

UK Safer Internet Day – 9th February 2021



Globally, Safer Internet Day is celebrated in over 140 countries, coordinated by the joint Insafe/INHOPE network, with the support of the European Commission and national Safer Internet Centres across Europe.

In the UK, Safer Internet Day is coordinated by the UK Safer Internet Centre and the campaign sees hundreds of organisations get involved to help start a national conversation about safe, responsible and positive use of digital technology for children and young people

What is Online Safety?

It can be called E Safety (or e-safety), Online Safety or Internet Safety, but it all means the same thing. It's about risk; it's about being aware of the possible threats that online activity can bring, and how to deal with them.

Ofcom's Media Use and Attitudes Report 2019, published in February 2020, tells us that half of ten-year-olds and one in four children under six year olds own their own smartphone. More children watch video-on-demand (VoD) than watch live broadcast TV.

For parents and families and for anyone working with children and young people, it's not easy to keep up with what's going on. With a huge increase in device ownership and use of online services, it is important to ensure that you and your children are safe when enjoying the potential of technology.

What is 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

Staying Safe Online

E-safety doesn't just happen. It needs awareness of the possible threats that online activity can bring, and how to deal with them.

Talking to children about Online Safety can be a daunting prospect, but it's important. Your children 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.

What should you do?

Find your way around - most devices have controls to ensure that children can't access content you don't want them to. Make sure your "in-app" purchases are disabled to avoid nasty surprises.

According to Statista, over half of internet usage in the UK is via a smartphone, with the laptop in second place at about 20%. For more advice about smartphones, gaming devices, tablets and other internet-connected devices take a look at the UK Safer Internet webpage here: [Parents' Guide to Technology | Safer Internet Centre](#)

E-Safety on Tablets

Tablets are really popular with younger children, and the market has several which are geared specifically towards delivering child friendly content.

When it comes to using them, start slowly: only download games and apps you have checked out carefully and steer them towards age targeted content such as: [BBC iPlayer Kids](#) or [YouTube Kids](#).

Sites like www.net-aware.org.uk and or www.common sense media.org provide useful advice and guidance to promote online safety.

E-Safety on Mobile Phones/Smartphones

If you have older children, the focus will probably be shifting from tablets to smaller and more portable mobile devices like phones.

The old online safety messages about having your home computer in a communal place become defunct, because phones are literally mobile computers and can do pretty much the same stuff that traditional desktop PCs can.

You can use tools like [Google Family Link - Home](#) for Android devices, or [Use parental controls on your child's iPhone, iPad and iPod touch – Apple Support](#) for Apple iOS devices, to set up controls around usage, but it's just as important, if not more so, to talk to children about what they should and shouldn't be doing (see 'Setting Boundaries' below).

Social Media Platforms

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 children, 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

Ofcom's research also shows that YouTube remains a firm favourite. Children between 5 and 15 are more likely to use YouTube than other on-demand services such as Netflix, or TV channels including the BBC and ITV.

WhatsApp has also grown to join Facebook in popularity; Snapchat and Instagram are one of the top social media platforms used by children. SWGFL have produced checklists for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Roblox, TikTok and Netflix that you can download from their website which can be found here:

<https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/checklists/>

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!

Gaming

There are so many exciting games out there, and so many consoles to choose from, there is a good chance you might have one in your home. Whether it's Microsoft Xbox, Nintendo Switch or Sony PlayStation, there is something for everyone, and every age.

Consider whether your child is mature enough to join an online community, and whether the games they are playing are appropriate. For more advice on this visit: [Home | Pegi Public Site](#) or [Home \(askaboutgames.com\)](http://askaboutgames.com)

SWGFL have produced some guidance specifically for PlayStation and Xbox:

[Staying safe on PlayStation – 5 in 5 \(swgfl.org.uk\)](#)

[Staying safe on Xbox – 5 in 5 \(swgfl.org.uk\)](#)

Katt Watson is Assistant Project Co-ordinator for SWGfL and the UK Safer Internet Centre, she is a gaming enthusiast and has worked as a beta tester for a number of titles. She has a blog which looks at some of the issues that can arise from online games and apps that ask for real money as well as offer in-game currency or

rewards for increased play time. [Parenting in a digital age: The real cost of online gaming \(swgfl.org.uk\)](http://www.swgfl.org.uk)

Staying Safe Online - Setting Boundaries

Internet safety isn't just about setting up technology in the right way. It's just as important, if not more so, to get the 'offline' setup right: expectations, behaviours, discussions about use. Our advice is to set some ground rules, and ensure children understand them. Here are some areas to look at.

Screen Time

Agree a time limit or number of games beforehand, to avoid repeated disagreements around how long they can spend online.

Please see the leaflet called 'Young People and Screen Time' which provides some tips and checklists to help parents and carers get children off to a good start using digital devices.

Sleep Comes First

It is advisable that the phone stays out of the bedroom to avoid night-time interruptions and having a period of time before bed without phone or tablet use is beneficial too.

The blue light emitted from LCD screens has been shown to disrupt sleep by interfering with our natural body rhythms, blocking our bodies from creating a sleep hormone called melatonin.

Request Access

You care more about your kid's health and wellbeing than anyone else. That means you need to guide them in the virtual world as well as the real world. If you're genuinely concerned about them, ask them to allow you access to the phone.

Monitoring vs Having a Conversation

It is possible to install software onto devices that monitors online activity, alerts you to inappropriate behaviour, and can block access to certain content. This kind of software is becoming increasingly popular, but while this might sound tempting, it might pose a number of issues around your child's right to privacy and could have an impact upon your relationship with them.

For some further reading that raises some interesting points, take a look at an article on the SWGFL website:

[Parenting in a digital age: Parenting through technology \(swgfl.org.uk\)](http://www.swgfl.org.uk)

The best advice is to talk to your child regularly and openly about behaviour and risk, so that they know they can come to you if something goes wrong. Another good article called 'Parenting in a digital age: it's good to talk' can be found here: [Parenting in a digital age: it's good to talk \(swgfl.org.uk\)](https://www.swgfl.org.uk/parenting-in-a-digital-age-its-good-to-talk)

Whole Home Approach

Consider setting parental controls on your Wi-Fi. You can block access to inappropriate or adult content and set time limits which may help rein in those excessive Minecraft sessions.

The UK Safer Internet Centre have produced guidance which is a good place to start: [Parental controls offered by your home internet provider | Safer Internet Centre](https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/parental-controls-offered-by-your-home-internet-provider)

Child Friendly Search Engines/Apps

Net Aware have brought together NSPCC expertise in protecting children and O2's tech know how to keep children safe online providing the latest information on the social networks, apps and games that children are using. There is 76 apps for you to check out but there are a few examples of the most popular ones listed below.

[Net Aware: Your guide to social networks, apps and games \(net-aware.org.uk\)](https://www.net-aware.org.uk/)

Swiggle.org.uk – Child Friendly Search Engine

Swiggle is a search engine designed to provide a safer environment for children taking their first steps on the road to safe online searching.

Powered by Google Custom Search, the results are filtered using Google SafeSearch and educational resources prioritised. We also filter the search terms to check that Swiggle is not being used to search for inappropriate content.

[Swiggle.org.uk - Child Friendly Search Engine | SWGfL](https://www.swiggle.org.uk/)

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 children can access. Of course, there is also inappropriate content, and parents have a couple of options to control what children can watch.

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.

SWGFL have written a parents guide to YouTube restricted mode which sets out the things you can do to help your child stay safe when they're watching YouTube.

[A parent's guide to YouTube Restricted Mode \(swgfl.org.uk\)](https://www.swgfl.org.uk/parents-guide-to-youtube-restricted-mode)

[BBC iPlayer Kids](#)

BBC iPlayer Kids is a brand-new free app, available to download now onto your mobile or tablet. Find all your favourite CBBC and CBeebies shows in a safe and easy to use app - made just for you. Watch shows now or download them to enjoy later!

[YouTube Kids](#)

'Youtube Kids' is an app made just for children, available for both Android and Apple iOS devices. Aimed at younger users, the app was created to give children a more contained environment that makes it simpler and more fun for them to explore on their own. It uses a mix of automated Google filters (who own YouTube).

[Kiddle - visual search engine for kids](#)

Kiddle is a visual search engine for children, offering safe kids web, image, and video search. Results are vetted by editors.

[Subscribe to our Newsletter | SWGfL](#)

If you would like to receive regular updates and information, latest news and tips about online safety, security and education technology, you can subscribe to the SWGFL newsletter by clicking on the above link.