

Internet Safety

Advice for Parents & Carers
September 2026-2027



|K The Key

IT COULD HAPPEN HERE!

me, you, us

safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

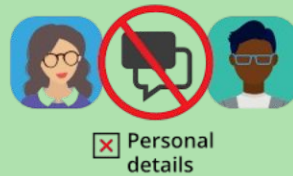




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10 Key Internet Safety Tips for Children

1. Be careful who you talk to - strangers can pretend to be children. Never share personal details (name, school, address, photos). If asked for pictures, say no and tell a trusted adult.
2. Social media age limits - most apps require you to be 13+. Keep accounts private, think before posting, and remember images can be shared anywhere once uploaded.
3. AI tools - not everything they generate is true. Never give them personal info or photos, as these could be misused.



10 Key Internet Safety Tips for Children



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4. Your digital footprint matters – what you post now could affect things like job opportunities later.



5. If something upsets you online – tell a trusted adult straight away and report it using the app's tools (usually via the 3 dots).



6. Check your sources – news and stories online may be fake or misleading.





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10 Key Internet Safety Tips for Children

7. Beware of **scams** – don't forward chain messages or give out passwords or payment details.



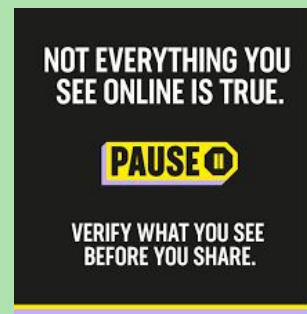
8. Avoid money transfer schemes – offers of “easy cash” are usually linked to crime.



9. Think before spending in games – loot boxes and **in-game purchases** can add up quickly.



10. Don't believe everything you see – people edit photos, exaggerate lifestyles, or use AI. *Gang life online, for example, is rarely what it seems.*



Do

- ✓ Set your profiles to private
- ✓ Share what you do online with adults you trust
- ✓ Tell an adult if anything worries, upsets or frightens you
- ✓ Be kind to others
- ✓ Spend time with friends and family offline



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Don't

- ✗ Believe everything you see
- ✗ Trust strangers
- ✗ Give anyone your name, age or address
- ✗ Share pictures or videos of yourself
- ✗ Spend any money without checking with an adult



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Age Restrictions for Social Media Platforms

What is the minimum age for account holders on these social media sites and apps?



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Under 13



13+



16+



17+

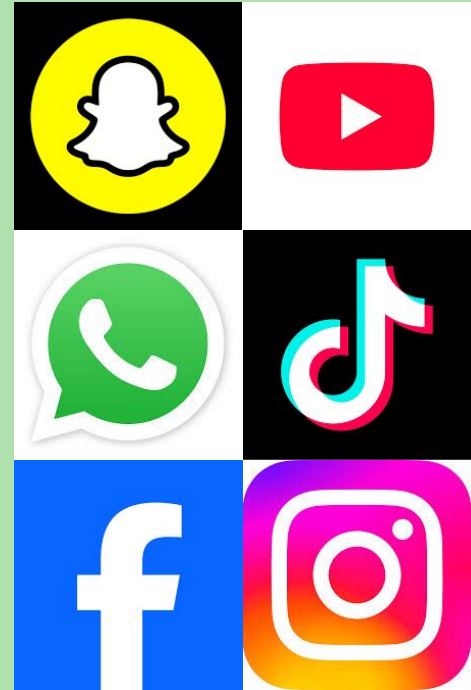


18+ or 13 with parent's permission



What are the risks of social media for children?

Oversharing	+
Sharing their location	+
Talking to people they don't know	+
Sending or receiving inappropriate content	+
Unrealistic sense of body image or reality	+
Obsessive focus on likes and comments	+



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What are the risks of online gaming?

Being bullied



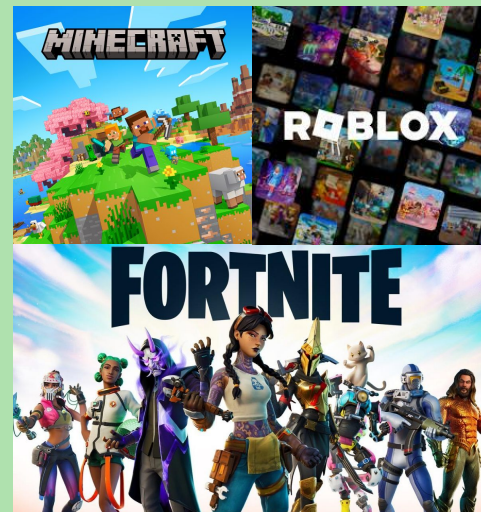
Trolling, griefing and scams



In-game purchases



Talking to people they don't know



Roblox



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Sign up with the correct age

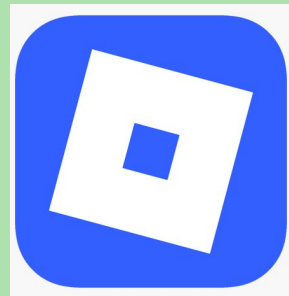
- Make sure your child creates an account using the correct age. On Roblox, certain safety settings and parental controls are enabled by default for children under 13. However, you should still review the settings to ensure they've been set up correctly.

Build a list of age-appropriate games

- Not all games on Roblox will be appropriate for your child. The platform has a setting that lets parents and carers limit what their child can play by allowing them to build lists of age-appropriate games. You can also switch off in-app spending or set them monthly limits.

Explore communication settings

- You can manage who your child can speak to by disabling chat completely or limiting it to friends only. You can also switch off their inbox to stop them receiving direct messages.





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“I thought he
safe...he was just
in his room.”

In today's digital world, teenagers are using emojis as a form of **coded language** on social media, texting apps, and online forums. While most emoji use is harmless, some symbols carry hidden meanings that parents should be aware of, especially when they relate to risky behaviours such as substance use or inappropriate online interactions.

General Expressions:

- 🔥 (Fire) – Cool, awesome, or attractive
- 💀 (Skull) – "I'm dead" (used when something is extremely funny)
- 😂 (Laughing Face with Tears) – Something is hilarious
- 👁️ (Eyes) – Paying attention or something suspicious
- 🤡 (Clown) – Someone being foolish or embarrassing

Friendship & Relationships:

- ❤️ (Red Heart) – Love or deep friendship
- 💙 (Blue Heart) – Platonically caring about someone
- 💜 (Purple Heart) – Could indicate romantic interest but also used in fan culture (e.g., K-pop fans)
- 🖤 (Black Heart) – Dark humour or expressing sadness
- 🙏 (Fingers Crossed) – Hopeful, but sometimes used for unclear or unofficial relationships

Potentially Risky Meanings:

Some emojis can be used to refer to drug use, alcohol, or risky behaviour. While their meanings are:

- 🌿 (Leaf) or 🍃 (Herb) – Marijuana
- 💊 (Pill), 🍷 (Clinking Glasses), 🍾 (Champagne Bottle) – Drugs or alcohol
- 🔌 (Electric Plug) – A drug dealer or supplier
- 🚀 (Rocket) – Getting high or taking drugs
- ⌚ (Hourglass) – "Time is running out" (can refer to body shape or urgency for risky behaviour)

Sexual Innuendos:

Some emojis have become widely used as symbols for body parts or sexual content:

- 🍑 (Peach) – Buttocks
- 🍆 (Eggplant) – Male genitalia
- 🌮 (Taco) or 🍒 (Cherries) – Female anatomy
- 💧 (Sweat Droplets) – Sexual activity or attraction
- 🔥 + 🍑 (Fire + Peach) – Suggesting someone has an attractive body



Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report (May, 2025)



Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report

Published 7 May 2025

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/children/childrens-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025/childrens-media-literacy-report-2025.pdf?v=396621>



Media use, by age:

3-5



19% have their own mobile phone

85% use any device to go online.

To go online: **69%** use a tablet, **34%** use a mobile phone, and **12%** use a laptop

56% use messaging sites/apps

91% use video sharing platforms

49% use live streaming sites/apps

37% use social media and **60%** have their own social media profile

Across these categories the top 3 sites/apps used by this age group are Youtube (**85%**), WhatsApp (**31%**) and Snapchat (**23%**)

31% play games online

76% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**77%** on a TV set)

32% watch live TV | **77%** watch SVoD (Such as Netflix, Amazon Prime or Disney+)



Media use, by age:

6-7



30% have their own mobile phone

96% use any device to go online.

To go online: **80%** use a tablet, **48%** use a mobile phone, and **26%** use a laptop

57% use messaging sites/apps

94% use video sharing platforms

48% use live streaming sites/apps

36% use social media and **63%** have their own social media profile

Across these categories the top 3 sites/apps used by this age group are Youtube (**91%**), WhatsApp (**33%**) and TikTok(**30%**)

43% play games online

78% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**83%** on a TV set)

38% watch live TV | **76%** watch SVoD (Such as Netflix, Amazon Prime or Disney+)



Media use, by age:

8-9



42% have their own mobile phone

97% use any device to go online.

To go online: **73%** use a tablet, **51%** use a mobile phone, and **37%** use a laptop

74% use messaging sites/apps

96% use video sharing platforms

61% use live streaming sites/apps

57% use social media and **69%** have their own social media profile

Across these categories the top 3 sites/apps used by this age group are Youtube (**93%**), WhatsApp (**46%**) and TikTok (**42%**)

65% play games online

80% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**85%** on a TV set)

41% watch live TV | **74%** watch SVoD (Such as Netflix, Amazon Prime or Disney+)



Media use, by age:

10-12



82% have their own mobile phone

100% use any device to go online.

To go online: **81%** use a mobile phone, **68%** use a tablet, and **48%** use a laptop

94% use messaging sites/apps

99% use video sharing platforms

73% use live streaming sites/apps

81% use social media and **86%** have their own social media profile

Across these categories the top 3 sites/apps used by this age group are Youtube (**90%**), WhatsApp (**71%**) and TikTok (**63%**)

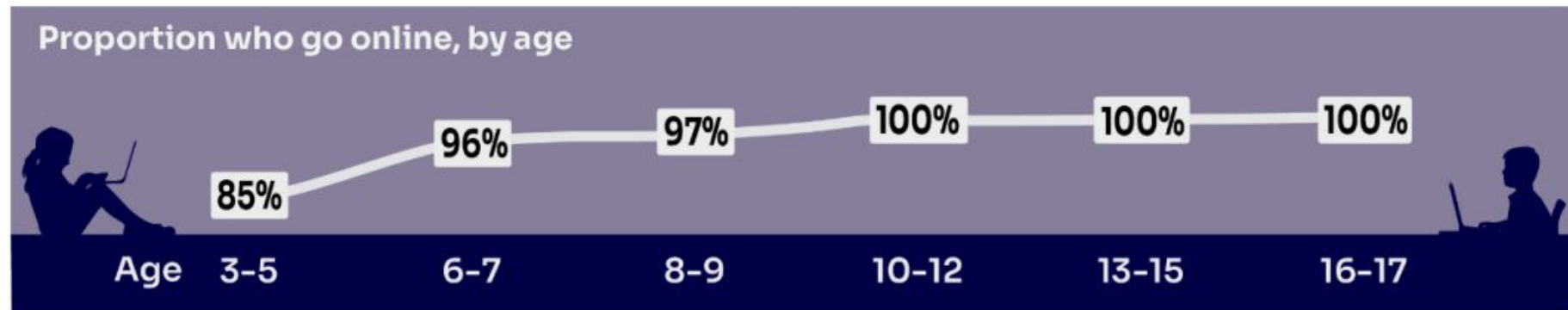
77% play games online

79% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**87%** on a TV set)

41% watch live TV | **77%** watch SVoD (Such as Netflix, Amazon Prime or Disney+)



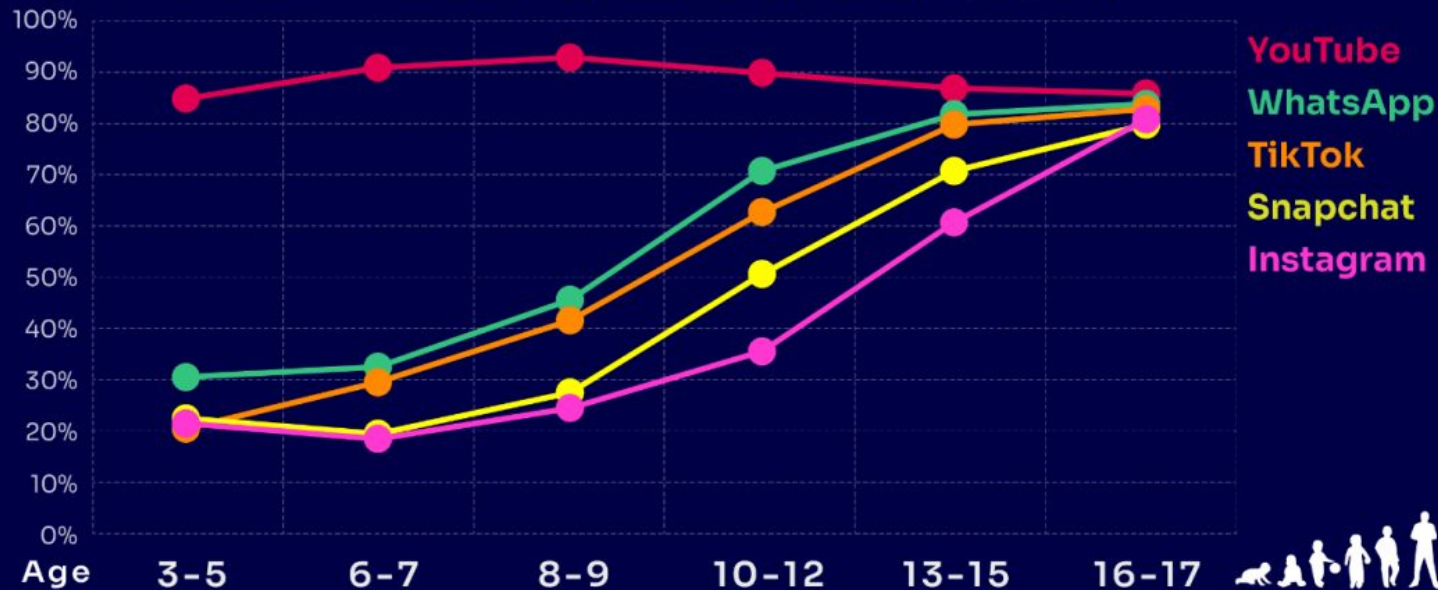
Almost all children age 3-17 (96%) went online in 2024, highlighting the centrality of the internet in children's lives.





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Top 5 online communication apps/sites used - by age group





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Use of **mobile phone** or **tablet** to go online: by age





‘Brain rot’¹⁵ is an emerging genre of video content consumed by some participants in our Children’s Media Lives study

In last year’s [*Children’s Media Lives*](#) report, we noted a continued increase in the use and appeal of short-form content among children in our study, as well as a preference for videos that are ‘loud and dramatic in nature’ and use choppy, fast-paced editing styles with overlaid sound effects, animations, and rapid transitions. While this still holds true, for some participants this appears to have developed into a habit of watching seemingly meaningless content. This year, for the first time, the phrase ‘brain rot’ was used by several children in the study to describe both the genre of content they were watching, and also the negative feeling they experienced after engaging with this type of content. ‘Brain rot’ videos can be described as frenetic, choppy, and loud and usually include contextless, random, non-sequitur clips that do not seem to make sense. One participant, Amber, discovered the term on TikTok:

“It’s really hard to explain brain rot. It’s, like, something that’s like so annoying that it rots your brain kind of.” *Amber, 13*

The term "**Brain Rot**" is not a recognized medical diagnosis. However, it is often used to describe the perceived negative effects of excessive screen time on children's cognitive development. Some potential effects associated with this concept include



- ✓ Reduced attention span
- ✓ Difficulty with critical thinking
- ✓ Increased risk of mental health issues
- ✓ Lower academic performance
- ✓ Impaired social skills



Key Findings:

- Nearly four in ten 8-17s believe that people are mean or unkind to each other online all or most of the time
- Girls continue to be more likely than boys to experience nasty or hurtful interactions online
- Certain demographics (8-13) are more likely to see worrying or nasty content online
- Nearly four in ten parents would let their child create a profile before reaching the minimum age
- Parents continue to set rules for their children about being online, although there have been some decreases among parents of 10-12s
- A high proportion of parents are aware of online protection tools or controls, but many do not use them
- Many parents who are aware of content filters prefer to rely on their child's ability to navigate online content



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Potentially Dangerous Apps for Children: Popular Messaging, Gaming, Image & Video Sharing Platforms Schools Should Be Aware Of In 2025

<https://www.securus-software.com/dangerous-apps-for-children/>

How can we help to protect children?



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stay safe online

Remember the 5 SMART rules when using the internet and mobile phones.

- S SAFE:** Keep safe by being careful not to give out personal information when you're chatting or posting online. Personal information includes your email address, phone number and password.
- M MEET:** Meeting someone you have only been in touch with online can be dangerous. Only do so with your parents' or carers' permission and even then only when they can be present.
- A ACCEPTING:** Accepting emails, IM messages, or opening files, pictures or texts from people you don't know or trust can lead to problems – they may contain viruses or nasty messages!
- R RELIABLE:** Someone online might lie about who they are, and information on the internet may not be true. Always check information with other websites, books or someone who knows.
- T TELL:** Tell your parent, carer or a trusted adult if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, or if you or someone you know is being bullied online.

Find out more at Childnet's website ...
www.kidsmart.org.uk

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Childnet International KidSMART





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Topics covered in school lessons (% of 8-17s who go online)



Taking steps to be safe online



Learning online

More children this year are watching videos which help them with doing their schoolwork and learning new things

Parents continue to see the educational benefits of their children being online, aligning with findings from the previous two years. At least half of parents of 3-17s whose child goes online agreed that doing so helped their children with developing skills with reading and numbers (55%) and/or learning a new skill (51%); and seven in ten (72%) felt that that being online helped their children with their schoolwork/homework. And nearly six in ten (57%) of these parents felt that the benefits outweighed the risks of their child going online for information-gathering purposes, unchanged over the previous two years.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety



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1. Set Clear Screen Time Limits

- Agree on daily/weekly screen time and stick to it.
- Use tools like “downtime” or “bedtime” features on devices to automatically limit usage.
- Encourage balance: outdoor play, reading, and family time alongside screen time.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety

2. Stay Informed and Educated

- Keep up to date with the apps, games, and websites your child is using.
- Explore resources like NSPCC *Net Aware*, UK Safer Internet Centre, or Childnet.
- Talk to your child regularly about their online interests so you understand what they enjoy and where risks might lie.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety



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3. Remember: It Could Happen Here

- Don't assume "my child would never..."—online risks (cyberbullying, strangers, inappropriate content) can affect any child.
- Keep conversations open so children feel safe telling you if something goes wrong.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety

4. Use Filtering and Parental Controls

- Activate filters on your home Wi-Fi and on individual devices.
- Set up child accounts with age-appropriate restrictions.
- Regularly review privacy and security settings on apps and websites.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety



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5. Limit Internet Access Times

- No devices in bedrooms overnight—charge them in a shared space.
- Set “offline times” such as during meals, family activities, or before school.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety



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6. Monitor Devices Proactively

- Keep devices in shared areas where you can see what's happening.
- Check browsing history, app use, and friend lists on social apps/games.
- Consider agreeing a “digital contract” with your child, setting expectations about how devices are used.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety

7. Talk Openly and Regularly

- Encourage your child to tell you if they see something that worries or confuses them.
- Role-play scenarios (“What would you do if someone you don’t know messages you?”).
- Praise honesty—children are less likely to hide mistakes if they feel supported.



Actionable Advice for Online Safety



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8. Model Good Online Habits

- Show your child that you also put your phone away at dinner or bedtime.
- Be mindful of your own screen time, social media use, and sharing of photos/information.

Useful links and resources:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/child-abuse-and-harm/keeping-children-safe-online>



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O₂ | NSPCC

Let's keep kids safe online



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology



Changing childhoods.
Changing lives.