

## Digital Parenting

### Introduction

Nowadays, young people live in a non-stop, social, digital and connected world. To them, technology is the norm as it is all they have ever known.

Whilst the internet is great in that it allows young people to learn, explore and socialise, there are many pitfalls, which we, as adults must make the young people aware of. Every week we read about a new hazard that child may face online, whether this is cyberbullying, sexting or selfies harming young people's opinions of themselves. It is easy to identify inappropriate content for children but we also need to be aware of the content which we may think is safe but can in fact, be very damaging.

These conversations must start at an early age to present a clear understanding of when and how they are safe to explore the online world freely. We must remind our children that not everything on the internet is true and they must be encouraged to question and not to take everything at face value.

### Why are children vulnerable online?

We are all vulnerable at times. We can all feel insecure and the internet can exaggerate those feelings. For young people, this could turn a minor issue into a more serious problem. Rachel Rosen, Health Editor of Parentinfo.org tells us that the best way to help our children avoid harm online is to do the same things we do offline; stay alert to what they are doing and let them know they can talk to you if anything goes wrong.

Until fairly recently, most homes had a family computer on which parents could safely introduce their children to the internet and monitor their usage at the same time. However, as more and more children started to get their own computers for doing their homework and playing games, it became increasingly difficult to ensure they were visiting appropriate websites and not talking to strangers online in the privacy of their bedrooms. Now, of course, in the age of smartphones and tablets, most parents find it a real challenge to not only educate their children in doing the right thing, but monitor and control their online behaviour.

### Build your child's resilience online

Research has shown that we should be focusing on helping our children build their online skills, confidence and creativity as this will make it easier for them to deal with risks if they arise. When we talk about a child's 'digital resilience', we're really talking about their ability to cope with

setbacks and bounce back when they experience something difficult online. Children cannot be protected from online risks any more than they can day to day risks in the street, but not all risks have to turn into harm.

To help prevent that harm, young people need to be streetwise online. This is sometimes called digital literacy and involves young people knowing their way around different technologies, understanding the reliability of different online platforms and understanding online etiquette.

As a parent, you may not be a technical whizz or know what Snapchat is but you can help your child understand the implications of their online behaviour e.g. what goes online stays online, or that it's generally bad practice to say something to someone online that you wouldn't say to their face. It is important that they understand that life is not measured by how many social media 'likes' they get and as a parent we should discuss with them how social media makes them feel and reassure them that they can tell you about anything they do not feel comfortable with online.

### Digital etiquette advice for children

- Think before you attack on social media especially if joining in with other people. Are your comments necessary?
- Keep messages and posts positive and truthful
- Don't post pictures of your friends looking daft without their permission first
- Before you post anything, think about the people in your life reading it
- Remember that what goes online, stays online. Make sure it isn't going to cause regret in 10 years' time.
- It is easy to misinterpret an online message so sometimes it is better to speak in person

<https://www.brainpop.com/technology/freemovies/digitaletiquette/>

### Ensuring your child is safe and secure with a smartphone

You child has asked for their own smartphone but are they really ready for one?

While there is no minimum age for having a smartphone, it is a personal decision and many children are given one as they move up to secondary school. They are very handy for staying in

touch with your children, but it is worth ensuring your child really needs one and is responsible enough to have one.

If you do agree to let your child have a mobile phone, then there are a number of steps you can take to ensure they are safe and understand the risks associated with using a phone.

1. Explain to your child why they should use a passcode and also why they should lock their phone after every use they do a purse or wallet. Not only is this important in a financial sense but also as personal information may be stored on there.
2. Make the most of parental controls built into the phone
3. Take a look at location sharing services and think about whether these need to be on for certain apps
4. Make a note of the phone's IMEI number in case the phone is stolen
5. Establish some rules about how long they can use their phone each day. If using an iPhone, make use of the screen time facility and set limits.

## Parental Controls

Smartphones, tablets, games consoles, apps and computers all have tools to control what your child sees but no one tool can work all the time. Parents and carers should use a range of strategies, including supervision, regular conversations and taking an interest in their child's digital life in order to control and understand what the internet is being used for.

- Age 0-5 pre-schoolers

A recent survey showed that two thirds of children between one and three years old know how to use a tablet. As the first device your child uses is likely to be yours, it's crucial that you make sure they don't accidentally stumble across things they shouldn't. The simplest way is to use parental controls. There will be settings you can choose on your home broadband, your phone and your tablet, which let you control the type of content your children can access online. You can also ensure they don't access inappropriate content stored on your device or make in-app purchases when playing games by using the password controls.

- Age 6-10 years

At this age your child may use the internet without supervision – for example, when doing homework so it's a good time to set rules about their online use. Child-friendly search engines such as Swiggle, Kids Search and Kiddle make it less likely they will stumble across inappropriate content, but tools alone can't guarantee they won't see things they shouldn't. Talk to your child about what they see online and ask them about their concerns. Most apps have age restrictions,

and you should make sure that your child only downloads age-appropriate ones by using a password for all purchases.

- Age 11- 12 years

We encourage parents to think carefully about allowing your child on social media. If you do decide to, make sure they reveal no personal information and choose privacy settings so they only share with family and friends they know offline. A strong password is also essential. If your child has a smartphone, make sure they know about the risks of sharing images, and encourage them to use closed WiFi when away from the home. It's free to use in lots of public spaces and can't be used to access explicit content.

### Family Link

Whether your children are younger or in their teens, the Google Family Link app lets you set digital ground rules to help guide them as they learn, play, and explore online.

The app allows parents to block adult content and manage other apps across registered devices. Devices are also monitored for the amount of screen time and can also be remotely locked by parents. The app also have the ability to approve downloads from the Google Play store, limit content visibility in the Play store, change the content filtering setting and turn search on or off in the YouTube Kids app and set screen time limits on Android devices.

To use the parental control app, child accounts must be set up on each device. Google places a small fee on credit for each account created, which it says goes to a child protection agency.

Googles 'Pretty please mode' is also inbuilt and teaches the children that use the devices to be polite and use manners – like saying please and thank you, for Google voice commands.

### Qustodio

Qustodio is a user friendly app which offers a combination of features and is excellent for parents who are a little short on time. It offers a dashboard that shows you all recent mobile activity for any connected device, including time spent on specific services like Instagram or Twitter. From there you can set time limits, track texts, filter out racy sites, and block any game or app. Plenty of customization options make it a great parental control app to use when managing devices for kids of multiple ages, and it also works on Kindle or Nook devices, which is rare. There is both a free and premium paid version of the app however the free version only allows you to control one device.

## Web Watcher

Web Watcher is an android only app. If you feel the need to keep tabs on your child's text messaging, including deleted texts, photos, web browsing, call log, and location then this app has all of these features. Web Watcher even allows you to delve into their activity on certain apps, including WhatsApp and Viber. You can also set time limits and even capture screenshots of your child's phone screen. Because it's essentially spyware, with a stealth mode, it has to be installed outside the official app store. The downside of the app is that it is you'll need to give it some serious security permissions, and it's very invasive, so you should certainly think twice before considering it.