

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

YOUTUBE

YouTube is a video-sharing social media platform that allows billions of people around the world to watch, share and upload their own videos with a vast range of content – including sport, entertainment, education and lots more. It's a superb space for people to consume content that they're interested in. As a result, this astronomically popular platform has had a huge social impact: influencing online culture on a global scale and creating new celebrities.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

YouTube is free and can be accessed via numerous devices, even without creating a YouTube account. Some content is flagged as 'age-restricted' (requiring the user to be logged into an account with a verified age of 18), but children can still view some mildly inappropriate material. This can include profanity and violence, which some young users may find upsetting.

CONNECT WITH STRANGERS

YouTube is a social media platform which allows people to interact with other (usually unknown) users. Account holders can leave comments on any video they have access to, as well as messaging other users directly. Connecting with strangers online, of course, can potentially lead to children being exposed to adult language, to cyberbullying and even to encountering online predators.

SUGGESTED CONTENT

YouTube recommends videos related to what the user has previously watched on their account, aiming to provide content that will interest them. This is intended to be helpful but can also lead to binge-watching and the risk of screen addiction, especially if 'auto-play' is activated. Users without an account are shown popular videos from the last 24 hours, which might not always be suitable for children.

HIGH VISIBILITY

Content creators can also be put at risk – especially young ones who try to make their online presence as visible as possible. Creating and uploading content exposes children to potential harassment and toxicity from the comments section, along with the possibility of direct messaging from strangers. Videos posted publicly can be watched by anyone in the world.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

YouTube is teeming with trends, challenges and memes that are fun to watch and join in with. Children often find these immensely entertaining and might want to try them out. Most challenges tend to be safe, but many others may harm children through either watching or copying. The painful 'salt and ice challenge', which can cause injuries very quickly, is just one of many such examples.

SNEAKY SCAMMERS

Popular YouTube channels regularly have scammers posing as a well-known influencer in the comments section, attempting to lure users into clicking on their phishing links. Scammers impersonate YouTubers by adopting their names and profile images, and sometimes offer cash gifts or 'get rich quick' schemes. Children may not realise that these users are not who they claim to be.

Advice for Parents & Carers

APPLY RESTRICTED MODE

Restricted Mode is an optional setting that prevents YouTube from showing inappropriate content (such as drug and alcohol abuse, graphic violence and sexual situations) to underage viewers. To prevent your child from changing across age-inappropriate content on the platform, we would recommend enabling Restricted Mode on each device that your child uses to access YouTube.

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CENSORED

TRY GOOGLE FAMILY

Creating a Google Family account allows you to monitor what your child is watching, uploading and sharing with other users. It will also display their recently watched videos, searches and recommended videos. In general, a Google Family account gives you an oversight of how your child is using sites like YouTube and helps you ensure they are only accessing appropriate content.

CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

YouTube gives users the option of uploading videos as 'private' or 'unlisted' – so they could be shared exclusively with family and friends, for example. Comments on videos can also be disabled and channels that your child is subscribed to can be hidden. If your child is only uploading videos that are protected as 'private', they are far less likely to receive direct messages from strangers.

CHECK OTHER PLATFORMS

Influential content creators usually have other social media accounts which they encourage their fans to follow. Having an open discussion about this with your child makes it easier to find out how else they might be following a particular creator online. It also opens up avenues for you to check out that creator's other channels to see what type of content your child is being exposed to.

MONITOR ENGAGEMENT

YouTube is the online viewing platform of choice for billions of people, many of them children. Younger children will watch different content to older ones, of course, and react to content differently. You may want to keep an eye on how your child interacts with content on YouTube – and, if applicable, with content creators – to understand the types of videos they are interested in.

LIMIT SPENDING

Although YouTube is free, it does offer some in-app purchases: users can rent and buy TV shows and movies to watch, for example. If you're not comfortable with your child purchasing content online, limit their access to your bank cards and online payment methods. Many parents have discovered to their cost that a child happily devouring a paid-for series quickly leads to an unexpected bill!

Meet Our Expert

Clare Godwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2015, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.



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SPOTTING ADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Do you always know when you're seeing an ad on your social media feed? You might not! Some ads look just like any other post – they might be funny or cool, but really they're trying to sell you something without you realising. But here are some ideas for spotting ads like a pro!

Look closely at the profile picture

Pay attention to the account name



Check if it says "sponsored"   or "promoted" 

A 'verified' tick can still mean it's an ad

17,932 likes
WHEN UR KICKS ARE LIFE #Ad #Influencer #Sponsored
VIEW ALL 683 COMMENTS

Study the hashtags for clues about the post's purpose

Be savvy with high numbers of likes and shares



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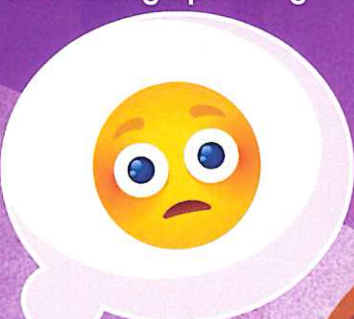
SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO DEAL WITH UPSETTING CONTENT

A Guide for Parents and Carers

Raising children in the digital age seems to be getting tougher, with the world currently experiencing so many uncertainties. From the continuing impact of COVID-19 to the war in Ukraine, right now children across the globe can scarcely go online without being exposed to unsettling stories, images and ideas. Reassuring a concerned child can be difficult, especially when bad news feels omnipresent. We've put together some advice to help you in discussing upsetting events with young ones.

1 FIND OUT WHAT YOUR CHILD KNOWS

There are many ways that children are exposed to upsetting content in the media, both online and offline. Before swamping your child with information, find out what they know already. Show them you're interested in what they have to say, practice active listening and try to gauge how much your child has been impacted by what they have seen.



2 RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Starting a conversation about upsetting content probably isn't the best idea when your child is studying for an exam or about to go to bed. Choose a time when they're relaxed and open to talking, to make sure you have their full attention. Remember, these conversations can become emotional, so choose somewhere your child feels safe and comfortable.



3 KEEP IT AGE APPROPRIATE

With younger children, try and keep the conversation more general and avoid leading questions and complex detail. You can go slightly deeper into the specifics with young teenagers but keep monitoring their emotional response. With older teens, you can be more open about the realities and consequences of what is happening – but again, do stay aware of their emotional state.



4 EMPHASISE HOPE

Upsetting content can make us feel angry, scared. Upsetting content can make anyone feel angry, scared, sad or overwhelmed. Try to find stories of hope, generosity and strength related to the content you're discussing. Children often feel reassured when they know they can do something to help, so encourage your child's sense of control through activities which make them feel they're positively impacting the events they're concerned about.



5 MONITOR REACTIONS

All children react differently, of course, and young people might not directly say that they're scared, angry, anxious, confused or uncomfortable. Emotional reactions are natural when discussing upsetting topics, so take note of your child's body language and reactions. Allow them to express their feelings in a non-judgmental space and try to stay mindful of how they might be feeling.



6 CONSIDER YOUR EMOTIONS

It's not only young people who find upsetting news difficult to process: adults also have to deal with strong emotions in moments of stress. Children develop coping strategies by mirroring those around them, so staying on top of how you appear to be regulating your emotion on the outside is important for supporting your child through worrying times.



7 SET LIMITS

Managing screentime and content can be difficult at the best of times, but especially in unusual or stressful periods (at the start of the pandemic, for example). It's virtually impossible to keep children away from upsetting content completely, but it's important to try and at least limit exposure by using parental controls, talking about the dangers of harmful content and enforcing screentime limits.



8 TAKE THINGS SLOWLY

Try not to overwhelm your child with information all at once: instead, take the discussion one step at a time. You could make the first conversation a simple introduction to a potentially upsetting subject and then wait until your child is ready to talk again. Opening the door to the conversation and demonstrating that your child can talk to you about this type of issue is a vital first step.



9 ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS

Online, troubling images, posts, videos and stories are shared across multiple platforms, many of which your child might access. Even if the content is actually inappropriate, encourage your child to discuss what they saw instead of being angry at them for seeing it. Children are still learning that not everything online is accurate – you want to be their ultimate source of information, not their device.



10 FIND A BALANCE

There's often a tremendous compulsion to stay right up to date with events. Our phones frequently send us push notifications urging us to read the latest article or view the most recent video on social media. It's essential to remind your child that it's healthy to take regular breaks, and to focus on positive events instead of 'doomscrolling' and risking becoming overwhelmed by bad news.



11 BUILD RESILIENCE

News has never been more accessible. While our instinct may be to shield children from upsetting stories, it's important that they're equipped with the tools to manage this content when they are exposed to it. Talk about upsetting content more generally with your child and emphasise that they can always tell you or a trusted adult if something they see makes them feel uneasy.



12 IDENTIFY HELP

It's hugely important that children know where to find support if they encounter upsetting content online. Encourage them to open up to an adult that they trust, and make sure they're aware of who their trusted adults are. It is essential that children understand that they're not alone, and that help is available if and when they need it.



Meet Our Expert

Cayley Jorgensen is the director of FaceUp South Africa, which is a reporting system that is currently being used by schools and companies to fight bullying around the world. FaceUp helps give a voice to bystanders by encouraging them to speak up and get the help they not only want but need.



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Sources: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/6047806> | <https://www.childnet.com/blog/supporting-your-child-with-upsetting-content/> | <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/how-talk-your-children-about-conflict-and-war>



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about NETFLIX

Netflix is a subscription-based streaming service that allows users to watch TV shows and movies on any internet-enabled device that supports the software, such as smart TVs, phones and tablets. The pandemic saw a surge in children consuming on-demand content as many families relaxed their screen-time rules. Netflix's diverse range of programming caters for all age groups – so it's important for parents to recognise the potential risks of children using the service and the measures to help their child enjoy a safe streaming experience.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Netflix produces and curates an extensive catalogue of content that can provide hours of entertainment. If they share the same user account as an adult, this can potentially lead to children accidentally viewing all manner of inappropriate content, including nudity, profanity and extreme violence. This can happen easily on shared accounts, as Netflix cannot establish who's watching.

BINGE-WATCHING

Netflix allows users to view shows and movies quickly and easily without adverts or interruptions, making excessive screen time a concern. Binge-watching has become more common during the pandemic, due to Netflix's regularly updated content and algorithms which recommend content very similar to what's previously been enjoyed. Marathon viewing sessions can lead to children staying up too late, affecting their mood and concentration the next day.

SCREEN ADDICTION

From TVs and phones to consoles and tablets, Netflix is available on almost any device with an internet connection – making it extremely difficult to manage children's screen time. The service is now adding games to its mobile app, tempting users to spend even more time on the platform. Screen addiction can distract children from important activities like schoolwork and socialising, and can impact their health by reducing their exercise and sleep.

HACKING ATTEMPTS

With millions of users worldwide, Netflix is often targeted by hackers who try to steal usernames and passwords to gain access to people's accounts. If successful, they can then steal payment details or try to sell stolen personal data on the dark web, providing other criminals with a profitable opportunity. Netflix also doesn't provide two-factor authentication, making the hackers' task that little bit easier.

CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

Netflix's Teleparty feature became popular during lockdown periods as it allows users from different households (friends and relatives, for example) to synchronise when they watch content. It requires an access link to be sent to the people you wish to invite; the link, however, can also be distributed to people you don't know. A text chat feature enables interaction with the other users in real-time: this represents a risk to children if a stranger gains access to the Teleparty.

Advice for Parents & Carers

KEEP ACCOUNTS SECURE

Netflix doesn't use two-factor authentication, so a strong password is vital. Your child's Netflix password should be unique (not one they've used elsewhere) and a minimum of eight characters with a mix of letters, numbers and symbols. Emphasise not to share their login details with anyone and remind them to always log out after using the app – so their account remains inaccessible, even if their device is lost or stolen.

CHECK MATURITY RATING

Netflix warns about content that includes violence, sex, profanity and nudity. These warnings form part of the show or movie's 'maturity rating'. Users can restrict age ratings to avoid children viewing age-inappropriate content. On their profile, open the Profile and Parental Control settings and choose the maturity level for the shows and movies you want to allow.



CREATE A KIDS' PROFILE

Setting up a Netflix Kids experience profile means your child can only access content which is suitable for children aged up to 12 years. All other content is automatically blocked. This rating can be further restricted via the child's profile settings. Setting up a Netflix Kids experience profile will help to prevent your child from viewing age-inappropriate content.



SET UP PROFILE PINS

Netflix account holders can lock profiles using a four-digit PIN. Doing this can prevent your child from accessing the wrong account and viewing content that isn't appropriate for their age. Try setting a PIN for each account on your Netflix app – ideally avoiding numbers that would be easily guessed, such as dates of birth. Remember not to share these PINs with anyone, including family.



SWITCH OFF AUTO-PLAY

When a show or movie concludes, Netflix's algorithms select content with similar themes that it thinks your child will enjoy next. This new content starts automatically after a 10-second countdown. Disabling this auto-play feature reduces the possibility of your child being shown something inappropriate and provides a natural break to help prevent them becoming too immersed in Netflix.



CHECK VIEWING HABITS

Netflix has tools which enable parents and carers to monitor what their child has been watching. Selecting 'Viewing Activity' in each profile's account settings displays a list of what content has been viewed (and when). This can reassure parents that their child is watching age-appropriate content and can open avenues for discussing your child's favourite shows and movies, and why they like 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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Sources: www.help.netflix.com | www.about.netflix.com | www.ofcom.gov.uk

What Parents and Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL BOTS

WHAT ARE SOCIAL BOTS?

Bots are computer-generated accounts which sit on social media, masquerading as humans. While many are harmless or even have good intentions, others are designed to extort, sell products, spread propaganda or bully human users. Bots – short for ‘robots’, of course – are often confused with state-funded troll accounts; the two can be difficult to tell apart. However, if the results are the same, then both should be treated similarly.

KNOWING THE RISKS ...

ASTROTURFING

Propaganda and conspiracy theories are usually niche interests on social media. But with an army of thousands of bots amplifying posts through retweets and shares, people can make their messages travel further and appear to reflect mainstream opinion. Known as ‘astroturfing’, this can make children more susceptible to questionable beliefs.

CYBERBULLYING

Bots can be set to hunt for certain search terms or opinions and then automatically reply aggressively to anybody who uses them in a message. This means that if your child posts something that whoever programmed the bot doesn't like, they may be deluged with angry messages from fake accounts – which can be overwhelming and comparable to cyberbullying.

EXTORTION

Criminals use bots to trap users into sextortion or online blackmail scams. The bot cultivates a flirtatious online relationship with the victim, then persuades them into a video chat during which they are tricked into posing inappropriately or carrying out a sexual act. This footage is recorded, and threats are then made to release it to the victim's friends and family unless money is paid.

SHADY SELLING

Bots are often used for illicit advertising – that is, they spam social media platforms with links to commercial websites. Additionally, some unscrupulous influencers have been found to use bots to artificially inflate their number of followers and the engagement with their account – making them seem more popular and therefore able to charge companies more to work with them.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS ...

BEWARE PROLIFIC POSTING

Bots post a superhuman amount of content. A visit to their profile usually proves they're responding to people far faster than a human could. Check their join date and number of followers. If the account has been around for ages and still doesn't have any friends, it probably isn't a real person. A brand-new page is also a red flag.

NOTICE ODD USERNAMES

Finding a social media username that isn't taken can be difficult. People often end up with their name and some numbers – but not the way bots do it. A username like johnsmith5273 is either a sign of a random number generator or a site offering an unwieldy alternative because the preferred name is taken, which isn't something most humans would accept.

VERIFY PROFILE PICS

Check a user's authenticity by investigating their profile picture: bots obviously don't have faces, so they tend to skim publicly available photos to try to fool people. Put suspicious pics through a reverse-image search like TinEye – you might find they actually belong to someone else or are stock images.

CHECK THE CONTENT

Bots can't think for themselves and usually just exist to amplify somebody else's message. Try copying and pasting the text into the search function on Twitter, for example, and see if it's being said anywhere else. If a lot of similar-looking accounts are saying the same thing, you're probably looking at a bot army.

Advice for Parents & Carers

SPOT THE BOTS

Forewarned is forearmed, so if your children aren't that familiar with the world of bots yet, explain what to look for using the tips in this guide. At the moment, most bots still aren't that sophisticated – so finding accounts which are designed purely to troll people or spread misinformation isn't hugely difficult, even for an untrained eye.

BLOCK AND MOVE ON

Your child isn't obliged to be friends with anyone online, bot or not. Pretty much every social media app has a block button, and you should encourage your child to use it whenever something or someone is making their digital lives less than pleasant. If everyone blocked malicious bots rather than engaging them, they wouldn't pose a problem.

BE SUSPICIOUS

While many people have made lifelong friends over the internet, it's important not to be too trusting. Random strangers adding you on Facebook could well be bots, so do some background checks: do they have any mutual friends? Is it a new account? Even if everything seems fine, encourage your child to be cautious: warn them of potential risks.

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist and the former deputy editor of technology and internet culture website Alpr. Now freelance, he has contributed articles to publications including the *New Statesman*, *CNET*, the *Evening Standard*, *Wired*, *Rock Paper Shotgun*, *Gizmodo*, *Pocket Gamer*, *Stuff*, *T3*, *PC Pro*, *Macworld*, *TechRadar* and *Trusted Reviews*.



SOURCES: <https://www.computing.co.uk/feature/3085226/the-positive-case-for-twitter-bots> | <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/uk-russia-troll-factory.html> | <https://truepublica.org.uk/united-kingdom/propaganda-automated-bots-defending-the-government/> | <https://www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/james-obrien/what-are-the-twitter-users-with-eight-numbers/>

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What Parents Need to Know about POKÉMON GO



Pokémon GO has been among the world's most popular mobile games since its spectacular release in 2016. It's recently enjoyed a resurgence, thanks partly to people combining entertainment and exercise during lockdown. In Pokémon GO – like the Pokémon TV show, trading card series and other video games – players capture, train and battle with their Pokémon creatures: physically exploring locations while using augmented reality via their phone's screen. The game generally provides a positive experience, but there are still some safety concerns to consider.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Pokémon GO requires players to visit in-game landmarks like Pokéstops and Gyms. These are often situated at public real-world locations such as churches or post offices. Sometimes, however, they can inadvertently end up being placed in dangerous areas which are unsuitable for children, even when accompanied by an adult: near a construction site or a main road, for example.

STRANGERS & MEETING OFFLINE

Players often cooperate with friends in the game, and there are many online discussion hangouts. As well as sharing tips and info, these groups may arrange to meet offline to catch Pokémon or attend raids (communal events where players flock to the same real-world place for a mass battle). This can put children at risk of being messaged and invited to meet by strangers under the pretence of talking about the game.

DATA COLLECTION

When a player logs into their Pokémon GO account, the game collects personal data about the user and their device. Locations, emails, names, ages and even camera images can all be accessed. What then happens to this information is open to debate. Niantic, the game's developers, maintain that they do not sell user information to third parties – but the fact that they have it at all is a concern, nonetheless.

VISIBLE PROFILES & LOCATION

Pokémon GO players can add each other as 'friends' in the game by sharing their trainer codes. Two trainers who do this can then view each other's information, such as their username. If a username gives any clues to the player's real name or personal details, a stranger may then be able to look them up online. The game also lets users upload images to social media, which could publicly disclose a child's exact location.

IN-GAME PURCHASES

The game uses a currency called Pokécoins, which can be bought for real money (in bundles between £0.79 and £99.99) and exchanged for in-game items such as Pokéballs and berries. It's extremely easy for a child to purchase Pokécoins (even accidentally) if there's a payment method connected to their mobile phone – and possibly rack up a sizeable bill without realising it!

Advice for Parents & Carers

PLAY ALONGSIDE YOUR CHILD

Finding and catching Pokémon with young ones could turn into a great mutual hobby. At 25 years old, it's one of the few games franchises that spans two generations. Enjoying the game together will give you plenty of new things to talk about with your child – and if you played Pokémon in your own childhood, you might impress them with your knowledge of the digital critters!

ENCOURAGE AWARENESS

Remind your child of the physical dangers they could face while catching Pokémon and emphasise staying aware of their surroundings. The game will often alert children (through their phone) when they are close to an interesting Pokémon item – usually sending them excitedly rushing off to find it – so they should never play Pokémon GO near busy roads or in places they don't know well.

DISGUISE THE EXERCISE

One of Pokémon GO's benefits is that it encourages young (and not-so-young!) ones to get exercise outdoors. Some parts of the game can be completed from home, but it's best experienced while walking around your local area. Certain tasks (like visiting Pokéstops) can be repeated every day – and an hour outside having fun catching Pokémon will hardly feel like exercise at all!

USE AN OLDER PHONE

If children use an older phone to play Pokémon GO, then they won't be walking around with their own new device, which could get broken or stolen. Parents are also far less likely to have left a credit card linked to the old mobile. It also means that you can limit the amount of information used to set up an account, and what companies who gain access to your data can do with it.

AGREE PLAY BOUNDARIES

Ensure your child knows where they are (and aren't) allowed to go searching for Pokémon, when they have to be home, and how often they can play the game. Talk to other young Pokémon GO fans' parents or carers to see what boundaries they set for their children. Lunchtimes (if allowed by the school) or after school are ideal times for getting some exercise and catching all those Pokémon!

Meet Our Expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for several years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world: UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Having started gaming at 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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SOURCES: <https://heimdalsecurity.com/blog/is-pokemon-go-safe/>
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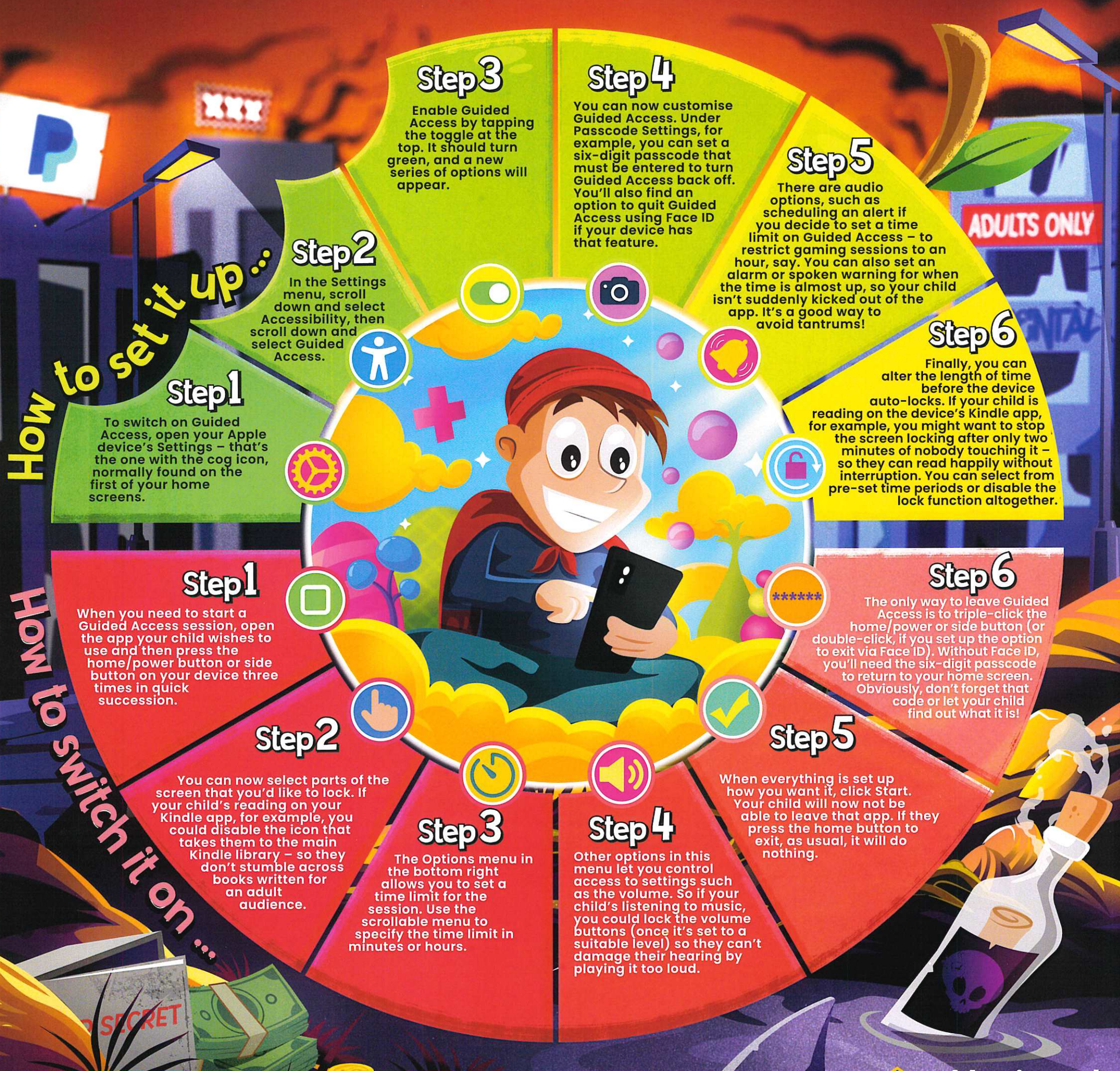
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What Parents and Carers Need to Know about APPLE GUIDED ACCESS

iPhones and iPads don't offer separate user accounts. So when you hand your Apple device to a child to play a game or watch a video, you're also handing them access to your email, the web, messaging and numerous other apps through which they could accidentally do something regrettable.

Apple Guided Access solves this potential problem by letting you restrict the iPhone or iPad to one particular app whenever your child uses the device. If they try and leave that app, they will be asked for a passcode or Face ID, meaning they can't access anything they shouldn't elsewhere on the device. Here, we show you how to find and set up the Guided Access feature, so you can confidently let your child borrow your iPhone or iPad.



Meet Our Expert

Barry Collins has been a technology journalist and editor for more than 20 years, working for titles such as the *Sunday Times*, *Which?*, *PC Pro* and *Computeractive*. He's appeared regularly as a technology pundit on television and radio, including on *Newsnight*, *Radio 5 Live* and the *ITV News at Ten*. He has two children and has writes regularly about internet safety issues.



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10 Ways You Can SHARE KINDNESS ONLINE

Last year, around one in five young people aged 10–15 in England and Wales admitted experiencing online bullying: most commonly being insulted or sworn at, or having hurtful messages sent about them. To someone who's being bullied, the world can seem like a bleak, negative place – but just one kind word can be a ray of hope: a turning point that brightens their day and refreshes their perspective. That's why 'One Kind Word' is the theme of Anti-Bullying Week 2021. We're supporting this year's event by bringing you ten top tips for beating online bullying by replacing it with kindness.

1 PRAISE WHERE IT'S DUE

Sometimes a friend or relative might post online about something they're proud to have achieved: maybe an exam they've passed, a new skill they've learned or a task they've completed. Celebrate their hard work and determination by being kind enough to praise them for it publicly.

2 REACH OUT

It's not always easy to tell what kind of mood someone is in just from what they post online. Simply dropping somebody a message to say 'hi', to ask if they're OK or to tell them that you're thinking of them could totally make their day.

3 RECOMMEND FUN THINGS

If there's something you enjoy doing online – perhaps you play a particular game, or you've found a really cool site – share it with someone you think will enjoy it. Even recommending a film or TV show you think they'll like can bring a little happiness to someone who really needs it.

4 OFFER TO HELP

Sometimes you might see a friend or family member posting a question online or asking for help with something they can't do themselves. Don't just ignore it – if you can help, get in touch. Something that's difficult for them might be no trouble for you!

5 POST POSITIVELY

Lots of people seem to go online purely to complain about things or be negative. Just because you're communicating online (and not face to face) doesn't mean you can't be positive, though! Post about things that make you happy and that you're thankful for. It could brighten someone else's day.

6 SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

If somebody that you know has done something positive or shown kindness themselves, go online and thank them with a message or a post. Expressing your gratitude costs nothing and showing someone that you appreciate them will really make them feel good.

7 BE UNDERSTANDING

Showing empathy towards others is an act of online kindness which often gets overlooked. If you notice that someone you know is upset, drop them a message. Sometimes people just need someone else to listen to them and understand their situation.

8 SHARE INSPIRATIONAL POSTS

When you see something online that inspires you or makes you feel happy, share it with people you know. A spot-on quotation, a beautiful photo or an uplifting video can lift someone's spirits and help them to feel better about life.

9 THINK BEFORE COMMENTING

Thinking before we act can be just as important as acting in the first place. Taking a second to consider what you're saying in advance could stop you from posting something negative, hurtful or offensive – even if you don't mean to. It's better to post positively or not post at all.

10 LIKE, LOVE AND ENGAGE

If somebody posts something that you like on social media, don't just scroll past – take the time to like it, love it or leave an appreciative comment! Reacting positively to other people's posts might seem like a small gesture but could mean a lot to them.

Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology journalist with more than 10 years of experience in the industry. Previously the editor of tech tabloid *The Inquirer*, Carly is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant.



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CHECK IN WITH YOUR FRIENDS

If one of your friends doesn't seem OK, checking in on them can make a huge difference. One in every five children struggles with their mental health, so let's make sure we support each other through any difficult times.

**BE A GOOD
LISTENER**

**ASK HOW
YOU CAN
HELP**

**SHOW
EMPATHY**

**SEND A
NICE
MESSAGE**

BE KIND

★ **BE** ★
:: **SUPPORTIVE** ::

IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT A FRIEND
**TELL A
TRUSTED
ADULT**

**I SAW THIS AND
THOUGHT OF YOU!**

**WANTED TO LET YOU
KNOW I'M THINKING
OF YOU!**

**I'M HERE WHEN YOU
NEED ME.**

**MISSED YOU AT
SCHOOL TODAY.
EVERYTHING OK?**

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LONELINESS ONLINE:

What Causes It and Ways to Feel Better

Have you ever been online and felt a little bit lonely?
In a recent study, 14% of 10–12-year-olds said they often felt lonely, so you're not the only one who sometimes feels that way. We spoke to a group of children and teenagers, who told us some of the things that make them feel isolated when they're online.

CAUSES OF LONELINESS ONLINE

-  Seeing photos or videos of friends having fun without me
-  Being excluded from group chats or games with friends
-  Friends or family not replying to texts or answering my calls
-  People being unkind to me online
-  When friends leave my group chat



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

So if these things happen to you and you start to feel down, what can you do? The same young people also told us how they make themselves feel less lonely when they're online – and we've collected some of their advice to share with you.

- ☒ Tell a friend or a trusted adult that you feel lonely
- ☒ Watch funny videos of cats and pandas
- ☒ Watch yoga videos and do some exercises
- ☒ Play single-player games you enjoy
- ☒ Listen to happy music
- ☒ Listen to your favourite audiobooks
- ☒ Send nice messages to your friends and family
- ☒ Play games with friends who you trust, if they're online too



TAKE A BREAK

Sometimes the best thing you can do is to take a break from technology and do something offline that makes you feel happy.

Here's what our group suggested!

- ☒ Paint or draw pictures
- ☒ Play with a pet
- ☒ Write about your feelings
- ☒ Hang out with your family
- ☒ Get outdoors & enjoy nature



FURTHER SUPPORT

Remember, it's normal to feel a bit lonely sometimes – but if it's really upsetting you, and you have no-one to talk to, you can call Childline for free on

0800 1111



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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.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Age-inappropriate content is easily accessible through many social media platforms. TikTok, for instance, 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 older) 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't 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.

Advice for Parents & Carers

TALK IT THROUGH

Embarrassment or fear of getting into trouble can make it difficult for children to talk openly about age-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.

CAN WE HAVE A CHAT?

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 safeguard your child online, set up parental controls on internet-enabled devices that 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

Cayley Jorgensen is a Registered Counsellor with The Health Professions Council of South Africa, and she 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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Sources: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/bullystoppers/sminappropriate.pdf> | <https://www.safeschools.gov.au/educators/training-professionals/professional-learning-program-teachers/inappropriate-content-factsheet> | <https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/childrens-media-lives-year-7.pdf>

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.

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 can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

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.

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.

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 wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

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 cause them to do or say things on 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 your child does upset 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 could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

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 they 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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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

FORTNITE

CHAPTER
3

AGE RATING
PEGI
12

First released in 2017, Fortnite has become one of the most popular games in the world. It currently has around 350 million registered players. Developed by Epic Games, it began life exclusively as a 'battle royale' contest, where up to 100 online player characters would fight – with weaponry including rifles, handguns and rocket launchers – to be the last one standing. Today, it features multiple modes which each offer something different (although some modes, such as 'Save the World', are only available on certain platforms).

IN-APP PURCHASES

Not all of Fortnite is free. Save the World mode, for example, can become quite costly. An in-game currency called V-Bucks is used to buy items such as cosmetics, which are not a necessity to play the game. It can feel like buying them is essential, however – even for adult players. Making sure no payment methods are linked to the game's store is a good idea when children are playing Fortnite.

REPEAT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Fortnite now offers a monthly repeat subscription which costs £9.99 (or equivalent). This package offers different non-essential benefits every month – including fancy cosmetics, rare weapons, V-Bucks and special bonuses. Signing up, therefore, can be tempting for dedicated players. However, subscriptions cannot be paid for with V-Bucks earned in the game, only with real-world money.

COMPETITIVE COMMUNITY

Fortnite isn't purely a competitive experience (some modes prioritise cooperation), but the rivalry aspect remains central. Battle Royale is an especially ruthless mode, where the last player or squad left standing wins. Games can become heated, and players' desire to win can often cause excessively aggressive or "toxic" behaviour towards others – via the game's audio chat, for instance.

POSSIBILITY OF SCAMS

Popular games like Fortnite are often targeted by unscrupulous individuals trying to trick or exploit genuine fans. In Fortnite, scammers have been known to offer children free V-Bucks or vast amounts of V-Bucks in exchange for rare items – often asking the player to click a particular link. These scammers are seeking access to your child's account, personal information and payment details.

USER-CONTROLLED CONTENT

Some elements of online video games can't be rated for age appropriateness because the developer doesn't have control over them. In Fortnite, for instance, things like voice or text chat, usernames, trades and other player-generated content may not always be suitable for children. It also means that the makers aren't liable for anything a stranger might say to young Fortnite players online.

Advice for Parents & Carers

STAY AWARE OF SPENDING

Free-to-play games (that is, ones without up-front costs) can still be big financial drains. In Fortnite, for example, the Battle Pass – a set of rewards to improve players' experience in the game – can be either earned through playing or bought with real money (with additional incentives for the latter). With supervision, however, this can be a great lesson in money management for young people.

TALK ABOUT TALKING

Communication is key in the squad-based Fortnite modes, and children will quickly realise that talking with team-mates online helps to increase their win rate. It's a good idea, therefore, to chat with your child first about speaking to strangers online, trading, scammers and other potential risks. Remind them that they can always come to you for help if they run into problems online.

ENCOURAGE BREAKS

Gaming sessions can reach marathon lengths, especially when your child is on a winning streak and doesn't want to stop. Sitting in the same position for hours isn't healthy, of course, but it's an easy habit to form. Encouraging young ones to break regularly for drinks and so on will help them stay hydrated, rest their eyes and release some of the tension from competitive gameplay.

DISCUSS OTHER APPS

Games like Fortnite can lead on to third-party apps (Discord, for example) where players can join a voice, text or – in some cases – video chat about the game. Certain add-ons also let children talk with other players from their local area, which clearly presents a potential risk. When discussing Fortnite with your child, you might also want to ask them about other apps they use while playing.

Meet Our Expert

Clare Godwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2015, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.



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Sources: <https://www.epicgames.com/fortnite/en-US/fortnite-crew-subscription> | <https://www.epicgames.com/help/en-US/fortnite-c75/battle-royale-c93/how-do-i-get-more-vbucks-in-battle-royale-c3274> | <https://www.epicgames.com/help/en-US/fortnite-c75/battle-royale-c93/what-is-the-battle-pass-where-can-i-learn-more-a3271> | <https://www.epicgames.com/fortnite/en-US/parental-controls>



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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 Wink and Hoop 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 to 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 app's 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.

SEXTING

Sexting 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 if it has been screenshot first – 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 'beautify' 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 number is in your child's contacts list. Explain to your child that this feature could potentially make their profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add, which can be 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.

TALK ABOUT SEXTING

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. Discuss the legal implications of sending, receiving or sharing explicit images, as well as 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.

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 with. Additionally, Snapchat's 'Spotlight' feature has a #challenge like TikTok's: it's vital that your child understands the potentially harmful consequences of taking part in these challenges.

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 adding 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: strangers, bullies and groomers could use this information to engage in conversation and arrange to meet in person.

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 that person's profile and choose report or block. There are options to state why they are reporting that user (annoying or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example).

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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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

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-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Most videos appearing on a child's feed are light-hearted and amusing. However, some clips have been reported for featuring 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.

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CENSORED

EXPLICIT SONGS

TikTok primarily revolves around videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to music. Inevitably, some featured songs will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the app's young user-base, there is a risk that children may view older users' videos and then be inclined to imitate any explicit language or suggestive actions.

W&#*!

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.



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 hugely 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 mean it's easy for a 5-minute visit to turn into a 45-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 a user likes. Prices range from 99p to an eye-watering £99 bundle. TikTok is also connected with Shopify, which allows users to buy products through the app.

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.

MAINTAIN PRIVACY SETTINGS

The default setting for all under 16s' accounts to 'private'. Keeping it that way is the safest solution: it means only users who your child approves can watch their videos. The 'Stitch' (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 16s. 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, in case something *does* slip through, make sure your child knows how to recognise and report inappropriate content and get them to come to you about anything upsetting that they've seen. 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

Parven 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 Clicks: a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.



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SOURCES TikTok.cpm



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SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO DEAL WITH UPSETTING CONTENT

A Guide for Parents and Carers

Raising children in the digital age seems to be getting tougher, with the world currently experiencing so many uncertainties. From the continuing impact of COVID-19 to the war in Ukraine, right now children across the globe can scarcely go online without being exposed to unsettling stories, images and ideas. Reassuring a concerned child can be difficult, especially when bad news feels omnipresent. We've put together some advice to help you in discussing upsetting events with young ones.

1 FIND OUT WHAT YOUR CHILD KNOWS

There are many ways that children are exposed to upsetting content in the media, both online and offline. Before swamping your child with information, find out what they know already. Show them you're interested in what they have to say, practice active listening and try to gauge how much your child has been impacted by what they have seen.

2 RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Starting a conversation about upsetting content probably isn't the best idea when your child is studying for an exam or about to go to bed. Choose a time when they're relaxed and open to talking, to make sure you have their full attention. Remember, these conversations can become emotional, so choose somewhere your child feels safe and comfortable.

3 KEEP IT AGE APPROPRIATE

With younger children, try and keep the conversation more general and avoid leading questions and complex detail. You can go slightly deeper into the specifics with young teenagers but keep monitoring their emotional response. With older teens, you can be more open about the realities and consequences of what is happening – but again, do stay aware of their emotional state.

4 EMPHASISE HOPE

Upsetting content can make us feel angry, scared. Upsetting content can make anyone feel angry, scared, sad or overwhelmed. Try to find stories of hope, generosity and strength related to the content you're discussing. Children often feel reassured when they know they can do something to help, so encourage your child's sense of control through activities which make them feel they're positively impacting the events they're concerned about.

5 MONITOR REACTIONS

All children react differently, of course, and young people might not directly say that they're scared, angry, anxious, confused or uncomfortable. Emotional reactions are natural when discussing upsetting topics, so take note of your child's body language and reactions. Allow them to express their feelings in a non-judgmental space and try to stay mindful of how they might be feeling.

6 CONSIDER YOUR EMOTIONS

It's not only young people who find upsetting news difficult to process: adults also have to deal with strong emotions in moments of stress. Children develop coping strategies by mirroring those around them, so staying on top of how you appear to be regulating your emotion on the outside is important for supporting your child through worrying times.

7 SET LIMITS

Managing screentime and content can be difficult at the best of times, but especially in unusual or stressful periods (at the start of the pandemic, for example). It's virtually impossible to keep children away from upsetting content completely, but it's important to try and at least limit exposure by using parental controls, talking about the dangers of harmful content and enforcing screentime limits.

8 TAKE THINGS SLOWLY

Try not to overwhelm your child with information all at once: instead, take the discussion one step at a time. You could make the first conversation a simple introduction to a potentially upsetting subject and then wait until your child is ready to talk again. Opening the door to the conversation and demonstrating that your child can talk to you about this type of issue is a vital first step.

9 ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS

Online, troubling images, posts, videos and stories are shared across multiple platforms, many of which your child might access. Even if the content is actually inappropriate, encourage your child to discuss what they saw instead of being angry at them for seeing it. Children are still learning that not everything online is accurate – you want to be their ultimate source of information, not their device.

10 FIND A BALANCE

There's often a tremendous compulsion to stay right up to date with events. Our phones frequently send us push notifications urging us to read the latest article or view the most recent video on social media. It's essential to remind your child that it's healthy to take regular breaks, and to focus on positive events instead of 'doomscrolling' and risking becoming overwhelmed by bad news.

11 BUILD RESILIENCE

News has never been more accessible. While our instinct may be to shield children from upsetting stories, it's important that they're equipped with the tools to manage this content when they are exposed to it. Talk about upsetting content more generally with your child and emphasise that they can always tell you or a trusted adult if something they see makes them feel uneasy.

12 IDENTIFY HELP

It's hugely important that children know where to find support if they encounter upsetting content online. Encourage them to open up to an adult that they trust, and make sure they're aware of who their trusted adults are. It is essential that children understand that they're not alone, and that help is available if and when they need it.

Meet Our Expert

Cayley Jorgensen is the director of FaceUp South Africa, which is a reporting system that is currently being used by schools and companies to fight bullying around the world. FaceUp helps give a voice to bystanders by encouraging them to speak up and get the help they not only want but need.



Sources: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/6047806> | <https://www.childnet.com/blog/supporting-your-child-with-upsetting-content/> | <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/how-talk-your-children-about-conflict-and-war>

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about NETFLIX

Netflix is a subscription-based streaming service that allows users to watch TV shows and movies on any internet-enabled device that supports the software, such as smart TVs, phones and tablets. The pandemic saw a surge in children consuming on-demand content as many families relaxed their screen-time rules. Netflix's diverse range of programming caters for all age groups – so it's important for parents to recognise the potential risks of children using the service and the measures to help their child enjoy a safe streaming experience.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Netflix produces and curates an extensive catalogue of content that can provide hours of entertainment. If they share the same user account as an adult, this can potentially lead to children accidentally viewing all manner of inappropriate content, including nudity, profanity and extreme violence. This can happen easily on shared accounts, as Netflix cannot establish who's watching.

BINGE-WATCHING

Netflix allows users to view shows and movies quickly and easily without adverts or interruptions, making excessive screen time a concern. Binge-watching has become more common during the pandemic, due to Netflix's regularly updated content and algorithms which recommend content very similar to what's previously been enjoyed. Marathon viewing sessions can lead to children staying up too late, affecting their mood and concentration the next day.

SCREEN ADDICTION

From TVs and phones to consoles and tablets, Netflix is available on almost any device with an internet connection – making it extremely difficult to manage children's screen time. The service is now adding games to its mobile app, tempting users to spend even more time on the platform. Screen addiction can distract children from important activities like schoolwork and socialising, and can impact their health by reducing their exercise and sleep.

HACKING ATTEMPTS

With millions of users worldwide, Netflix is often targeted by hackers who try to steal usernames and passwords to gain access to people's accounts. If successful, they can then steal payment details or try to sell stolen personal data on the dark web, providing other criminals with a profitable opportunity. Netflix also doesn't provide two-factor authentication, making the hackers' task that little bit easier.

CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

Netflix's Teleparty feature became popular during lockdown periods as it allows users from different households (friends and relatives, for example) to synchronise when they watch content. It requires an access link to be sent to the people you wish to invite: the link, however, can also be distributed to people you don't know. A text chat feature enables interaction with the other users in real-time: this represents a risk to children if a stranger gains access to the Teleparty.

Advice for Parents & Carers

KEEP ACCOUNTS SECURE

Netflix doesn't use two-factor authentication, so a strong password is vital. Your child's Netflix password should be unique (not one they've used elsewhere) and a minimum of eight characters with a mix of letters, numbers and symbols. Emphasise not to share their login details with anyone and remind them to always log out after using the app – so their account remains inaccessible, even if their device is lost or stolen.

CHECK MATURITY RATING

Netflix warns about content that includes violence, sex, profanity and nudity. These warnings form part of the show or movie's 'maturity rating'. Users can restrict age ratings to avoid children viewing age-inappropriate content. On their profile, open the Profile and Parental Control settings and choose the maturity level for the shows and movies you want to allow.

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CENSORED

CREATE A KIDS' PROFILE

Setting up a Netflix Kids experience profile means your child can only access content which is suitable for children aged up to 12 years. All other content is automatically blocked. This rating can be further restricted via the child's profile settings. Setting up a Netflix Kids experience profile will help to prevent your child from viewing age-inappropriate content.

HELLO MY NAME IS OSCAR

SET UP PROFILE PINS

Netflix account holders can lock profiles using a four-digit PIN. Doing this can prevent your child from accessing the wrong account and viewing content that isn't appropriate for their age. Try setting a PIN for each account on your Netflix app – ideally avoiding numbers that would be easily guessed, such as dates of birth. Remember not to share these PINs with anyone, including family.

SWITCH OFF AUTO-PLAY

When a show or movie concludes, Netflix's algorithms select content with similar themes that it thinks your child will enjoy next. This new content starts automatically after a 10-second countdown. Disabling this auto-play feature reduces the possibility of your child being shown something inappropriate and provides a natural break to help prevent them becoming too immersed in Netflix.

CHECK VIEWING HABITS

Netflix has tools which enable parents and carers to monitor what their child has been watching. Selecting 'Viewing Activity' in each profile's account settings displays a list of what content has been viewed (and when). This can reassure parents that their child is watching age-appropriate content and can open avenues for discussing your child's favourite shows and movies, and why they like 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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Sources: www.help.netflix.com | www.about.netflix.com | www.ofcom.org.uk



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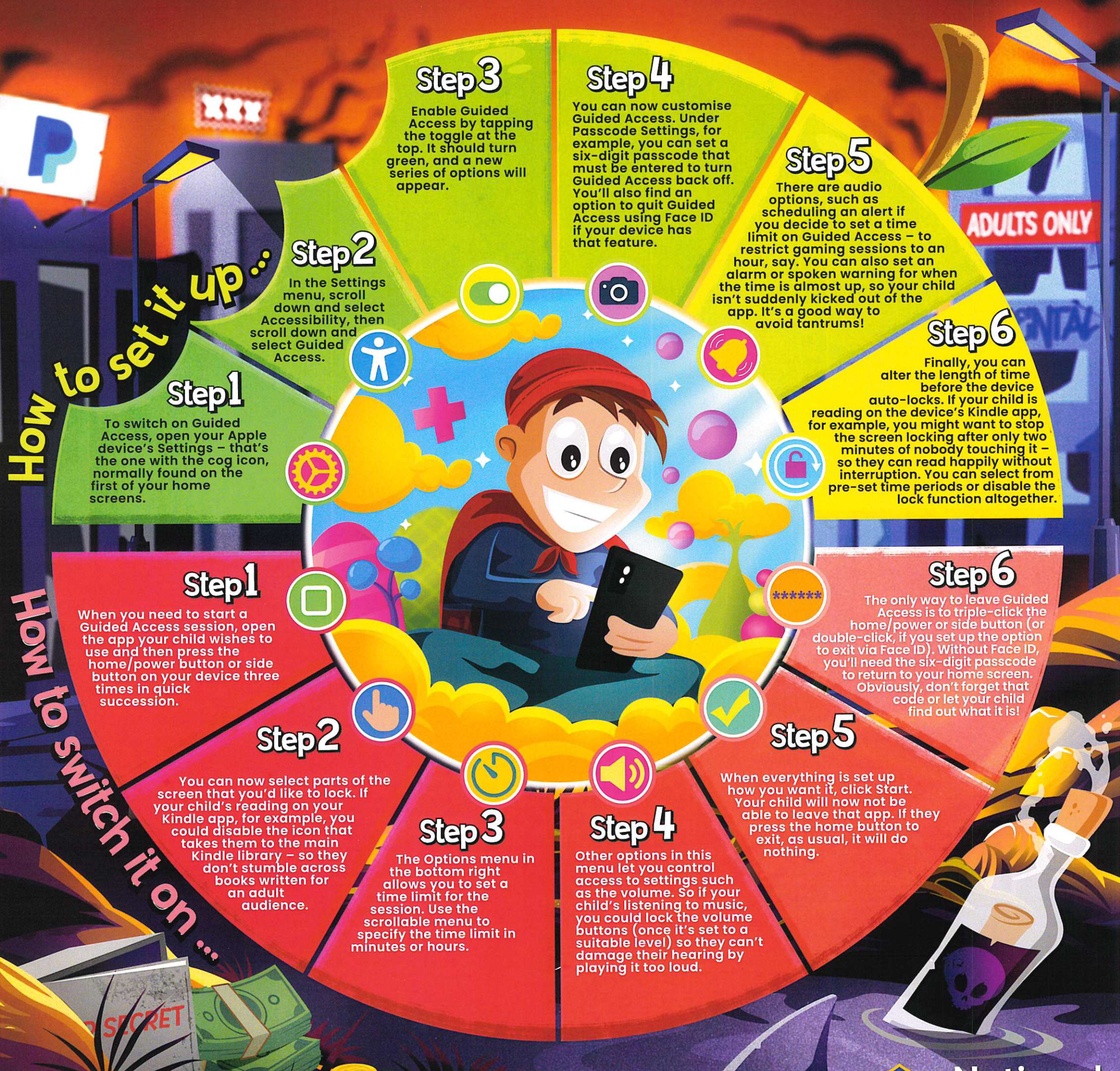
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Content last updated: 10/11/2021

What Parents and Carers Need to Know about APPLE GUIDED ACCESS

iPhones and iPads don't offer separate user accounts. So when you hand your Apple device to a child to play a game or watch a video, you're also handing them access to your email, the web, messaging and numerous other apps through which they could accidentally do something regrettable.

Apple Guided Access solves this potential problem by letting you restrict the iPhone or iPad to one particular app whenever your child uses the device. If they try and leave that app, they will be asked for a passcode or Face ID, meaning they can't access anything they shouldn't elsewhere on the device. Here, we show you how to find and set up the Guided Access feature, so you can confidently let your child borrow your iPhone or iPad.



Meet Our Expert

Barry Collins has been a technology journalist and editor for more than 20 years, working for titles such as the *Sunday Times*, *Which?*, *PC Pro* and *Computeractive*. He's appeared regularly as a technology pundit on television and radio, including on *Newsnight*, *Radio 5 Live* and the *ITV News at Ten*. He has two children and has writes regularly about internet safety issues.



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SOURCES: <https://support.apple.com/en-gb/HT202612>



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10 Ways You Can SHARE KINDNESS ONLINE

Last year, around one in five young people aged 10–15 in England and Wales admitted experiencing online bullying: most commonly being insulted or sworn at, or having hurtful messages sent about them. To someone who's being bullied, the world can seem like a bleak, negative place – but just one kind word can be a ray of hope: a turning point that brightens their day and refreshes their perspective. That's why 'One Kind Word' is the theme of Anti-Bullying Week 2021. We're supporting this year's event by bringing you ten top tips for beating online bullying by replacing it with kindness.

1 PRAISE WHERE IT'S DUE

Sometimes a friend or relative might post online about something they're proud to have achieved: maybe an exam they've passed, a new skill they've learned or a task they've completed. Celebrate their hard work and determination by being kind enough to praise them for it publicly.

2 REACH OUT

It's not always easy to tell what kind of mood someone is in just from what they post online. Simply dropping somebody a message to say 'hi', to ask if they're OK or to tell them that you're thinking of them could totally make their day.

3 RECOMMEND FUN THINGS

If there's something you enjoy doing online – perhaps you play a particular game, or you've found a really cool site – share it with someone you think will enjoy it. Even recommending a film or TV show you think they'll like can bring a little happiness to someone who really needs it.

4 OFFER TO HELP

Sometimes you might see a friend or family member posting a question online or asking for help with something they can't do themselves. Don't just ignore it – if you can help, get in touch. Something that's difficult for them might be no trouble for you!

5 POST POSITIVELY

Lots of people seem to go online purely to complain about things or be negative. Just because you're communicating online (and not face to face) doesn't mean you can't be positive, though! Post about things that make you happy and that you're thankful for. It could brighten someone else's day.

6 SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

If somebody that you know has done something positive or shown kindness themselves, go online and thank them with a message or a post. Expressing your gratitude costs nothing and showing someone that you appreciate them will really make them feel good.

7 BE UNDERSTANDING

Showing empathy towards others is an act of online kindness which often gets overlooked. If you notice that someone you know is upset, drop them a message. Sometimes people just need someone else to listen to them and understand their situation.

8 SHARE INSPIRATIONAL POSTS

When you see something online that inspires you or makes you feel happy, share it with people you know. A spot-on quotation, a beautiful photo or an uplifting video can lift someone's spirits and help them to feel better about life.

9 THINK BEFORE COMMENTING

Thinking before we act can be just as important as acting in the first place. Taking a second to consider what you're saying in advance could stop you from posting something negative, hurtful or offensive – even if you don't mean to. It's better to post positively or not post at all.

10 LIKE, LOVE AND ENGAGE

If somebody posts something that you like on social media, don't just scroll past – take the time to like it, love it or leave an appreciative comment! Reacting positively to other people's posts might seem like a small gesture but could mean a lot to them.

Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology journalist with more than 10 years of experience in the industry. Previously the editor of tech tabloid *The Inquirer*, Carly is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant.



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about WHATSAPP



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.

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 (aiming to dupe 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 rumours. 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 admins' 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 FROM STRANGERS

To start a WhatsApp chat, you only need the mobile number of the person you want to message (the other person also needs 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, that person 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

[CLICK HERE](#)

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'll be given the option to report it as spam. If the sender claims to be a friend or relative, call that person on their usual number to verify it 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 making them feel uncomfortable, or has been added to a group that they don't want to be part of, they can use WhatsApp's group settings to leave. If someone exits a group, the admin can add them back in once; if 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 have been forwarded at least five times, by double-tapping 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

Parven 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 Clicks: a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.



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CHECK IN WITH YOUR FRIENDS

If one of your friends doesn't seem OK, checking in on them can make a huge difference. One in every five children struggles with their mental health, so let's make sure we support each other through any difficult times.

**BE A GOOD
LISTENER**

**ASK HOW
YOU CAN
HELP**

**SHOW
EMPATHY**

**SEND A
NICE
MESSAGE**

BE KIND

★ **BE** ★
SUPPORTIVE

IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT A FRIEND
**TELL A
TRUSTED
ADULT**

**I SAW THIS AND
THOUGHT OF YOU!**

**WANTED TO LET YOU
KNOW I'M THINKING
OF YOU!**

**I'M HERE WHEN YOU
NEED ME.**

**MISSED YOU AT
SCHOOL TODAY.
EVERYTHING OK?**

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LONELINESS ONLINE:

What Causes It and Ways to Feel Better

Have you ever been online and felt a little bit lonely?
In a recent study, 14% of 10–12-year-olds said they often felt lonely, so you're not the only one who sometimes feels that way. We spoke to a group of children and teenagers, who told us some of the things that make them feel isolated when they're online.

CAUSES OF LONELINESS ONLINE

-  Seeing photos or videos of friends having fun without me
-  Being excluded from group chats or games with friends
-  Friends or family not replying to texts or answering my calls
-  People being unkind to me online
-  When friends leave my group chat



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

So if these things happen to you and you start to feel down, what can you do? The same young people also told us how they make themselves feel less lonely when they're online – and we've collected some of their advice to share with you.

- ☒ Tell a friend or a trusted adult that you feel lonely
- ☒ Watch funny videos of cats and pandas
- ☒ Watch yoga videos and do some exercises
- ☒ Play single-player games you enjoy
- ☒ Listen to happy music
- ☒ Listen to your favourite audiobooks
- ☒ Send nice messages to your friends and family
- ☒ Play games with friends who you trust, if they're online too



TAKE A BREAK

Sometimes the best thing you can do is to take a break from technology and do something offline that makes you feel happy.

Here's what our group suggested!

- ☒ Paint or draw pictures
- ☒ Play with a pet
- ☒ Write about your feelings
- ☒ Hang out with your family
- ☒ Get outdoors & enjoy nature



FURTHER SUPPORT

Remember, it's normal to feel a bit lonely sometimes – but if it's really upsetting you, and you have no-one to talk to, you can call Childline for free on

0800 1111



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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. TikTok, for instance, 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 older) 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't 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.

Advice for Parents & Carers

TALK IT THROUGH

Embarrassment or fear of getting into trouble can make it difficult for children to talk openly about age-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 safeguard your child online, set up parental controls on internet-enabled devices that 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

Cayley Jorgensen is a Registered Counsellor with The Health Professions Council of South Africa, and she 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.



Sources: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/bullystoppers/sminappropriate.pdf> | <https://www.esafety.gov.au/educators/training-professionals/professional-learning-program-teachers/inappropriate-content-factsheet> | <https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/childrens-media-lives-year-7.pdf>



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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.

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 can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

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.

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.

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 wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

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 cause them to do or say things on 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 your child does upset 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 could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

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 they 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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Sources: https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/it_18/lets-talk-about/socialising-online/group-chats/ | <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/chat-apps/>

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

FORTNITE

CHAPTER
3

AGE RATING
PEGI
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First released in 2017, Fortnite has become one of the most popular games in the world. It currently has around 350 million registered players. Developed by Epic Games, it began life exclusively as a 'battle royale' contest, where up to 100 online player characters would fight – with weaponry including rifles, handguns and rocket launchers – to be the last one standing. Today, it features multiple modes which each offer something different (although some modes, such as 'Save the World', are only available on certain platforms).

IN-APP PURCHASES

Not all of Fortnite is free. Save the World mode, for example, can become quite costly. An in-game currency called V-Bucks is used to buy items such as cosmetics, which are not a necessity to play the game. It can feel like buying them is essential, however – even for adult players. Making sure no payment methods are linked to the game's store is a good idea when children are playing Fortnite.

REPEAT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Fortnite now offers a monthly repeat subscription which costs £9.99 (or equivalent). This package offers different non-essential benefits every month – including fancy cosmetics, rare weapons, V-Bucks and special bonuses. Signing up, therefore, can be tempting for dedicated players. However, subscriptions cannot be paid for with V-Bucks earned in the game, only with real-world money.

COMPETITIVE COMMUNITY

Fortnite isn't purely a competitive experience (some modes prioritise cooperation), but the rivalry aspect remains central. Battle Royale is an especially ruthless mode, where the last player or squad left standing wins. Games can become heated, and players' desire to win can often cause excessively aggressive or "toxic" behaviour towards others – via the game's audio chat, for instance.

POSSIBILITY OF SCAMS

Popular games like Fortnite are often targeted by unscrupulous individuals trying to trick or exploit genuine fans. In Fortnite, scammers have been known to offer children free V-Bucks or vast amounts of V-Bucks in exchange for rare items – often asking the player to click a particular link. These scammers are seeking access to your child's account, personal information and payment details.

USER-CONTROLLED CONTENT

Some elements of online video games can't be rated for age appropriateness because the developer doesn't have control over them. In Fortnite, for instance, things like voice or text chat, usernames, trades and other player-generated content may not always be suitable for children. It also means that the makers aren't liable for anything a stranger might say to young Fortnite players online.

Advice for Parents & Carers

STAY AWARE OF SPENDING

Free-to-play games (that is, ones without up-front costs) can still be big financial drains. In Fortnite, for example, the Battle Pass – a set of rewards to improve players' experience in the game – can be either earned through playing or bought with real money (with additional incentives for the latter). With supervision, however, this can be a great lesson in money management for young people.

TALK ABOUT TALKING

Communication is key in the squad-based Fortnite modes, and children will quickly realise that talking with team-mates online helps to increase their win rate. It's a good idea, therefore, to chat with your child first about speaking to strangers online, trading, scammers and other potential risks. Remind them that they can always come to you for help if they run into problems online.

ENCOURAGE BREAKS

Gaming sessions can reach marathon lengths, especially when your child is on a winning streak and doesn't want to stop. Sitting in the same position for hours isn't healthy, of course, but it's an easy habit to form. Encouraging young ones to break regularly for drinks and so on will help them stay hydrated, rest their eyes and release some of the tension from competitive gameplay.

DISCUSS OTHER APPS

Games like Fortnite can lead on to third-party apps (Discord, for example) where players can join a voice, text or – in some cases – video chat about the game. Certain add-ons also let children talk with other players from their local area, which clearly presents a potential risk. When discussing Fortnite with your child, you might also want to ask them about other apps they use while playing.

Meet Our Expert

Clare Godwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2015, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.



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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 Wink and Hoop 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 to 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 app's 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.

SEXTING

Sexting 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 if it has been screenshot first – 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 'beautify' 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 in to 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 number is in your child's contacts list. Explain to your child that this feature could potentially make their profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add, which can be 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.

TALK ABOUT SEXTING

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. Discuss the legal implications of sending, receiving or sharing explicit images, as well as 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.

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 with. Additionally, Snapchat's 'Spotlight' feature has a #challenge like TikTok's: it's vital that your child understands the potentially harmful consequences of taking part in these challenges.

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 adding 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: strangers, bullies and groomers could use this information to engage in conversation and arrange to meet in person.

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 that person's profile and choose report or block. There are options to state why they are reporting that user (annoying or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example).

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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Sources: Status of Mind: Social media and young people's mental health | Life in Likes – Children's Commissioners Report | <https://support.snapchat.com/en-US> | <https://natsafety.net/snapchat-parent-review/> | BT.com | Independent.co.uk, <https://mashable.com/article/snapchat-status-snap-maps/?europe=true>, eSafety Commissioner, (2017), Young People and Sexting – Attitudes and Behaviours: Research Findings from the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia.



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

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-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Most videos appearing on a child's feed are light-hearted and amusing. However, some clips have been reported for featuring 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.

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CENSORED

EXPLICIT SONGS

TikTok primarily revolves around videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to music. Inevitably, some featured songs will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the app's young user-base, there is a risk that children may view older users' videos and then be inclined to imitate any explicit language or suggestive actions.

W&#*!

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.



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 hugely 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 mean it's easy for a 5-minute visit to turn into a 45-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 a user likes. Prices range from 99p to an eye-watering £99 bundle. TikTok is also connected with Shopify, which allows users to buy products through the app.

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.

MAINTAIN PRIVACY SETTINGS

The default setting for all under 16s' accounts to 'private'. Keeping it that way is the safest solution: it means only users who your child approves can watch their videos. The 'Stitch' (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 16s. 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, in case something does slip through, make sure your child knows how to recognise and report inappropriate content and get them to come to you about anything upsetting that they've seen. 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

Parven 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 Clicks: a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.



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SOURCES TikTok.cpm



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SPOTTING ADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Do you always know when you're seeing an ad on your social media feed? You might not! Some ads look just like any other post – they might be funny or cool, but really they're trying to sell you something without you realising. But here are some ideas for spotting ads like a pro!

Look closely at the profile picture

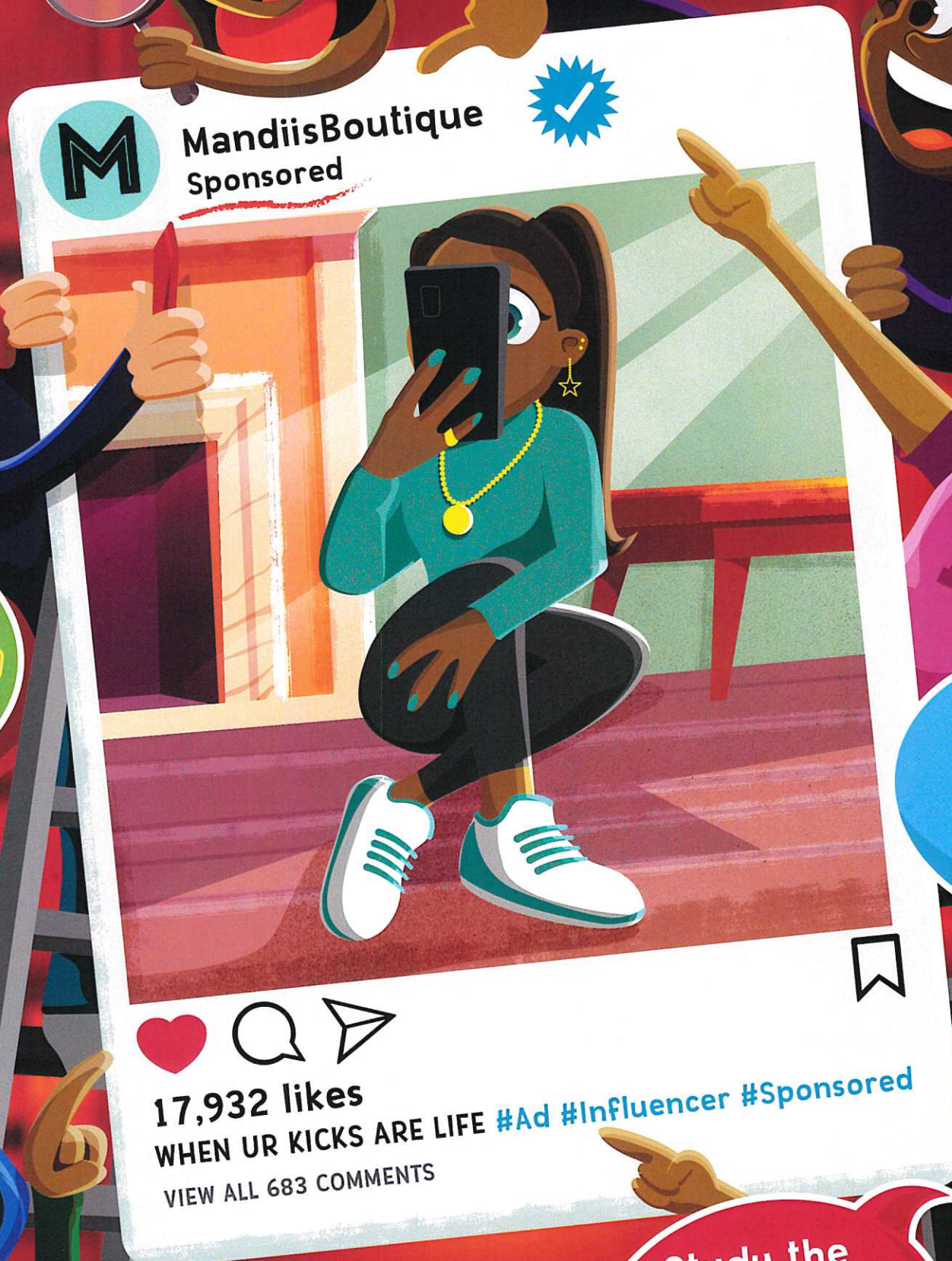
Pay attention to the account name

Check if it says "sponsored"   or "promoted" 

A 'verified' tick can still mean it's an ad

Study the hashtags for clues about the post's purpose

Be savvy with high numbers of likes and shares



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

YOUTUBE

YouTube is a video-sharing social media platform that allows billions of people around the world to watch, share and upload their own videos with a vast range of content – including sport, entertainment, education and lots more. It's a superb space for people to consume content that they're interested in. As a result, this astronomically popular platform has had a huge social impact: influencing online culture on a global scale and creating new celebrities.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

YouTube is free and can be accessed via numerous devices, even without creating a YouTube account. Some content is flagged as 'age-restricted' (requiring the user to be logged into an account with a verified age of 18), but children can still view some mildly inappropriate material. This can include profanity and violence, which some young users may find upsetting.

CONNECT WITH STRANGERS

YouTube is a social media platform which allows people to interact with other (usually unknown) users. Account holders can leave comments on any video they have access to, as well as messaging other users directly. Connecting with strangers online, of course, can potentially lead to children being exposed to adult language, to cyberbullying and even to encountering online predators.

SUGGESTED CONTENT

YouTube recommends videos related to what the user has previously watched on their account, aiming to provide content that will interest them. This is intended to be helpful but can also lead to binge-watching and the risk of screen addiction, especially if 'auto-play' is activated. Users without an account are shown popular videos from the last 24 hours, which might not always be suitable for children.

HIGH VISIBILITY

Content creators can also be put at risk – especially young ones who try to make their online presence as visible as possible. Creating and uploading content exposes children to potential harassment and toxicity from the comments section, along with the possibility of direct messaging from strangers. Videos posted publicly can be watched by anyone in the world.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

YouTube is teeming with trends, challenges and memes that are fun to watch and join in with. Children often find these immensely entertaining and might want to try them out. Most challenges tend to be safe, but many others may harm children through either watching or copying. The painful 'salt and ice challenge', which can cause injuries very quickly, is just one of many such examples.

SNEAKY SCAMMERS

Popular YouTube channels regularly have scammers posing as a well-known influencer in the comments section, attempting to lure users into clicking on their phishing links. Scammers impersonate YouTubers by adopting their names and profile images, and sometimes offer cash gifts or 'get rich quick' schemes. Children may not realise that these users are not who they claim to be.

Advice for Parents & Carers

APPLY RESTRICTED MODE

Restricted Mode is an optional setting that prevents YouTube from showing inappropriate content (such as drug and alcohol abuse, graphic violence and sexual situations) to underage viewers. To prevent your child from chancing across age-inappropriate content on the platform, we would recommend enabling Restricted Mode on each device that your child uses to access YouTube.

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CENSORED

TRY GOOGLE FAMILY

Creating a Google Family account allows you to monitor what your child is watching, uploading and sharing with other users. It will also display their recently watched videos, searches and recommended videos. In general, a Google Family account gives you an oversight of how your child is using sites like YouTube and helps you ensure they are only accessing appropriate content.

CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

YouTube gives users the option of uploading videos as 'private' or 'unlisted' – so they could be shared exclusively with family and friends, for example. Comments on videos can also be disabled and channels that your child is subscribed to can be hidden. If your child is only uploading videos that are protected as 'private', they are far less likely to receive direct messages from strangers.

CHECK OTHER PLATFORMS

Influential content creators usually have other social media accounts which they encourage their fans to follow. Having an open discussion about this with your child makes it easier to find out how else they might be following a particular creator online. It also opens up avenues for you to check out that creator's other channels to see what type of content your child is being exposed to.

MONITOR ENGAGEMENT

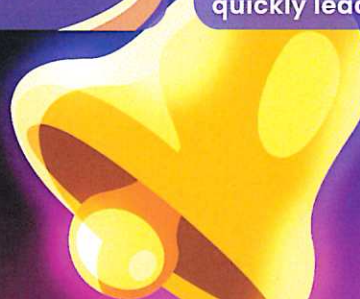
YouTube is the online viewing platform of choice for billions of people, many of them children. Younger children will watch different content to older ones, of course, and react to content differently. You may want to keep an eye on how your child interacts with content on YouTube – and, if applicable, with content creators – to understand the types of videos they are interested in.

LIMIT SPENDING

Although YouTube is free, it does offer some in-app purchases: users can rent and buy TV shows and movies to watch, for example. If you're not comfortable with your child purchasing content online, limit their access to your bank cards and online payment methods. Many parents have discovered to their cost that a child happily devouring a paid-for series quickly leads to an unexpected bill!

Meet Our Expert

Clare Godwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2015, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.



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What Parents and Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL BOTS

WHAT ARE SOCIAL BOTS?

Bots are computer-generated accounts which sit on social media, masquerading as humans. While many are harmless or even have good intentions, others are designed to extort, sell products, spread propaganda or bully human users. Bots – short for ‘robots’, of course – are often confused with state-funded troll accounts; the two can be difficult to tell apart. However, if the results are the same, then both should be treated similarly.

KNOWING THE RISKS ...

ASTROTURFING

Propaganda and conspiracy theories are usually niche interests on social media. But with an army of thousands of bots amplifying posts through retweets and shares, people can make their messages travel further and appear to reflect mainstream opinion. Known as ‘astroturfing’, this can make children more susceptible to questionable beliefs.

CYBERBULLYING

Bots can be set to hunt for certain search terms or opinions and then automatically reply aggressively to anybody who uses them in a message. This means that if your child posts something that whoever programmed the bot doesn't like, they may be deluged with angry messages from fake accounts – which can be overwhelming and comparable to cyberbullying.

EXTORTION

Criminals use bots to trap users into sextortion or online blackmail scams. The bot cultivates a flirtatious online relationship with the victim, then persuades them into a video chat during which they are tricked into posing inappropriately or carrying out a sexual act. This footage is recorded, and threats are then made to release it to the victim's friends and family unless money is paid.

SHADY SELLING

Bots are often used for illicit advertising – that is, they spam social media platforms with links to commercial websites. Additionally, some unscrupulous influencers have been found to use bots to artificially inflate their number of followers and the engagement with their account – making them seem more popular and therefore able to charge companies more to work with them.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS ...

BEWARE PROLIFIC POSTING

Bots post a superhuman amount of content. A visit to their profile usually proves they're responding to people far faster than a human could. Check their join date and number of followers. If the account has been around for ages and still doesn't have any friends, it probably isn't a real person. A brand-new page is also a red flag.

NOTICE ODD USERNAMES

Finding a social media username that isn't taken can be difficult. People often end up with their name and some numbers – but not the way bots do it. A username like johnsmith5273 is either a sign of a random number generator or a site offering an unwieldy alternative because the preferred name is taken, which isn't something most humans would accept.

VERIFY PROFILE PICS

Check a user's authenticity by investigating their profile picture: bots obviously don't have faces, so they tend to skim publicly available photos to try to fool people. Put suspicious pics through a reverse-image search like TinEye – you might find they actually belong to someone else or are stock images.

CHECK THE CONTENT

Bots can't think for themselves and usually just exist to amplify somebody else's message. Try copying and pasting the text into the search function on Twitter, for example, and see if it's being said anywhere else. If a lot of similar-looking accounts are saying the same thing, you're probably looking at a bot army.

Advice for Parents & Carers

SPOT THE BOTS

Forewarned is forearmed, so if your children aren't that familiar with the world of bots yet, explain what to look for using the tips in this guide. At the moment, most bots still aren't that sophisticated – so finding accounts which are designed purely to troll people or spread misinformation isn't hugely difficult, even for an untrained eye.

BLOCK AND MOVE ON

Your child isn't obliged to be friends with anyone online, bot or not. Pretty much every social media app has a block button, and you should encourage your child to use it whenever something or someone is making their digital lives less than pleasant. If everyone blocked malicious bots rather than engaging them, they wouldn't pose a problem.

BE SUSPICIOUS

While many people have made lifelong friends over the internet, it's important not to be too trusting. Random strangers adding you on Facebook could well be bots, so do some background checks: do they have any mutual friends? Is it a new account? Even if everything seems fine, encourage your child to be cautious: warn them of potential risks.

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist and the former deputy editor of technology and internet culture website Alphr. Now freelance, he has contributed articles to publications including the *New Statesman*, CNET, the *Evening Standard*, *Wired*, *Rock Paper Shotgun*, *Gizmodo*, *Pocket Gamer*, *Stuff*, *T3*, *PC Pro*, *Macworld*, *TechRadar* and *Trusted Reviews*.



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What Parents Need to Know about POKÉMON GO

AGE RESTRICTION
PEGI
7

Pokémon GO has been among the world's most popular mobile games since its spectacular release in 2016. It's recently enjoyed a resurgence, thanks partly to people combining entertainment and exercise during lockdown. In Pokémon GO – like the Pokémon TV show, trading card series and other video games – players capture, train and battle with their Pokémon creatures: physically exploring locations while using augmented reality via their phone's screen. The game generally provides a positive experience, but there are still some safety concerns to consider.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Pokémon GO requires players to visit in-game landmarks like Pokéstops and Gyms. These are often situated at public real-world locations such as churches or post offices. Sometimes, however, they can inadvertently end up being placed in dangerous areas which are unsuitable for children, even when accompanied by an adult: near a construction site or a main road, for example.

STRANGERS & MEETING OFFLINE

Players often cooperate with friends in the game, and there are many online discussion hangouts. As well as sharing tips and info, these groups may arrange to meet offline to catch Pokémon or attend raids (communal events where players flock to the same real-world place for a mass battle). This can put children at risk of being messaged and invited to meet by strangers under the pretence of talking about the game.

DATA COLLECTION

When a player logs into their Pokémon GO account, the game collects personal data about the user and their device. Locations, emails, names, ages and even camera images can all be accessed. What then happens to this information is open to debate. Niantic, the game's developers, maintain that they do not sell user information to third parties – but the fact that they have it at all is a concern, nonetheless.

VISIBLE PROFILES & LOCATION

Pokémon GO players can add each other as 'friends' in the game by sharing their trainer codes. Two trainers who do this can then view each other's information, such as their username. If a username gives any clues to the player's real name or personal details, a stranger may then be able to look them up online. The game also lets users upload images to social media, which could publicly disclose a child's exact location.

IN-GAME PURCHASES

The game uses a currency called Pokécoins, which can be bought for real money (in bundles between £0.79 and £99.99) and exchanged for in-game items such as Pokéballs and berries. It's extremely easy for a child to purchase Pokécoins (even accidentally) if there's a payment method connected to their mobile phone – and possibly rack up a sizeable bill without realising it!

Advice for Parents & Carers

PLAY ALONGSIDE YOUR CHILD

Finding and catching Pokémon with young ones could turn into a great mutual hobby. At 25 years old, it's one of the few games franchises that spans two generations. Enjoying the game together will give you plenty of new things to talk about with your child – and if you played Pokémon in your own childhood, you might impress them with your knowledge of the digital critters!

ENCOURAGE AWARENESS

Remind your child of the physical dangers they could face while catching Pokémon and emphasise staying aware of their surroundings. The game will often alert children (through their phone) when they are close to an interesting Pokémon item – usually sending them excitedly rushing off to find it – so they should never play Pokémon GO near busy roads or in places they don't know well.

DISGUISE THE EXERCISE

One of Pokémon GO's benefits is that it encourages young (and not-so-young!) ones to get exercise outdoors. Some parts of the game can be completed from home, but it's best experienced while walking around your local area. Certain tasks (like visiting Pokéstops) can be repeated every day – and an hour outside having fun catching Pokémon will hardly feel like exercise at all!

USE AN OLDER PHONE

If children use an older phone to play Pokémon GO, then they won't be walking around with their own new device, which could get broken or stolen. Parents are also far less likely to have left a credit card linked to the old mobile. It also means that you can limit the amount of information used to set up an account, and what companies who gain access to your data can do with it.

AGREE PLAY BOUNDARIES

Ensure your child knows where they are (and aren't) allowed to go searching for Pokémon, when they have to be home, and how often they can play the game. Talk to other young Pokémon GO fans' parents or carers to see what boundaries they set for their children. Lunchtimes (if allowed by the school) or after school are ideal times for getting some exercise and catching all those Pokémon!

Meet Our Expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for several years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world: UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Having started gaming at 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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SOURCES: <https://heimdalsecurity.com/blog/is-pokemon-go-safe/>

<https://bleedingcool.com/games/pokemon-go-announces-quality-of-life-updates-for-february-2021/>



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