

Staying safe online across the ages

4 and under

Over half of 3-4 year olds watch movies on a tablet, and 14% spend almost six hours a week gaming. Regardless of whether or not your child has their own tablet, online time should be family time. Explore and play together with child-friendly apps like YouTube Kids. Set boundaries and explain why you're blocking certain content.

Apps can help develop hand eye coordination and entertain toddlers with their favourite characters. If your child uses a device unsupervised, remember to take it offline by switching it to airplane mode.

Social media

The internet can be a fantastic learning resource, with games and apps to help develop your child's memory and speech, as well as explore their creativity and keep them entertained. Online time should be family time though. Always accompany your child online, and protect your devices with passwords so that they can't access them accidentally.

Cyberbullying

At this age, make sure you play alongside your child at all times when they're online. Try out fun ways to help them understand why it's important to be kind online. Chat about the fact that people sometimes say mean things, both online and in real life, and discuss what to do if someone says something you don't like. TV shows and stories make a great springboard for discussing issues in a friendly, fun way.

Messaging apps

AVOKIDDO EMOTIONS Kids of this age are too young for messaging apps as they are still learning to communicate, but this fun app can help them to better read emotions by interacting with cartoon animals and seeing how they respond to situations. *Free, available on iOS and Android*

Video chat

Skype or FaceTime can be a fun way to keep in touch with far-flung relatives but children of this age should be supervised online at all times.

Minecraft

It's not unheard for kids to play Minecraft at this age – especially if they have older siblings. If your child is keen to try, make sure you play it with them. Use the single-player option to stop anyone else from joining the game and choose Creative mode, which makes it impossible for your child's character to die.

Christmas – apps for different ages

Tablets are a great way to spend family time together. Play alongside little ones with their favourite characters from CBeebies, sing along to The Wheels on the Bus, or test their memory and counting skills with flashcard games. However, be aware that even apps for toddlers, such as Peppa Pig, can come with in-app purchases.

YouTube

Children of this age should always be supervised online, whatever they're watching. Make things fun. Watch cartoons and kids' shows together – YouTube Kids has loads. Set up safety controls on any device or app you use with them.

Appy Holidays

SleepHero Created by a sleep-deprived dad, SleepHero plays your pre-recorded lullabies or white noise to help babies sleep. **£1.49, available on iOS**

Staying safe online across the ages

5-7

With devices available like the Kindle Fire Kids Edition, many children of this age have their own tablet and will be starting to play games on their own. Although they're too young for most social networking sites, some may be keen to explore, particularly if they have older siblings. At **net-aware.org.uk** you'll find age ratings for apps and sites, as well as reviews by other parents and children, to help you check they're suitable.

Apps may well feature in the classroom as they can be a great way to help children expand cognitive skills such as reading, remembering and focusing. If your child has their own tablet or phone, set appropriate controls and ensure they know their boundaries.

Social media

'Proper' social networks will still be off-limits, but social games such as Disney's Club Penguin are a great way for your kids to dip a toe in the water, with a bit of parental supervision. Just keep an eye on in-app purchases, set clear boundaries for use and start talking about staying safe and what to do if they have a concern.

Cyberbullying

Build on your earlier conversations about being kind online. Encourage your child to speak up when they come across something that makes them feel uncomfortable. Use NSPCC's Net Aware website (net-aware.org.uk) to find the right sites and apps for your child. Pay attention to comments from others reporting mean behaviour. Introduce the idea of privacy, and show them how to block unwanted contact and report things.

Messaging apps

ROO KIDS Parents set up the account and are alerted when any new contacts are added. They can filter certain words, control in-app purchases and set a curfew for the app's use. Kids can message their friends and take part in quizzes with chat bots. *Free, available on iOS and Android*

Video chat

They may be starting to use apps and games that have video functions, so turn the webcam off. Restrict settings to block friend requests.

Minecraft

Minecraft will be part of playground chat, and children of this age will want to give it a go. Playing in Creative mode allows your child to explore the game freely, without fear of getting hurt. They can then get used to the game before moving on to other levels. You can adjust the difficulty rating within each mode – Peaceful is the easiest.

Christmas – apps for different ages

Many children use tablets at school and some may have their own device. Gaming apps can be a great way to encourage learning but be aware that some, such as Bearville, come with chat features too. Make sure your child is only playing with friends, and check privacy and permissions settings.

YouTube

YouTube Kids is full of fun shows but remember, content is filtered by computers, not humans, so keep an eye out. Subscribe to channels together, it's a safer way of discovering things than through search.

Appy Holidays

Enchanted Meditations For Kids 1 It's easy for kids to get hyped up, particularly on long car journeys. The peaceful recordings on Enchanted Meditations will help calm them. £2.29/£2.75, available on iOS and Android

Staying safe online across the ages

8-11

At this age, kids want to explore social networking and gaming sites, possibly interacting with people they don't know. They may also have free rein over their device, with almost half (43%) owning their own tablet. Their tech skills can outpace their judgment, though, as many won't fully understand the risks they face. Ask them to show you around their favourite site to open up conversations about online safety.

Developing friendships off and online is important at this age, but kids may not yet fully understand risk. Explore sites and apps together and discuss talking to strangers and what to do if they see anything they don't like.

Social media

Social networks will start to come onto the radar, but try to resist for now. Facebook doesn't allow users younger than 13 to join. You may also be thinking about your child's first phone or tablet. Talk to an O2 Guru about enabling parental controls and consider using app store gift cards to limit how much they spend on downloads.

Cyberbullying

Look at age ratings of games, as competitive behaviour sometimes prompted by inappropriate or violent games can escalate into bullying. Remember these sites may have in-game chat, and ensure your child only plays with friends. As they get older, they'll be making the transition to secondary school and will want more independence. Now is the time to talk about who they might talk to or where they might go if they want help.

Messaging apps

POPJAM Described as Instagram for kids, Popjam lets children create and share art, photos and audio, and has lots of inbuilt safety features. By encouraging creative posts, it can help younger kids learn how to engage online in a positive way. *Free, available on iOS and Android*

Video chat

Apps like MeowChat and MeetMe may sound fun, but they're not suitable for this age. Kids may be exploring on their own phones so chat about who they're talking to.

Minecraft

If you have a child in this age group, they probably talk about nothing else. They may have even played Minecraft in the classroom and want to continue at home. If they're keen to go on to the multiplayer option, search online for a child-friendly server. If you're concerned about your child talking to strangers, turn off the chat feature.

Christmas – apps for different ages

Kids may own their own phone, but won't fully understand the risks. Social networks such as Facebook or Twitter should be off the table for now, but your children could still interact with people they don't know through games and other apps. Messaging app Roo Kids can help here – you'll be alerted when your child adds a new contact and you can set a curfew preventing live chat at certain times.

YouTube

They'll be wanting to move on to the full version of YouTube, but they must be 13 to have an account. Log in as you in Restricted mode and explore channels together. Disable comments so they don't read anything nasty from others.

Appy Holidays

Touchnote A great way for the kids to share their holiday snaps by designing photo postcards with personal messages, which you can then get printed and posted. **Free, available on iOS and Android**

Staying safe online across the ages

12-15

Once kids reach secondary school, they'll be looking to explore their independence and identity. On average, they spend about 19 hours a week online and three-quarters have a social networking profile. Messaging apps are the main way of keeping in touch with each other. Show an interest in what they're doing online, help them to assess risks and discuss the consequences of things like talking to strangers.

Social networking will play an important role. Show an interest in who they're meeting but set boundaries for family time, too.

Social media

Children are legally allowed to use most social networks at 13. Discuss what's safe to share, and help set up their account. They may let you follow or friend them, but they'll also want some independence, so talk regularly about what they're doing online and who they're chatting to so they know they can come to you if something goes wrong.

Cyberbullying

Exclusion can be a big issue during secondary school. The desire to be included often leads to young people pressuring their parents to let them join Facebook and other social media sites. It's important to give them the freedom to keep up with their friends, but make sure they're ready. Encourage them to think carefully about what they share – especially when it comes to photos. Help them understand that things they post can end up in places they didn't expect them to be. Help them to develop alternative support networks, and reiterate how they can respond to bullying by blocking/reporting.

Messaging apps

SNAPCHAT Send snaps (videos and pictures) that disappear in seconds and create stories from a sequence of snaps, lasting 24 hours. Snapchatters can take screenshots though, so children should still be careful about what they send. *Free, available on iOS and Android*

Video chat

Teenagers start to want to take risks, so may use sites like ooVoo and Omegle. Help them to assess danger and know where to go for help.

Minecraft

As children reach their teens, they may venture into some darker areas of the gaming world and potentially meet new characters that can introduce them to activities you might not approve of. For example, it's possible to download illegal mods that allow Minecraft characters to have sex, or to show realistic pain. Chat to them about what they've been doing in the game and who they've been talking to – just as you would in real life.

Christmas – apps for different ages

Social networks like Facebook help older children navigate growing up and friendships. Take an interest in what they're doing, but also set some boundaries. Privacy settings on chat apps, such as ooVoo, are set to public by default, but can be changed if you only want your child to talk to friends. Talk openly about who they chat to, and what's safe to share.

YouTube

Even teenagers need reassurance that they can talk to you if they see something upsetting. Set boundaries, ensure they subscribe as an under-18 and talk about what they watch and which vloggers they follow – it should be part of everyday family chat.

Appy Holidays

HearPlanet Like a guide book, HearPlanet provides curious kids with an audio guide to locations across the world. **£2.99/£0.65, available on iOS and Android**

Staying safe online across the ages

16+

Young adults will be looking for the same freedom online that they enjoy in real life. They'll likely be interested in relationships and sex, so talk to them about staying safe with dating apps. Older children can be a powerful force for good in helping to teach younger siblings to stay safe online, so keep the family communicating.

Young adults need freedom to make their own decisions. They may be interested in meeting people online, so discuss the dangers of sexting (sending sexual images) and giving out information to strangers.

Social media

Your teenager will no doubt be a social networking pro by now and may well be experimenting with internet dating and meeting new people online. Respect their space, as you would in real life, and resist the temptation to snoop by chatting openly about what they're up to. This way, you can check they're sharing information wisely.

Cyberbullying

Young people need freedom to explore new things. Help them do it safely. Talk regularly about what they share. At this age, they're more likely to be in spaces where they can get messages from anonymous sources, which can increase the likelihood of bullying. Check they know where to go for help. ChildLine (childline.org.uk) offers a free service for children to chat anonymously online with trained counsellors. If you are worried and want advice, remember there's also the NSPCC adult helpline on 0808 800 5000.

Messaging apps

YIK YAK A posting app that allows users to create and view 'yaks' within a five-mile radius. It aims to connect people through casual, heartfelt and silly posts, and there's an option to post anonymously, but this can mean it's used in a nasty way. *Free, available on iOS and Android*

Video chat

This age group need freedom to explore relationships online as in real life. Let them know they should never be afraid to say no and to talk to you about any concerns.

Minecraft

This age group will take their game playing pretty seriously. They may well have built up a reputation within the Minecraft communities and attracted an online following who they share hints and tips with. If they're dabbling in vlogging (video blogging), encourage them to set a good example when it comes to playing safe, respecting other players and staying secure online. They may have a huge influence both on online viewers and younger siblings.

Christmas – apps for different ages

Young people need freedom to explore. Help them do it safely. They may be interested in dating apps such as Skout. Respect their need for privacy and independence, but encourage them to talk regularly about their life online, just as they would about everyday friendships and relationships.

YouTube

Young adults need freedom to explore online, and they may watch video through a number of sites. Talk to them about setting a good example if they do any vlogging themselves – particularly if they have younger siblings.

Appy Holidays

FourSquare Teenagers get bored easily so involve them in decision-making by using FourSquare to research restaurants, shops and museums nearby. **Free, available on iOS and Android**