight frequently asked questions will provide you with useful information and tips that you can put into place at home, to help keep your youngest children safe online.



## Where do I start?

The best way to keep your family safe online, and to understand your children's internet use, is to use the internet together. Explore the games and services that your children are using, or want to use, and use the safety features available. There are lots of fantastic websites, apps and games for young children to use so look out for these and enjoy them together. These steps will give you a better understanding of the different ways that children are engaging with technology and help you to feel more confident.

## Should I set any rules?

In the same way that you set boundaries for most areas of your children's lives, establish your expectations regarding online activities. Creating a family agreement ([www.childnet.com/have-a-conversation](http://www.childnet.com/have-a-conversation)) is a useful step, which might include time spent online, where and when devices can be used and what to do if they see something upsetting.



## How can I supervise my child?

Prevention is better than cure so it is best to look at apps or websites before your child is allowed to use them. There are lots of great apps and websites out there so have a look and try them out yourself. We also recommend that you always supervise young children when they are online as they may stumble across something upsetting, on sites like YouTube. Since the internet can be accessed from a number of devices and many of these are portable, we would advise you to keep devices (tablets, voice enabled technology, games consoles, laptop) in a busy part of the house e.g. the living room or kitchen. This makes it easier for you to be involved in their technology use and you are right there to answer any questions and help them.

## How much time is too much time?

Young children can be enthusiastic users of technology. The challenge can be to harness this enthusiasm and ensure a balance, so that the use of technology does not negatively impact on other important areas of young children's lives. There are some strategies that can be used to help manage the time online issue, such as setting time limits or using time limiting tools, designating weekly times to use the internet together, or removing portable devices from your child's bedroom at night to avoid tiredness.



## Are there tools to help?

You can take steps to restrict what your children see online. Using **parental controls** and **filters** will reduce the chances of them seeing something inappropriate or accidentally spending your money through in-app purchases. On devices, you can do things like block adult content, stop in-app purchases and even disable the camera on a phone. Visit the Parents' Guide to Technology on the UK Safer Internet Centre website ([www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech)) to find out more about the settings available on the devices you have at home. Parental controls are often password protected so choose a strong password and do not share it with your child.

Your internet service provider (such as BT or TalkTalk) will provide free filters to help block inappropriate content for children, and on the UK Safer Internet Centre website you can watch **video tutorials** that show you how to find and set these up ([www.saferinternet.org.uk/parental-controls](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/parental-controls)). All mobile phone operators (such as O2 or Vodafone) also provide such parental controls for free. The websites of device manufacturers (such as games consoles) should also outline the controls to which you have access. You can find out more by visiting [www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls](http://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls).

These parental controls and filters are a good starting point but it is important to recognise that nothing is 100% effective on its own. They will work best in combination with parental supervision and engagement to help your children understand how to stay safe online. As children grow and develop, so do their online needs, therefore you may want to periodically review your parental controls to accommodate this.

## What advice can I give my child?

Education is the best tool that a child can have, so discuss with your child the importance of telling an adult immediately if someone, or something, upsets them online. Make sure that your child knows that they can come and talk to you (without necessarily getting into trouble) if they see anything that worries them on the internet, and encourage them to feel confident enough to do so. Other immediate strategies to deal with unwanted content or contact could include; switch the screen off, close the laptop, exit the website, or turn the iPad or phone over and put it down.

Younger users may be distracted by advertising and pop ups and with just a couple of clicks, or a spelling mistake, may find themselves on a different website. Children are naturally curious and will innately push boundaries. Bookmarking sites or creating a 'favourites' list is a simple way to help your children find the content they want without having to search the internet for it. It is also important whilst beginning to explore the internet that your child realises that other internet users may not be who they say they are and that 'friends' made online are still strangers, so personal information should be kept safe, including their name, address, phone numbers and passwords. This is where a **family agreement** can be incredibly useful, to establish rules and good online behaviour in advance like not using your name in usernames on games.



## What games are okay for my child to play?

Gaming may be the very first way that your child encounters life online and there are lots of fantastic online games and apps to support their learning and development. Some games, however, are for adults or older audiences and contain images and language that are not suitable for children. Therefore it is important that the games your children play are the correct age rating. Like film classifications, these ratings are determined by the game's content, and all video games sold in the UK are clearly marked with age ratings set by PEGI (Pan European Games Information). Google Play and Windows Store apps are also rated by PEGI and the App Store has age ratings too.

**In-app purchases** are the optional extras within games that you have to pay for and can give parents a nasty shock when they receive a large phone or credit card bill. Free games as well as 'paid for' games can have in-app purchases and young children are often unaware that it is possible to spend real money through tapping on a device or clicking on something. Look out to see if the game has in-app purchases and you can use the parental controls on devices to disable in-app purchasing.

Many games allow children to play with and chat to other players. If these are people they only know online, they are strangers. You can often turn off the chat feature and some games provide a "safe chat mode" where simple predetermined phrases can be used. Playing these games yourself can be fun and will also enable you to see what the game is like and identify the safety features provided, such as reporting to a moderator. Common Sense Media ([www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)) is a website with reviews and lots of useful information on games but they also cover films, apps, TV shows, websites, books, and music too. Reading online reviews of games from other parents' experiences is a really useful way to highlight potential safety issues like whether the game features inappropriate adverts or bad language.



## Where can I report?

Reports can be made to websites through their safety/help centres and moderation services. If you are worried or suspicious about someone who contacts your child online report them to CEOP. Inappropriate media content seen online or offline, such as a game, advert or film can be reported via Parentport. For more information regarding reporting, visit our **Need Help** page in the parents and carers section of the Childnet website.



## USEFUL LINKS

### General advice for parents:

[www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/need-help](http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/need-help)

[www.childnet.com/have-a-conversation](http://www.childnet.com/have-a-conversation)

[www.childnet.com/resources/family-agreement](http://www.childnet.com/resources/family-agreement)

### Filtering and parental controls:

[www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech)

[www.saferinternet.org.uk/parental-controls](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/parental-controls)

[www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org)

### Games and apps:

[www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)

[www.pegi.info](http://www.pegi.info)

### Reporting:

[www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

[www.parentport.org.uk](http://www.parentport.org.uk)

[www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)

