

Online Risks

Risks are inherent in everyday life, however what is important is being aware of the possible threats that online activity can bring, and how to deal with them.

These risks are grouped into four categories:

1. Conduct: children's behaviour may put them at risk
2. Content: access to inappropriate or unreliable content may put children at risk
3. Contact: interaction with unsuitable, unpleasant or dangerous people may put children at risk
4. Commercialism: children's use of platforms with hidden costs may put them at risk

The [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) has broken these [online safety risk categories](#) down in more detail.

Talking to Children about Online Safety

This can be a daunting prospect, but it's important. Your kids need to know they can talk to you if something does go wrong.

Talking to them about their online activity in the same way you would do about anything else will help them to relax and, if anything is troubling them, they'll be more likely to tell you about it.

We've got some guidance at our '[Keeping Children Safe Online](#)' page, and in our 'Parenting in a Digital Age' series, in the '[It's good to talk](#)' article.

Bullying

Online Bullying, also referred to as cyberbullying, is using technology (including phones, messaging tools, e-mail, chat (including within games) or social networking sites to harass, threaten or intimidate someone.

While grooming, predation and similar activities often cause the most concern for parents, it's a sad fact that bullying is one of the most common issues young people will face online.

The Ofcom research states that about 20% of children aged eight to 15 have been bullied in some way, and that for older children (aged twelve to 15), bullying incidence is consistent between 'real life' (16%) and online (14% on social media, and 12% in messages apps).

We've got some [**cyberbullying advice for parents and carers on the UK Safer Internet Centre website.**](#)

Sexting

Sexting, or 'sending nudes', is sharing intimate content with another person, and includes anything from texts, partial nudity right up to sexual images or videos.

We've developed a resource – '[**So You Got Naked Online**](#)' - that offers children, young people and parents advice and strategies to support the issues resulting from sexting incidents.

Gaming

E-Safety fact: Online gaming can use games consoles, mobile phones or tablets, and PCs, and can be played on apps and websites, as well as traditional game media like cards and discs.

Many games include messaging for gamers to chat with each other. Some are integral to the game, and others are bolt-on apps, like Twitch.

With the range of platforms and types, parents and carers need general advice, as well as guidance for specific gaming environments.

Our 'Parenting in a digital age' series includes an article on '[The real cost of online gaming](#)', which provides some general information around things to be aware of in relation to gaming. We've produced some specific guidance [for PlayStation](#) and [for Xbox](#) too.

Online Video

Online video can be pre-recorded (like YouTube) or 'livestreamed' in real time (using apps like Twitch, or social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook).

YouTube is the biggest and most widely used video service. Over 400 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, so there's a wealth of great content that kids can access. Of course, there is also inappropriate content, and parents have a couple of options to control what children can watch.

YouTube Kids is an app-based approach, available for both Android and Apple iOS devices. Aimed at younger users, it uses a mix of automated Google filters (who own YouTube), review by moderation teams, and feedback from parents.

For older children, or use on a wider range of devices, YouTube Restricted Mode is an additional setting which can be enabled on the YouTube website and app. If enabled it restricts the availability of potentially mature or objectionable content. We've written **a parent's guide to YouTube Restricted Mode**, setting out the things you can do to help your child stay safe when they're watching YouTube.

Harmful Content

Harmful content is anything online which causes a person distress or harm. What may be harmful to one person might not be considered an issue by someone else, but we generally talk about eight types of harmful content:

1. Online Abuse
2. Bullying or Harassment
3. Threats
4. Impersonation
5. Unwanted Sexual Advances (Not Image Based)
6. Violent Content
7. Self-Harm or Suicide Content
8. Pornographic Content

We have a special service, called [**Report Harmful Content**](#), that provides advice about all types of harm online, and helps you find the best way to deal with it.

Devices

We've already touched on some of the devices used for gaming, and looking more broadly at internet access, we see the dominance of the smartphone: [**according to Statista, over half of internet usage in the UK is via a smartphone**](#), with the laptop in second place at about 20%.

The advice some years ago was to locate your computer in a family space, but that's not applicable to phones and other very portable devices.

Tools like [**Google Family Link**](#) for Android devices, or [**Screen Time**](#) for Apple iOS devices can help: you can set up controls around screen time limits, bed time, and restrict installation of apps.

Our '[**Young People and Screentime – A Good Start**](#)' provides tips to help parents and carers get kids off to a good start using digital devices.

Parental Controls

You can also look at setting up parental controls on your Wi-Fi, which can block access to inappropriate or adult content, as well as set time limits on internet usage. The UK Safer Internet Centre has produced a guide to '[**Parental controls offered by your home internet provider**](#)'.

It's worth thinking about the wider context of this too. Our ['Parenting through technology'](#) article (part of the 'Parenting in a digital age' series) has some interesting points.

Social Media

Social media is the term used to describe the websites and apps that allow the creation or sharing of social information. They're interactive, promote the creation and sharing of content, and join up each person (or more accurately, each person's profile) with others in 'social networks'.

For kids, social media services mean they can keep in touch with friends, connect with new people, and share photos and videos with each other.

There are risks too, including:

- Seeing inappropriate or harmful content
- The promotion of harmful or illegal behaviour or conduct
- Sharing too much information, or picking up incorrect information
- Inappropriate contact with other young people or adults

You can download checklists for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Roblox and TikTok from our [social media checklists page](#). The checklists will help parents to understand more about each platform, what information they use, and how to set privacy settings: they're a parent's social media survival guide!