Parents Online Safety Newsletter

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Welcome to the parents online safety newsletter.

We often get questions from parents and carers around the subject "*is my child old enough to have a smartphone, have their own tablet, or use particular apps or games?*" This is usually a parenting decision rather than a legal matter; however, there are things that you need to consider before deciding which technology and online environments you are happy for your child to access. In addition, all children are different and what might be suitable for one child might not be suitable for another, so it is not necessarily about their age but whether they are ready to manage the risks.

Is my child ready to have their own tablet?

It is often easier for parents and carers if children have their own tablet so that it can be set up appropriately specifically for them. On the iPad, the parental controls can be set up to stop use of the Internet browser Safari, Camera, Facetime etc. On Android tablets running the operating system 4.3 or newer, there are also some parental controls by creating a Restricted profile – you can then control which apps can be used. Search for your tablet and parental controls online to get specific instructions.
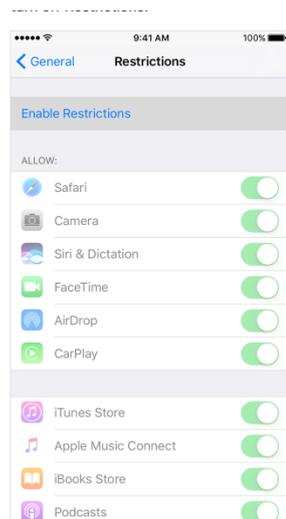
Younger children can benefit from parental controls on the device or on their Appstore or GooglePlay accounts preventing them downloading apps without your permission or making in-app purchases without your consent. Once the account has been set up go into Settings and choose the maturity level and set a PIN for App purchases to prevent those unexpected bills. For the GooglePlay store go to *Menu > Settings > Parental controls* to do this. For the Appstore you control this from the device as shown on the previous image.

Ensure you have access to the device: you should have the passwords and agree where and when the devices can be used.

If your child can follow these instructions then they are probably ready to have a tablet. Some will be ready once they start school; others may need to be 7 or 8 before this is possible for them. If a young child is using a family device, or your tablet that has limited or no controls on, then they must be supervised. For more information see
https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/devices-computers/

Rather than having their own device, many tablets can now be set up with profiles for different members of the family. This can work well and prevent children from seeing material they shouldn't, but there may be issues if different people want to use the device at the same time. For information about how to set up profiles on devices see the link above.

The child or young person will still need supervision and/or monitoring depending on their age.

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In summary:

- Consider giving a child their own device or their own profile on a shared device
- Decide whether you want your child to be able to contact others online
- Check out whether you want to use parental controls
- Think about how you will supervise and monitor

Is my child ready to have their own smartphone?

We find many children in year 5 (aged 9 and 10) have a smartphone and are using apps like Instagram and Snapchat on these (see later). The reason often given by parents is that the child needs to be able to communicate with them at school or on the way to and from school. All schools have in place robust communication policies for parents and there should be no need for a child to have a phone simply to communicate with parents at school: in fact many primary schools insist that mobile phones are stored safely at school, for example in the school office, and other schools allow phones to be kept in bags but not to be used at school. In relation to getting to and from school, if children are going a relatively short distance then there is no need for a smartphone as the child might need to call or text but not access the internet. Once a child has a smartphone it is almost impossible to get a phone contract that does not include data i.e. internet access, which means the child will be able to access the internet outside of any controls you have in place at home. Also, even if they don't have **data included** they will still be able to access the internet at friends' houses or in shops/cafes and other buildings that have **free WiFi**. We have seen a massive increase in the amount of bullying and sharing of inappropriate content by phone in the last two years in younger children and regularly have to attend primary schools to deal with these incidents. Unless your child is travelling long distances to school, we would recommend that you consider very carefully before buying a primary age child a phone and that children

should only be given smartphone once they are old enough to deal with the online safety issues around their own and other people's behaviour. They need to be able to **block and report** another user and **not to answer** any messages or requests from people they don't know.

In summary:

- Does your child need to be able to contact you?
- Does your child need access to the internet outside your home?
- Can you child manage the risks from inappropriate content and conduct from others without your help?

Is my child ready to use Instagram, Snapchat and Musical.ly?

All three of these popular apps are intended for people of 13 and older, according to their terms and conditions. Recent information from the NSPCC suggests that about half of parents are not sure what the age restrictions are https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/news-opinion/social-media-age-limit/. This is not helped by there being no proper age verification on most social media apps. It is sometimes difficult for parents to work out what apps actually do and what risks their children might be exposed to. These three apps might be thought to be a photo-sharing app, a messaging app and a music video app. In fact all three have multiple social media features that can cause issues. On all the apps a young person might well see **inappropriate content**. Because the manufacturers state that the app is only for 13+, if content is unsuitable for users younger than this, it will not be removed by the manufacturer, even if reported. If another user reports your child as having an under-age account then the app is perfectly within its rights to delete your child's account and prevent them from creating another one.

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How LIT was Little Mix's performance on Lively.TV?!

Check out their hit song #TouchChallenge & the ladies will be hooking up their fave muser with a swag box that includes all their albums!!!

Good luck!

24 notes

All the apps have **privacy settings** which prevent some other users being able to contact each other. However, these are not switched on automatically and must be switched on by the user. Even if an account has been made private, the **profile picture** and some **biography/personal information** is usually **still visible**. You may wish to consider your child using a profile picture without their face and reducing the amount of information showing in the biography.

Even once these settings are switched on there is a chance that a friends request can be sent to a user from a stranger; this means a person using the app needs to be confident deleting any requests of this type. All the apps have the ability to contact others and so even if a user is speaking to someone they know, there is still a risk of **bullying**, particularly as part of a **group chat** with multiple people, where a friend of a friend can join the group who your child might not know.

All the apps also use **locations services (sometimes known as GPS or geofilters)** in some way: this potentially can show other users where your child lives and can be used by adults grooming children to target a young person.

It is not just written messages that can be exchanged. All these apps have the ability to share **images** and **video** and **live streaming/video chat** (with Muscial.ly the user needs to download another app Live.ly). This allows your child to watch live streams of other users (this means they cannot be checked in any way first) and also to livestream to other users. During the livestreams other users can comment, ask questions etc in the chat window so it is not a one-way conversation. This can lead to people having very inappropriate conversations with your children and asking them for images or videos of themselves or
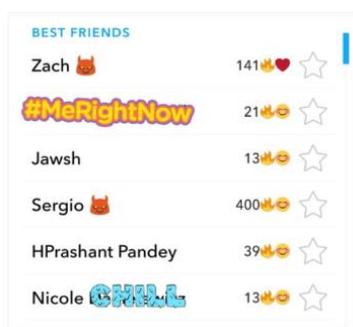
moving them into a more private environment.

The apps all use strategies to encourage **frequent usage**. In Snapchat, for example, users get symbols next to their friends showing if they are best friends (hearts) or if they have a **Snapstreak** (flames), which is 3 or more days

where users have messaged each other. Snapstreaks can last for hundreds of days and there is a pressure for users to keep them going. This can have the effect that a user will choose to **share passwords** if they are going to be on holiday somewhere they cannot use the app, for example abroad with no wifi. This can then have knock on effects that another person could access their account and cause problems by posting inappropriate or unpleasant information and, if the password is used for more than one account, could access your child's other accounts.

Muscial.ly and Instagram encourage using # **hash tags** to link to other people's content and encourage users to do various challenges. In the image above the users on Muscial.ly, known as Musers, are encouraged to upload a video of themselves miming/dancing etc. to Little Mix's new song, which may be appropriate.

Unfortunately, although many of these features can be lots of fun if used safely and appropriately, they can also be used to bully, groom and share inappropriate content so it is important that you consider whether the particular child can understand the risks, will leave any settings switched onto protect them, and have the capacity to ignore requests or conversations from someone they don't know.

Our recommendation is that if you are considering allowing your child to use any of these apps, check the

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See more at https://www.dorset.police.uk/neighbourhood-policing/safe-schools-team/

age rating. Check the App store or Google Play to see what the app is rated or look on the website for that app. Instagram is rated Parental guidance on the GooglePlay store. Apps rated Parental Guidance need to be checked thoroughly because they vary a great deal.

If you are thinking about giving a higher age-rated app to a younger child, download it first to see what the pitfalls might be and so that you can **ensure you understand** all the settings before you sit down with your child and create an account with them and talk them through the issues. In addition, **switch on privacy settings** and **switch off GPS/location services**. Check the apps periodically by accessing via your child's phone or tablet: check content being shared by your child and their friends and check the friends/followers list. Do not rely on being a friend, follower or subscriber of your child's account: if the child has set up an additional account you don't know about, you won't see it and you won't be able to see any private messages. Note that with Snapchat you will not be able to see messages unless they are saved/screenshotted; this is one of the features of Snapchat. Instagram has recently also created disappearing messages, photos and videos. We are dealing with bullying, grooming and sharing of inappropriate and illegal images on all of these apps.

In summary:

- Do you understand how the app works and what the risks are?
- Does your child understand the risks?
- Is your child likely to change the settings?
- Will your child answer a message from someone they don't know?
- What will your child do if they see inappropriate content?

Is my child ready to do online gaming?
Many people enjoy online gaming whether that is using a phone, tablet, computer or games console. If you are not a gamer yourself it can be difficult to understand the risks to your child if they are gaming online.

Content. It is very common in schools to find young children of 7 or 8 telling us about Call of Duty, Grand Theft Auto or other 18 rated games. Games are rated to provide guidance about the types of material you can expect to see and hear and tell you what age they are suitable for **3, 7, 12, 16 and 18**: they relate to **age suitability** rather than difficulty of the game. The following information explains why a game would be rated 18.

PEGI 18
The adult classification is applied when the level of violence reaches a stage where it becomes a depiction **of gross violence** and/or includes elements of specific types of violence. Gross violence is the most difficult to define since it can be very subjective in many cases, but in general terms it can be classed as the depictions of violence that would make the viewer feel a **sense of revulsion**.

As well as an age rating, games also carry **descriptors** indicating the main reasons why a game has received a particular age rating. There are eight such descriptors: violence, bad language, fear, drugs, sexual, discrimination, gambling and online gameplay with other people. See examples below.
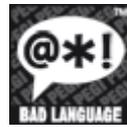
Bad Language
Game contains bad language

Discrimination
Game contains depictions of, or material which may encourage, discrimination

Drugs
Game refers to or depicts the use of drugs

Fear
Game may be frightening or scary for young children

Sex
Game depicts nudity and/or sexual behaviour or sexual references

Violence
Game contains depictions of violence

A game such as Grand Theft Auto has all of these issues. A game such as Minecraft is rated 7. For more information about age ratings see the PEGI website http://www.pegi.info/en/index/

For more information about suitability of games see Common Sense Media https://www.commonsensemedia.org/

Contact. Online gaming by its nature involves playing with other players. Again it is not uncommon to find very young children being allowed to play games **online with strangers**. This puts the child at risk of **bullying and grooming and even potentially radicalisation**. Younger children of primary age can find it difficult to identify when a person is behaving suspiciously and so it is not recommended they play games online with people they don't know if there is the ability to message or speak on a headset. This includes games such as Clash Royale or Clash of Clans where gamers band together in clans – your child can speak to all those in their clan – make sure you and they know who the other players are. Set up the clan so strangers cannot join and if other users behave badly they need to be removed from the game. Even where users are playing with friends they know, there is a risk of **online bullying** just the same as social media apps.

Where users are playing **adult rated games**, many of the people playing them will be adults and therefore the conduct of those players may not be suitable for younger users. Adult gamers can sometimes be quite unpleasant to younger players, especially on games that they do not consider suitable for younger players.

Online access and parental controls. Be aware that modern games consoles have **access to the internet** via browsers so if you have put parental controls on other devices you need to consider putting parental controls on the X-box/Playstation/Nintendo Switch https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/devices-computers/

This means that they can access lots of other websites, apps and games other than the ones you may be aware of.

In summary:

- Check the age rating and content of games
- Make sure children are playing with friends they know if they can message or chat with them
- Any online game has a risk of bullying even where a child is playing with friends they know – make sure you monitor or supervise

Is my child ready to be a YouTuber?
Children now watch more videos online than programmes on TV and this starts at an early age. **YouTube is rated 13** by the manufacturer, so if content is suitable for this age it will not be removed. There is a great deal of content on YouTube unsuitable for younger children. However, the latest trend is that many young **children are creating videos** and sharing these on their YouTube accounts, often unbeknown to their parents. Using the YouTube app allows a user to share videos with two or three taps: many young children are able to do this. One of the concerns about sharing images or videos online is that they are essentially **available for ever**. Even if a user deletes their account or deletes the individual images and videos one of their followers or subscribers can take a copy. When videos created when the user was 8 are shared again when they are 12 they can become a target for unpleasantness or **bullying**.

In summary:

- Making the videos can be fun but do they need sharing online?

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General considerations

Before giving your child new technology or access to a new website/game/app you need to consider the following:

- Do I understand how this technology works so I can help my child?
  Research online or download the app to try it out. You don't have to love it but you do need to get it.
- Do I understand the risks?
  Is the content suitable and who can contact my child? If I can't make it safe, then it isn't suitable
- Have I explained how the technology must be used to the child before they have it?
  Explain to the child what the risks are, and what behaviours you are expecting. Be clear that if they aren't behaving safely, the technology may have to be removed until they are older.
- Can I make this safer by using any technical tools or settings and, if so, will my child change these settings?
  For younger children (primary school age) consider tools and settings on devices and broadband as well as on apps. For older children, ensure the child understands the safety settings and talk through with them how to use it safely. If you think a child is going to change the settings, consider whether they are ready to have it
- How am I monitoring this?
  Parents should have access to all devices via the passwords so they can check them at any time. Younger children should be supervised while they are using the devices: older children can just be monitored from time to time. Check out what their online friends are doing as well as what your child is doing. Go into the apps and see what kinds of comments, images and videos are being shared. Do not rely on being a friend/follower/subscriber to your child's account – you will not be able to see private messages or additional accounts.
- Do I know where to go to get help for my child?
  If you child is having problems with bullying or sending/receiving inappropriate images for example, see how you can help them to use the tools on the game or app. If necessary, report the issue to school. If your child is having a more serious issue, you may need to report this to police. Look at the NPSCC website for help https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/ *or phone their special parents online safety helpline*
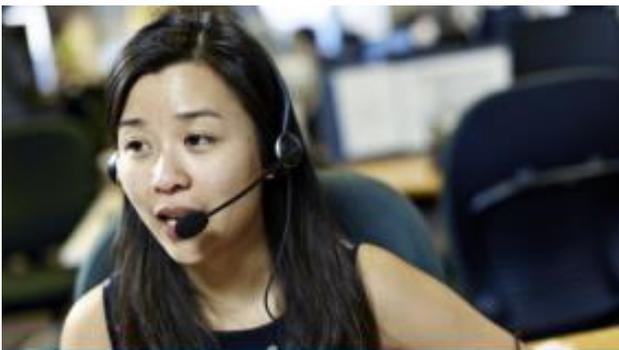
Talk to someone about online safety

Whether you want to set up parental controls, adjust privacy settings or get advice on social networks, experts from the free O2 & NSPCC helpline are here to help.

0808 800 5002

Hot off the press: The NSPCC have relaunched their ShareAware campaign https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/

Parents can sign up to the **Icebreaker email** series and become an expert in their child's online world in 6 weeks, follow their **four simple steps** to keeping kids safe online, watch the film **'Safety advice from a 10 year old'** or visit **Net Aware** – the NSPCC guide to your child's social networks apps and games. You can also download a template for a **Family Agreement**.

Talk — Explore — Agree — Manage

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See more at https://www.dorset.police.uk/neighbourhood-policing/safe-schools-team/