

Internet safety for children - Tips for adults

Why internet safety matters for children?

School children like going online to look at videos, play games and connect with friends and family. They might also be using the Internet for schoolwork and homework. They can do this using computers, mobile phones, tablets, TVs and other internet-connected devices.

With the above in mind, children are starting to be independent online and in certain cases might go online unsupervised, this means that there are potentially **more Internet safety risks** for them than there are for younger children. This is especially so if your child uses the Internet to communicate with others – for example, on social media or within games.



When you take some practical Internet safety precautions, you protect your child from potentially harmful or inappropriate content and activities and **your child gets to make the most of their online experience**, with its potential for learning, exploring, being creative and connecting with others.

Internet safety risks for school-age children

There are **four main kinds** of Internet risks for children.

1. Content risks

For school children these risks include things that they might find upsetting, disgusting or otherwise uncomfortable, if they come across them accidentally. This might include sexual content in games, pornography, images of cruelty to animals, and real and/or simulated violence.

2. Contact risks

These risks include children coming into contact with people they don't know or with adults posing as children online. For example, a child might be persuaded to share personal information with strangers, provide contact details after clicking on pop-up messages, or meet in person with someone they've met online.

3. Conduct risks

These risks include children acting in ways that might hurt others or being the victim of this kind of behaviour. Another conduct risk is accidentally making in-app purchases, that can potentially result in larger bills than expected.

4. Contract risks

These risks include children signing up to unfair contracts, terms or conditions that they aren't aware of or don't understand. For example, children might click a button that allows a business to send them inappropriate marketing messages or collect their personal or family data. Or children might use a toy, app or device with weak internet security, which leaves them open to identity theft or fraud.

Tips for protecting children from Internet safety risks

You can use a range of different strategies to help your child stay safe online.

Here are some ideas:

- **Use the Internet with your child** or make sure you're close by and aware of what your child is doing online. This way you can act quickly and reassure your child if they're concerned or upset by something they've seen online.
- **Use parental controls**, many devices such as search engines, browsers, and apps are equipped with parental control settings that can block inappropriate content or prevent kids from making accidental purchases. Parental controls can be a passive way to keep your kids a little bit safer online.
- **Check privacy settings** and location services in addition to parental controls and use safe search settings on browsers, apps, search engines and YouTube. Limit camera and video functions so your child doesn't accidentally take photos of themselves or others.



- **Stay present**, it can be hard to know if your child is being safe on the Internet when you're distracted by what's happening on your own device.
- **If you use TV streaming services**, set up profiles for different household members so your child is less likely to come across inappropriate programs.
- **Block in-app purchases** and disable one-click payment options on your devices.
- **Create a family media plan**. It's best to create your plan with your child and ask them for suggestions. Your plan could cover things like Internet safety rules, for example not giving out personal information, and programs and apps that are OK for your child to use.
- **Use child-friendly search engines** like Kiddle or Kidtopia, or content providers like ABC Kids, CBeebies, YouTube Kids, or messaging apps like Messenger Kids.

Trust between you and your child helps keep your child safe online. Calm, open conversations about Internet use can help your child feel that you trust them to be responsible online. If your child feels trusted, they're more likely to talk with you about what they do online. It's better to talk openly about your own Internet use and encourage your child to do the same. Alternatively, you may decide to monitor your child's Internet use while they're online or by reviewing their browser history, it's good to talk about this with your child.

Teaching safe and responsible online behaviour

You can help your child learn how to use the Internet safely, responsibly and enjoyably. If you teach your child how to manage Internet safety risks, your child will build digital resilience. This is the ability to deal with and respond positively to any risks they encounter online.

You can do this by:

1) Going online with your child.

Going online with your child gives you the opportunity to see the apps or games your child plays, or the videos they watch. You can **share your child's experience** while also checking that the content is appropriate. One way to do this is by asking questions that show interest in what your child is doing – for example, 'That looks like an interesting game. Can you teach me to play too?'

You can also **show your child sites that are fun, interesting or educational** and show your child how to bookmark them for later. You could help your child find information they need for homework by using the right kind of search words. If you come across **pop-up advertisements** while you're online together, it's a good opportunity to talk with your child about not clicking them. You can explain that pop-up ads can lead to sites with unpleasant pictures or sites that want your personal or financial information.



2) Talking with your child about online content and listening to their views.

It's a good idea to **explain to your child that the Internet has all sorts of content** and that some of it isn't for children. You may wish to consider parental controls or safe browsing settings that may protect children from inappropriate content. But these are not a guarantee, and your child could still come across inappropriate content. So, it's also a good idea to **encourage your child to talk to you or another trusted adult** if they see something that worries them. If you **name things to look out for**, it can help your child identify unsuitable material. For example, 'If you see a site with upsetting, scary or rude pictures, swearing or angry words, let me know. It's not a good site for you to look at'. You could also explain that not all information on the Internet is true or helpful – for example, some news is made up. Encouraging your child to question things they find on the internet helps your child develop the ability to tell whether a website has good-quality information. This is an important part of **digital and media literacy**.

3) Teaching your child to be careful with personal information.

It's a good idea to **make sure your child knows not to communicate online with people they don't know in person**. This is particularly important if your child is using in-game social networks. For example, some gaming sites may have messaging features that might allow strangers to communicate with your child.

Encourage your child to:

- tell you if someone they don't know contacts them online.
- not give out personal information, including your name, address, phone number or birthday and never send or post images of yourself.
- ask you before they use a new app, so you can show them how to check the privacy settings to keep their personal information safe.

4) Teaching your child to avoid online purchases

You can help stop any accidental in-app purchases by switching off in-app purchases and one-click payments on your devices. It is also a good idea for you and your child to agree on clear rules about not accepting in-app purchases. You might say, “if you want to buy a new game or something in a game, please ask me”.

5) Talking about appropriate online behaviour

Talking with your child about **appropriate and inappropriate online behaviour** will help your child learn how to stay safe, for example, you could:

- tell your child not to do or say anything online that they wouldn't do or say face to face with someone.
- encourage your child to think before posting photos or comments.
- help your child to walk away from online arguments.

Most, if not all of us, know a child like the young girl in this picture, playing on a smartphone or tablet. Given her apparent home surroundings, it is reasonable to assume that this child seems to be in a relatively safe environment.



However, we have to ask ourselves, is she as safe as she seems?

As your child gets older and more confident and starts using the Internet independently, **you may need to review your strategies.**

Please refer to the GRA's advice in respect of **safe Internet use for teenagers.**