



**North Oxfordshire Academy**

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Dear Parent/Carer,

At North Oxfordshire Academy we are always trying to find more ways to ensure students are staying safe whilst using the internet. With summer coming up and students not having the 'see it, hear it, take it' policy to contend with at school, they are likely to be on their phones/devices a lot more often.

There has been some recent research from OFCOM who have looked at child and parent use and attitudes around media. The research shows that the main parental concerns are children seeing age-inappropriate content, cyberbullying, children giving their personal details to strangers and children having their data collected by companies. With 76% of 12–15-year-olds playing games online, it is understandable how parents and carers can have these concerns.

Attached to this letter, you will find some online safety tips you can implement at home, ways to manage screen time, how to apply privacy settings to Instagram and links to other sources you may find interesting and helpful. I have also attached guides on the top apps being used at the moment; YouTube, Whatsapp, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram. These guides will give you more information on what the apps do and the potential risks.

It is vital that we all work together to keep your children safe online.

Best Wishes,

Mr D Jeffs

Network Manager and Lead in Whole School E-Safety



## The internet is amazing!

It's very easy to think about how the internet can affect us negatively with online trolls, fake news, scams and cyber bullying, but the internet is amazing, and we can't forget that. Our focus should be on how to use it in the best way possible and take advantage of all the great things it has to offer us.

Here are some ways in which the internet is amazing!

1. **Staying in touch** – for families who can't always be together, such as children with parents who have separated or grandparents who live far away, the internet lets us connect and stay close together. Video chats and sharing photos is a great way to stay connected when you can't be together in person.
2. **Making friends** – young people who have trouble dealing with social situations may find that online interaction makes them feel less isolated. Interacting successfully online can even give children more confidence to take these skills into their offline relationships.
3. **Being creative** – young people who are interested in music, writing or art can find loads of useful resources and ways to practice online. They can start blogs and follow their favourite artists. The internet can be a great way for young and aspiring creatives to get started.
4. **Finding help** – some experts are wondering if the internet is having a negative effect on mental health problems. There is not enough evidence to support this yet, but we do know that there are many positive effects as people dealing with an issue often find essential support online.
5. **Getting ahead** – most jobs (if not all) require some degree of technical skill.
6. **Learning** – platforms such as Sparx and Satchel One, which we use at Northampton Academy, are great tools for practicing skills in other subjects.
7. **Staying organised** – lots of schools, including Northampton Academy, post home learning tasks online. This is another way of you and your child being able to keep on top of their schedule.
8. **Special needs and disability** – there are lots of useful tech being developed to support people with disabilities and special educational needs. Some parents of children with autism have said that playing Minecraft with other young people has improved their communication and teamwork abilities.

**Finally, it's fun!** People of all ages love the internet for lots of reasons, and we shouldn't ignore the fact that it's just plain fun. When used responsibly and in moderation, the online world can be a great source of engaging, creative entertainment for kids.



## Online safety tips

*Fact: More than half of young people have a social media account by the time they are 13 years old.*

If you are unsure of what exactly your child is engaging with online, try going through this checklist:

1. **Have a conversation** – this is the best way to find out what your child is doing online. Ask them to tell you about what they do and what sites they like to visit. Discuss with them what they might come across. There are always stories in the press which can help to start a conversation.

Use this link if you are unsure of how to start a conversation:

[Conversation starters to encourage kids to share their digital lives - Internet Matters](#)

2. **Agree on boundaries** – Have a family agreement about where and when they can use the internet, how much time they can spend online, the sites they visit and the information they can share. **A tip is to introduce tech free mealtimes and encourage them to keep phones out of the bedroom at night.**

3. **Put yourself in control** – make use of parental controls on your home broadband. Here are some links to parental guidance on some of the common internet service provider websites. If yours isn't on the list, have a look on your internet providers website and its very likely you will find help on parental controls on there.

Remember, although these tools can create a safety net to protect children online, they are not 100% fool proof, so it is important to continue having regular conversations with children about their online use to equip them with coping strategies to deal with online risks.

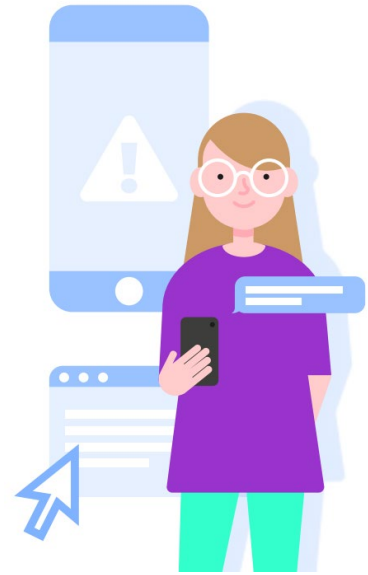
4. **Check if its suitable** – the age ratings which come with games, apps, films and social networks are a good guide as to whether they are suitable for your child. The minimum age limit for a social network account is 13 and this includes Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. Here is a link to check the minimum age of popular apps. [What age can my child start social networking? - Internet Matters](#)





5. **Get them clued up about social networking** – talk to children about the benefits and risks of social networking before they join any sites. Let them know that anything they upload, email or message could stay around forever online. Help them to set up a profile so they are in control of who can comment and message them. Help them to be critical of the things they see online and judge the quality and reliability of online sources.

Here is a good social media privacy guide which shows popular apps and how to change privacy settings: [Social Media privacy setting guide - Internet Matters](#)



*Fact: As they get older, 8 out of 10 teens spend most of their time online chatting to friends on social media or in games.*

### Teach your child the simple rules

- Don't share personal information like a phone number or address. If this is needed for them to sign up to something, tell them to check with you first.
- Encourage them to talk to real life friends and family only when they are online.
- Show them how to use privacy settings. The default on many sites is set to public.
- Advise them not to arrange to meet with people in real life that they have only spoken with online.
- Advise them to use secure and legal sites when downloading music and games. To learn more about the dangers of digital piracy, click here: [Dangers of digital piracy advice hub | Internet Matters](#)
- Check attachments and pop-ups for viruses before downloading anything.
- Make sure they know not to post things online that they wouldn't want you to see.



## Tips for a meaningful conversation

<p>Ask them for advice on how to do something online and use this as a conversation starter.</p>	<p>Be sensitive and praise them when they share their online experiences with you.</p>
<p>Make sure they know they can come to you if they are upset by something they have seen online and remember <b>it is important to listen and not overreact.</b></p>	<p>Tackle peer pressure by explaining that if they are talked into bullying someone online or sending inappropriate images it <b>may get reported to their school or even to the police.</b></p>
<p>Make sure they know how to <b>block abusive comments and report content</b> that worries them.</p>	<p>If your child comes to you with an issue, <b>stay calm and listen without judging them.</b></p>
<p>Teach them to <b>treat others as they would like to be treated</b> online and set a good example with your own internet use.</p>	<p>Talk to them about <b>how much time they spend online</b> and make sure this is balanced against other activities.</p>

## Dealing with it

You can find out where to get help and advice from relevant organisations and agencies using this link: [Report online issues to protect your child | Internet Matters](#)

There is also plenty of information on different situations you may encounter such as cyberbullying, finding inappropriate content, your child's online reputation, online pornography and child grooming.



# Guide to managing children's screen time

internet matters.org

**Effect on behaviour**  
Constant use of a device and features like auto-play on platforms can be habit forming and encourage children to spend longer on screens

**Effect on the brain**  
Screens can have a drug-like effect on the children's brains which can make them more anxious  
It can make children more forgetful as they rely on things like Google, GPS and calendar alerts to look up information

**Effect on sleep**  
Blue light from phones can trick the brain into thinking it's still daylight making it difficult to sleep

## What are the benefits?

- Gives children access to a **wealth of information** to build their knowledge
- Technology **takes away physical barriers** to social connections to make children less isolated
- Exposure to tech has proven to **improve children's learning** and development
- Online games and activities **enhance teamwork and creativity**

# 10 tips to get in control with your child's screen time

1. Set a good example with your own device use
2. Have discussions about the risks that they may face based on their online activities
3. Put in place a family agreement and agree an appropriate length of time they can use their device
4. Help them build critical thinking to understand that some features on platforms are design to keep you watching or playing
5. Encourage them to switch off auto-play on platform to remove the temptation to binge on programmes
6. Use tech tools and parental control to manage the time they spend online and the apps they use
7. Get the **whole family to unplug** and create 'screen free' zones at home
8. Together find apps, site and games that will help children **explore their passions** and make screen time active
9. For younger children find ways to **combine touch screen use** with creative and active play
10. Encourage children to **self-regulate** the time they spend online and the activity they do to ensure they are having a positive impact on their wellbeing



## Privacy

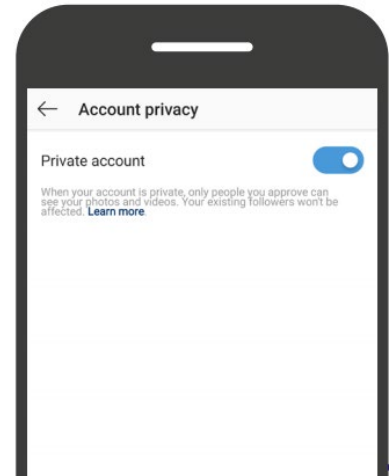
A number of apps provide helpful tools that allow users to control their privacy levels and customise their experience. For young people, these tools can be especially helpful for creating a safe space to connect with others. Here is how to use privacy tools on Instagram.

### Manage privacy

When first using Instagram, we encourage parents to set their child's account to private. If the account is private, your child can approve the people who follow them, and they can remove followers at any time.

#### How to set an account to private

- Go to **Settings**
- Tap **"Account privacy"**
- Swipe to set as **"Private"**

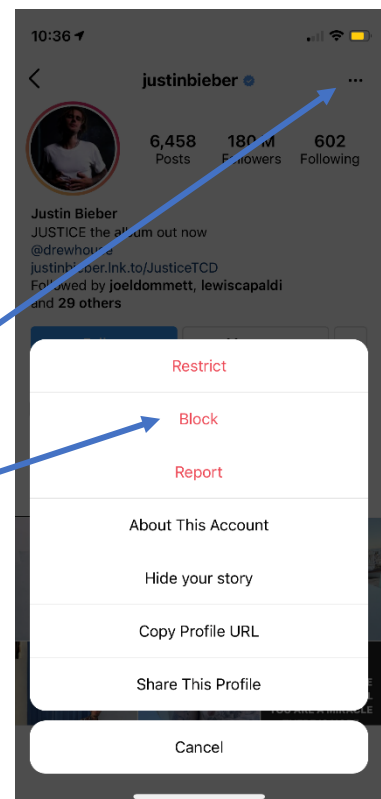


### Block unwanted interactions

Blocking is an immediate way to disengage from any negative interactions. This will block people from seeing and commenting on their posts. When you block an account, that person is not notified. You can unblock an account at any time.

#### How to block an account

- Tap **"..."** on profile
- Tap **"Block"**



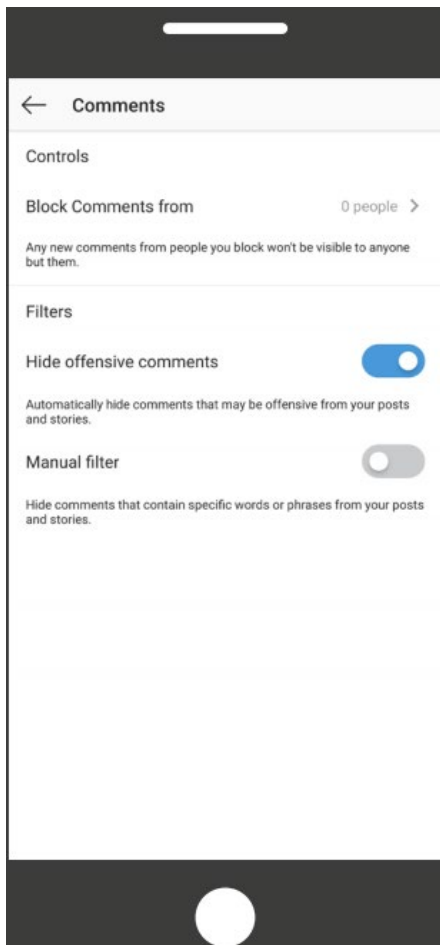


## Manage comments

Your child can also control who can comment on their posts. In the “Comments” section of the app settings, they can choose to:

- allow comments from everyone
- allow comments from people they follow and those people’s followers
- allow comments just the people they follow, or their followers.

*TIP: You can also hide offensive comments and add a filter to hide specific words or phrases from your posts and stories.*



## How to block or allow comments on post

- Go to your profile and tap the **menu icon**
- Tap **“Settings”**
- Tap **“Privacy” > “Comments”**
- Next to Block Comments from, tap **“People”**
- Enter the name of the person you want to block, then tap **“Block” next to their name**
- To unblock someone from commenting on your photos and videos, tap **“Unblock”** next to their name and then tap **“Unblock”** again to confirm





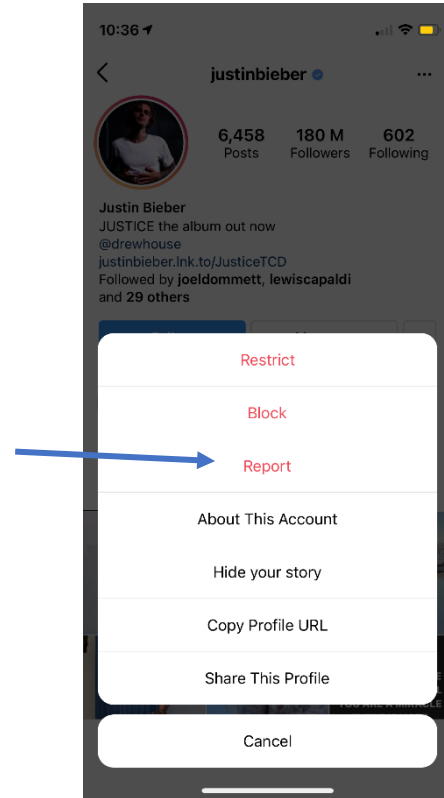
## Report Bullying

Bullying is against Instagram's community guidelines, and it's against their policies to create an account, post photos, or make comments for the purpose of bullying or harassing someone else.

### How to report something

- Tap "..."
- **Swipe left** on a comment or **tap and hold** the message
- Then tap **"Report"**

**NB. Reporting is totally anonymous**



### Unfollow an account

Young people may unintentionally keep following an account that is having a negative impact on them simply because they haven't stopped to think critically about that person's attitude and the impact it might be having on them.

### How to unfollow someone

- Tap **"Following"** from account profile
- Tap **"Following"** next to any name you want to unfollow. The button will turn blue
- Or you can also go to someone's profile and tap **"Unfollow"**

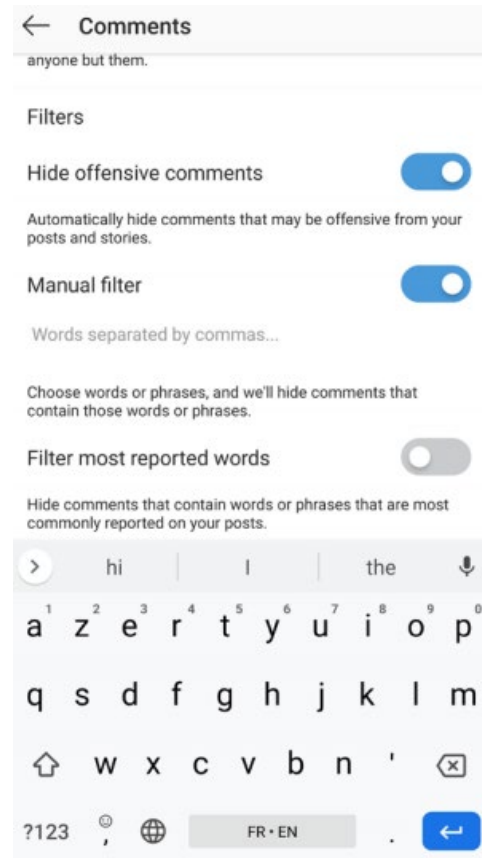
### Filter it out



Instagram has filters that automatically remove offensive words and phrases and bullying comments. Your teen can also create their own list of words or emojis they don't want to have appear in the comments section when they post by going to "Filters" in the comments section.

### How to filter words

- Go to your profile and tap "Settings". Tap "Privacy" > "Comments".
- Next to Block Comments from, tap "People". Next to Hide offensive comments, swipe to toggle the feature on.
- You can also manually filter specific words or phrases from your posts or stories:
  - Next to Manual filter, swipe to toggle the Go to your profile and tap the menu icon . Tap "Settings". Tap "Privacy" > "Comments".
  - Next to Block Comments from, tap "People". Next to Hide offensive comments, swipe to toggle the feature on.



### Mute an account

Through your ongoing conversations, you may identify accounts that your teen isn't interested in interacting with but is hesitant to unfollow, as the person will see their action.

*TIP: Muting will keep posts from those accounts from showing up in their feed, but the other person will not know they've been muted.*

### How to mute accounts

If you don't want to see someone's posts in your feed, you can mute them:

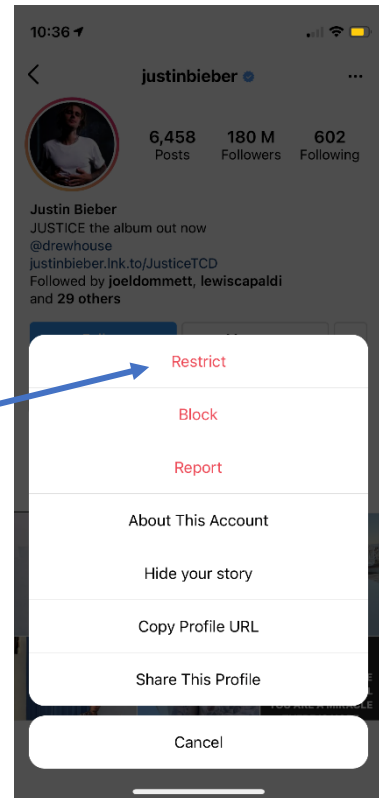
- Go to their profile by **tapping the search icon at the bottom**.
- Type their name into the search at the top and select their profile when it appears.
- Tap "Following" below their profile info and tap "Mute"
- Swipe to toggle the feature off – next to Posts.
- To unmute them, swipe to toggle the feature on, next to Posts.
- You can also mute them from feed:
- Tap (iPhone) or (Android) next to their post. Select "Mute" then "Mute Posts".

## Use “Restrict” to control access

Restrict is another way to control which comments can be seen by your followers or publicly. Comments from anyone on your “Restricted” list will not appear publicly unless you approve them first. Restricted people also won’t be able to see when you’re online or when you’ve read their messages. Young people may feel more comfortable using “Restrict” or “Mute” as an initial response, and then blocking or unfollowing if the problem persists.

### How to restrict an account

- Access **Restrict** by swiping left on a comment. Through the Privacy tab in Settings, or directly on the profile of the account you intend to restrict.
- Tap **“Restrict”** to add the account to your restricted list.

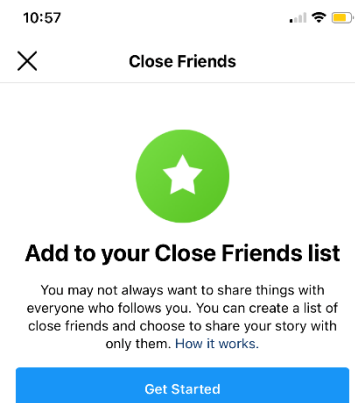
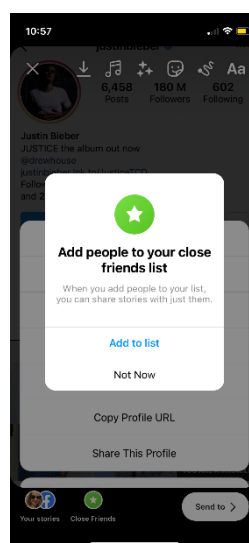
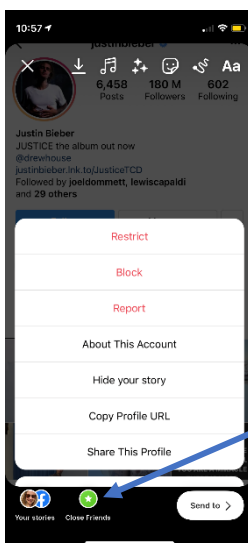


## Use ‘Close friends’

Even with have a private account, there are ways to post that are even more selective. The “Close Friends” setting on a story will keep anyone who isn’t on a “Close Friends” list from seeing the story. Importantly, people who are unable to see the story won’t know that they are missing something.

### How to create a Close Friends list

- Go to the **main menu**
- Tap **“Close friends”**
- Tap **“Add”** next to profiles to add close friends





# 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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 of '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.



### 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 & 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



### 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

Parveen 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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# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# INSTAGRAM

follow

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, with over 1 billion users worldwide. The platform allows users to upload images and videos to their feed, create interactive 'stories', share live videos, exchange private messages or search, explore and follow other accounts they like – whilst at the same time continuously updating and adding new features to meet the needs of its users.

AGE RATING

13+

## ADDICTION

Many social media platforms are designed in a way to keep us engaged on them for as long as possible. There's a desire to scroll often more in case we've missed something important or a fear of missing out. Instagram is no different and young people can easily lose track of time by aimlessly scrolling and watching videos posted by friends, acquaintances, influencers or even strangers.

## PRODUCT TAGGING

Product tags allow users (particularly influencers who are sponsored to advertise products) to tag a product or business in their post. This tag takes viewers, regardless of age, directly to the product detail page on the shop where the item can be purchased and where children may be encouraged by influencers to purchase products they don't necessarily need.

## EXCLUSION AND OSTRACISM

Young people are highly sensitive to ostracism. Feeling excluded can come in many forms such as: not receiving many 'likes', not being tagged, being unfriended, having a photo untagged, or not receiving a comment or reply to a message. Being excluded online hurts just as much as being excluded offline – with children potentially suffering lower moods, lower self-esteem, feeling as if they don't belong or undervalued.

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Product tagging on Instagram only works on public accounts. If your child wants to share their clothing style, make-up etc and tag items in a post then they may be tempted to change their settings to public, which can leave their profile visible to strangers.

Buy Milk

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### HAVE OPEN DIALOGUE

Talk to your child about live videos and the risks involved and how they can do it safely with family and friends. Talk to them about ensuring they have safety settings on so only followers can view them live, and maybe help them prepare what they would say when they do go live.

### REMOVE PAYMENT METHODS

If you're happy for your child to have a card associated with their Instagram account, we suggest adding a PIN which needs to be entered before making a payment. This can be added in the payment settings tab and will also help prevent unauthorised purchases.

### USE MODERATORS

Instagram has launched 'live moderators' on Instagram live where creators can assign a moderator and give them the power to report comments, remove viewers and turn off comments for a viewer. It's recommended to keep devices in common spaces so that you are aware if they do go live or watch live streaming.

### FAMILIARISE YOURSELF

Instagram is one social media app which has its safety features available to parents in a user-friendly manner. The document provides examples of conversation starters, managing privacy, managing comments, blocking and restricting and can be found on the Instagram website > community > parents.

### FOLLOW INFLUENCERS

Following influencers will allow you to monitor what they're sharing as well as being able to discuss anything which you deem inappropriate. Talk to your child about who they follow and help them develop critical thinking skills about what the influencer is trying to do. For example, are they trying to sell a product by promoting it?

### BE VIGILANT AND REASSURE

Talk to your child about the use of filters. While they can be fun to use they don't represent the real them. If you find your child continuously using a filter, ask them why and reassure them that they are beautiful without it to build up their feelings of self-worth. Discuss the fact that many images online are filtered and not everyone looks 'picture perfect' in real life, which can also lend itself to discuss what is real and not real online.

### MANAGE LIKE COUNTS

Due to the impact on mental wellbeing, Instagram has allowed users to change the focus of their experiences online away from how many likes a post has by hiding the like counts. Users can hide like counts on all the posts in their feed as well as hiding the like counts on their own posts. This means others can't see how many likes you get. This can be done by going into settings > notifications > posts > likes > off

### BALANCE YOUR TIME

Instagram now has an in-built activity dashboard that allows users to monitor and control how much time they spend on the app. Users can add a 'daily reminder' to set a limit on how much time they want to spend on Instagram, prompting them to consider if it's been too long with a 'take a break' message. There's also the option to mute notifications for a period of time. These features can help you have a conversation with your child about how much time they are spending on the app and to set healthy time limits.

## Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant at BCyberAware. She has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety workshops and policies for schools in Australia and the UK. Claire has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviours of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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Sources: <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-family-centers-and-supervisor-tools> | [https://about.instagram.com/en-GB/about/privacy/introducing-family-centers-and-supervisor-tools](https://about.instagram.com/en-GB/blog/1/https://about.instagram.com/en-GB/about/privacy/introducing-family-centers-and-supervisor-tools) | <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-real-time-usage-data>



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# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION  
**13+**



## CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

Even if your child only connects with people they know, they may still get friend requests from strangers. The Quick Add option lets users befriend people the app recommends – but these ‘friends’ are merely a username, which could have anyone behind it. Accepting such requests reveals children’s personal information through the Story, SnapMap and Spotlight features, potentially putting them at risk from predators.

## EXCESSIVE USE

Snapchat works hard on user engagement, with features like streaks (messaging the same person every day to build up a high score). Spotlight Challenges tempt users into spending time producing content in search of cash prizes and online fame, while it’s easy for children to pass hours watching Spotlight’s endless scroll of videos.

## INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some videos and posts on Snapchat aren’t suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so even an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app’s ‘disappearing messages’ feature also makes it easy for young people (teens in particular) to share explicit images on impulse – so sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat.

Snapchat is an instant messaging app which allows users to send images, videos and texts to people in their friends list. One of Snapchat’s unique features is that pictures and messages ‘disappear’ 24 hours after they’ve been viewed; however, this content isn’t as temporary as many believe – with some users saving screenshots or using another device to take a photo of their screen. This year, Snapchat added ‘My AI’: a customisable chatbot with which people can chat and share secrets, as well as asking for advice and suggestions of places to visit.

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

My AI is Snapchat’s new chatbot, which replies to questions in a human-like manner. However, the software is still in its infancy and has significant drawbacks, such as biased, incorrect or misleading responses. There have already been numerous reports of young users turning to AI for medical help and diagnoses, which could be inaccurate and therefore potentially dangerous.

## ONLINE PRESSURES

Although many of Snapchat’s filters are designed to entertain or amuse, the ‘beautify’ effects on photos can set unrealistic body-image expectations – creating feelings of inadequacy if a young person compares themselves unfavourably with other users. Snapchat now also has ‘priority’ notifications (which still get displayed even if a device is in ‘do not disturb’ mode), increasing the pressure on users to log back in and interact.

## VISIBLE LOCATION

Snap Map highlights a device’s exact position on a virtual map which is visible to other users. There are options to restrict who can see this information: all friends, only you (Ghost Mode) or selected friends. Snapchat also has real-time location sharing, which is intended as a buddy system to ensure friends have reached home safely – but which could also be used to track a young person for more sinister reasons.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### TURN OFF QUICK ADD

The Quick Add feature 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 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

In 2021, Snapchat rolled out a new safety feature: users can now 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 that they rarely communicate with, to maintain their online safety and privacy.



### DISCUSS AI

Although My AI’s responses can often give the impression that it’s a real person, it’s essential that young people remember this certainly isn’t the case. Encourage your child to think critically about My AI’s replies to their questions: are they accurate and reliable? Remind them that My AI shouldn’t replace chatting with their real friends, and that it’s always better to talk to an actual person in relation to medical matters.



### CHAT ABOUT CONTENT

It may feel like an awkward conversation (and one that young people can be reluctant to have) but it’s important to talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting. Remind your child that once something’s online, the creator loses control over where it ends up – and who else sees it. Likewise, it’s vital that children understand that some challenges which become popular on the platform may have potentially harmful consequences.



### KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Profiles are private by default, but children may make them public to gain more followers. Snap Stories are visible to everyone your child adds, unless they change the settings. On SnapMaps, their location is visible unless Ghost Mode is enabled (again via settings). It’s safest not to add people your child doesn’t know in real life – especially since the addition of My Places, which allows other Snapchat users to see where your child regularly visits and checks in.



### 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 sexual images to them, your child can select the three dots on that person’s profile and report or block them. There are options to state why they’re 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: <https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/122678338932-What-is-My-AI-on-Snapchat-and-how-to-use-it> | <https://ad.as.snap.com/en-gb/news/early-learning-get-on-the-a-i-game-safety-honourments> | <https://www.nccacw.com/2023/04/04/snapchat-ai-features-what-you-need-to-know/> | <https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/702202426944>

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# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION  
**13+**

(certain features are restricted to over-18s only)

TikTok is a free social media platform that lets users create, share and watch short videos ranging anywhere from 15 seconds to 10 minutes in duration. The app gained notoriety for its viral dances, trends and celebrity cameos and can be a creative, fun platform for teens to enjoy. Now available in 75 languages, it has more than a billion active users worldwide (as of spring 2022) and is most popular with the under-18 age bracket. In fact, a 2022 Ofcom report found TikTok to be the most-used social media platform for posting content, particularly among young people aged 12 to 17.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

While TikTok's "Following" feed only displays videos from users someone follows, "For You" is a stream of clips based on their previously watched content. Most videos on a child's "For You" feed will therefore be light-hearted and amusing, but it could potentially surface something unsuitable. TikTok's guidelines prohibit the sharing of illegal or inappropriate content, but the sheer volume of uploads mean they aren't manually monitored and vetted.

18  
CENSORED

### DANGEROUS CHALLENGES

Due to TikTok's immense popularity, some young people have unfortunately been influenced by videos challenging them to perform harmful, criminal or even deadly acts. One extreme example was the 'blackout' trend, which encouraged users to hold their breath until they passed out from a lack of oxygen. It led to two families filing lawsuits against TikTok over the tragic deaths of their children.

### CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

With around 1.1 billion users globally, the potential for contact from strangers on TikTok is high – especially as accounts created by over-18s (or youngsters using a false date of birth) are set to public by default. This not only means that someone's profile is visible to everyone else on the app; it also lets their videos be suggested to others and enables anyone to comment on them or download them.

### IN-APP SPENDING

TikTok is free, but users have the option to buy TikTok coins, which can be used to purchase emojis in the app. These emojis are then sent as rewards (retaining their monetary value) to other users for videos they've created. Coin bundles range from £3.99 to an eye-watering £99; TikTok's policy is that they can't be bought by under-18s, but it's possible to bypass this with a fake birthdate.

### ADDICTIVE NATURE

TikTok can be addictive, especially for young people: compulsive repeated use can interfere with sleep patterns and be a distraction from other activities. The platform recently introduced default usage time limits of 60 and 100 minutes for new members under 18 (in the UK, children with TikTok average 102 minutes per day on the app), but these restrictions can easily be removed in the settings.

### TIKTOK NOW

Introduced in late 2022, the 'TikTok Now' feature lets users post a daily video or photo at the exact same time as their friends. Users receive a synchronised notification at a random time of day, giving them three minutes to take a video or real-time photo. This addition can not only be a distraction to young people but could lead to them inadvertently sharing private content such as their location.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### ENABLE FAMILY PAIRING

Family Pairing allows parents to link their TikTok account with their child's and control their settings remotely. Parents can then, for example, turn on Restricted Mode (reducing the chances of a child seeing inappropriate content); set screen time limits; and manage their child's ability to send messages (and to whom). Children can't alter these settings without parental approval.

### MAKE ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Although under-16s will have their TikTok account set to private by default, bypassing this setting is relatively easy. However, parents have the ability to manually set their child's account to private – meaning that their videos won't be visible to strangers and they won't be able to exchange messages with people who aren't on their friends list.

### LIMIT IN-APP SPENDING

If your child is using an iPhone or Android device to access TikTok, you can alter the settings to prevent them from making in-app purchases. We'd recommend that you enable this feature, as it's quite easy for a young person – without realising what they're doing – to spend a significant amount of real money buying TikTok coins so they can unlock more features of the app.

### DISCUSS THE DANGERS

If your child wants to use TikTok and you're happy for them to do so, it's crucial to talk about the potential risks in this type of app. For example, ensure they understand not to share any identifying personal information – and that they realise they could be exposed to inappropriate content. Thinking critically about what they see on TikTok can help children become generally more social media savvy.

### READ THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that your child might be spending too much time on TikTok, or that they've been emotionally affected by something inappropriate or upsetting that they've seen, it's important to know how to spot the possible signs. Increased irritability and a lack of concentration are potential red flags, as are failing to complete homework or regularly not eating meals.

### Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology journalist with a track record of more than 10 years 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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## Wellbeing

Our overall wellbeing is determined by the physical and emotional experiences we have daily. As technology continues to be such a huge part of our lives, from the way we represent who we are, to the interactions we have with others, it too has an impact on our wellbeing. This is often referred to as your 'digital wellbeing' or 'online wellness.'

It is essentially about having an awareness of how being online can make us feel and looking after ourselves and others when online. This can include recognising the impact being online can have on our emotions, mental wellbeing and even on our physical health and knowing what to do if something goes wrong.

Our digital wellbeing can be influenced by the choices we make online, the content we see, the interactions we have with others and even how long we spend engaging with technology and the internet. Reports have found that those who spend extended amounts of time online are more likely to see upsetting content, receive abusive comments or send abuse to others.

People may communicate their feelings in different ways, but there are things that can give you clues to their emotional state.

- They're not acting like themselves
- They are taking more risks than usual
- They talk about feeling hopeless
- They are harming themselves
- They don't feel like hanging out as much
- Their mind seems to be somewhere else
- They are so anxious they can't relax
- They've gotten negative about life

If you notice any of the behaviours happening repeatedly, there are a number of things you could do.

### Reach out

Just letting them know that they aren't alone and that you care about them is a kind thing to do. Try a casual check-in like, "I've noticed you're not yourself lately. Are you OK?" Asking questions like "Have you talked to anyone else about this?" can be ways to see if they have support in the other parts of their life. Childline has some good guidelines for this.

### Reporting




There are report buttons on different websites and there are teams all over the world working 24 hours a day, seven days a week to review these reports.

**In an emergency, contact the authorities**

If someone is in immediate physical danger, please contact the police or other immediate local authority services for help. The [Shout free text line](#) is also available 24/7 and totally anonymous unless you need to contact emergency services to keep you or someone else safe. Text SHOUT to 85258.

**Here are some organisations which help with children’s online wellbeing:**

	<a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a>
	<a href="#">YoungMinds - children and young people's mental health charity</a>
	<a href="#">Home - Kooth</a>
	<a href="#">Speak to Our Team - The Mix</a>
	<a href="#">Home   Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems</a>

**Wellbeing apps**



<p><b>Headspace for kids</b></p> <p><b>Cost: Free for subscribers</b></p>	<p>Available to all subscribers and kids (and their parents) that can enjoy fun, engaging activities that teach them the basics of mindfulness. They'll practice breathing exercises, visualisations and even try some focus-based meditation.</p> <p>This is the kids' part of the popular app Headspace which helps children learn to be calm and relaxed and also learn about compassion, creativity and kindness.</p>
<p><b>Push2Play</b></p> <p><b>Cost: Free</b></p>	<p>Push2Play offers a range of games to help children make screen time active. It features a large number of games that you can do with a specific number of people, the app customises game suggestions to keep kids entertained and active. The app has a game finder that helps children find games based on where they are and how many players they have. It also offers an option to log all the physical activities that children are doing.</p>
<p><b>Plant Nanny</b></p> <p><b>Cost: Free</b></p>	<p>The app gives children a fun little nudge to help them get into the habit of drinking water regularly throughout the day by combining it with the process of growing a plant. You can pick from a selection of virtual plants and enter basic information like your child's weight and how much water they should be consuming.</p>
<p><b>eQuoo</b></p> <p><b>Cost: Free</b></p>	<p>eQuoo is an evidence-based Emotional Fitness Game proven to build resilience, boost your relationship skills, enhance personal growth and lower anxiety.</p> <p>The skills and storylines are based on current psychology using psychoeducation, elements of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, also called CBT, Positive Psychology, EQ, gamification and AI to take you on an adventure that supersedes the game.</p>



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# Looking After Your WELLBEING ONLINE

We all know that taking care of our minds and bodies is essential to keep us feeling happy and healthy. The thing is, we spend so much of our time online these days that it's also important that we remember to look after ourselves in the digital world, too. Our poster has got some simple but useful tips for supporting your wellbeing while you're gaming, on social media or just using the internet.

TAKE CARE WHAT YOU SHARE

TRACK YOUR SCREEN TIME

TAKE BREAKS

REPORT INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

SPEAK UP AGAINST HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR

STAY ACTIVE OFFLINE

BE KIND & BE CAREFUL

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LOOK FOR POSITIVE COMMUNITIES

PAUSE BEFORE YOU POST

GO TECH FREE BEFORE BED

AVOID COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS

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CHECK YOUR PRIVACY SETTINGS

BLOCK BULLIES

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**Extra sources to help with understanding online safety:**

	Use the Good App Guide to get independent reviews of children's apps.
	BBC iWonder Guide is an interactive guide to give you practical tips on how you can keep your children safe online. It covers 7 key areas such as 'Taking control with tech'.
<a href="https://www.vodafone.co.uk/mobile/digital-parenting">https://www.vodafone.co.uk/mobile/digital-parenting</a>	Vodafone's Digital Parenting provides checklists and practical advice on keeping children safe online.
	Together we raise awareness about internet safety, develop information materials and resources and organise high profile events such as Safer Internet Day. You can access a range of resources from across the UK, Europe and wider afield at <a href="http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/parents">www.saferinternet.org.uk/parents</a>
	The Parents and Carers area contains key advice, information on reporting and detailed information on a range of e-safety topics in the Hot topics section. <a href="http://www.childnet.com">www.childnet.com</a>