

10 Top Tips for Parents and Carers

ONLINE SAFETY FOR UNDER 5S

According to Ofcom's most recent research, a significant proportion of children are already online by the time they start school, with 17% of 5-year-olds owning their own mobile phone and 50% using messaging platforms. There is an increase in parents of 3-5-year-olds who say their child uses social media apps or sites. In 2021 and 2022 about a quarter of 3-5 year olds whose parents have said their child used social media apps or sites has risen to three in ten (29%) in 2023, and almost four in ten (37%) this year. As becoming familiar with technology is generally encouraged in younger children – and has been essential for education during the pandemic – it is now more than ever essential that trusted adults recognise both the benefits and the risks of infants and toddlers going online. We've compiled our top tips to help the under-5s start their online safety journey.

1

USE DEVICES TOGETHER



This lets you monitor and control what your child is using the device for. Co-viewing also provides the interaction that supports children's understanding of what they are seeing, discussing content – allowing them to ask you questions, and so on.

2

ACTIVATE PARENTAL CONTROLS



Most digital devices have built-in parental controls that can limit the type of content they have access to and can support, rather than replace, active supervision. Social media and AI toys should be avoided. If your child uses any device (even borrowing yours), it is a good idea to explore what controls the device has and enable them whenever they have access to it.

3

MANAGE SCREEN TIME



This can be tricky, especially if your child is interested in a certain video, app or game. Try to agree on some ground rules and get your child into a routine which includes certain times of the day without devices. According to the new guidance, you need to limit total screen time for young children, wherever possible. Under 2 years: screen time should be avoided, other than for shared activities with family that encourage bonding, interaction and conversation. 2-5 years: should try to keep screen time to 1 hour a day and even less if possible.

4

IF IN DOUBT, ASK



The easiest way to find out what your child is doing online is usually just to talk about it with them. Developing an open dialogue at an early age helps them grow up feeling able to talk to you about their digital life – providing opportunities to intervene if you're concerned.

5

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE



Children often learn by watching and copying those around them, and using digital devices is no exception. When you're around your child, try to follow the same rules that you've set for them. Let them see you balancing your time online with interacting with people in real life, too. Try to keep routines such as meals or before bedtime screen-free, alternative suggestions can be background music, simple conversations, table games, colouring or "I Spy" with colours or letters.

6

BLOCK IN-APP PURCHASES



If your child uses a device that's linked to payment method (such as a bank card), use the parental controls to block buys from app stores, as well as in-app purchases. That will prevent your child from accidentally spending money while on your device.

7

CHOOSE SAFE APPS AND SITES



There are some fantastic apps and platforms that are specifically designed to be safer for children. Always check the PEGI age rating before downloading and app and test it yourself before allowing your child to use it. Choose slow-paced, age-appropriate content and being mindful of risks such as autoplay features, algorithm-driven content, and in-app adverts or purchases.

8

INVOLVE THE FAMILY



If your toddler has older siblings, it's likely that their rules for device use will be different – and that they'll access content that isn't appropriate for younger ones (a particular worry if they share devices). Encourage your whole family to be good role models and help little ones stay safe online.

9

TALK ABOUT BEING SAFE ONLINE



Just like we teach children about being safe in the real world, we need to educate them about how to stay safe online. Use age-appropriate language to help them understand, and plenty of hand gestures can reinforce what you're telling them.

10

SUPPORT CREATIVE AND ACTIVE PLAY



Physical and creative activities are important for a child's wellbeing, and there are plenty of ways to incorporate technology into that. For example, you could encourage games that require physical movement; dance and sing along to songs your child loves; and follow step-by-step crafting videos. Screens should not replace key aspects of early development, such as sleep, physical play, and interaction with adults.

Meet Our Expert

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