A PARENT'S GUIDE TO:

Discovering digital at primary school

Online safety tips to support young children

internet matters.org

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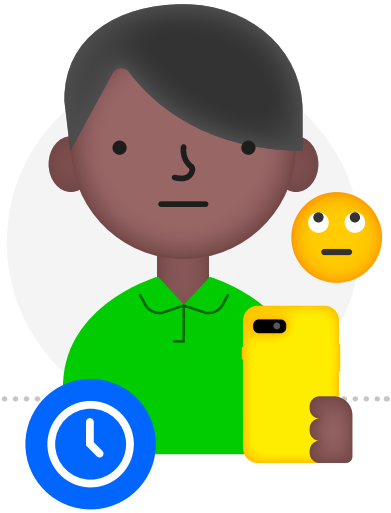


What are kids doing?

Before they've even learnt to read, most can navigate through devices to play games and watch cartoons.

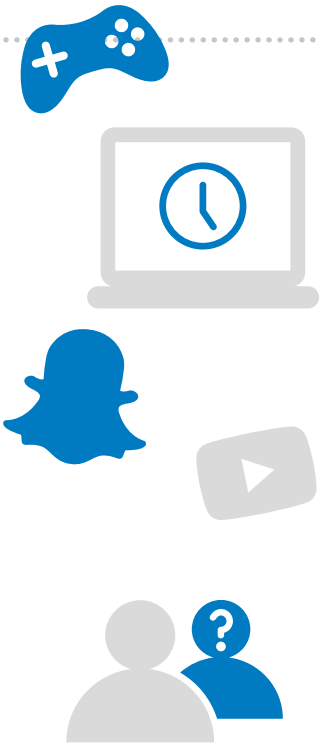
By the time they reach the age of 8, over one in three children own their own smartphone and **55% have their own tablet**.*

YouTube is an increasingly popular destination and an alternative to TV as over **70% of 5 - 11s use the platform*** to watch cartoons, funny videos or their favourite TV show.

**Ofcom Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2017*

Online activities

- Watch videos on **YouTube**
- **Play a range of online games** from Roblox and Fortnite to Toca Boca mobile games
- Older children use apps such as musical.ly to post **videos online and live-stream**
- Some may also be using platforms like **Snapchat and Instagram** although minimum age is 13
- **Use educational apps** to supplement learning



What risks do they face?

The internet can expose children to things that they may not be ready for such as violent content, extreme ideas and adult content either by accident or through an intentional search.

As they start to communicate with others through gaming or social networks there's the temptation to overshare information that could lead to incidences of cyberbullying or put them at risk of being approached by those that may wish them harm.

Seeing inappropriate content

Like looking up rude words in the dictionary back in the day, children remain curious creatures looking to push boundaries and be in the know about things they may have heard about on the school playground.

When children take part in the following activities online, the possibility and probability that they will see content that is inappropriate increases:

- **Joining social networks** before reaching the minimum age
- Playing games and using apps **which are not age appropriate**
- Watching **live streams which may show inappropriate content**

What can you do to help?

- **Use stories to introduce the topic** to make it easier to spark a conversation with children such as **Digiduck's Big Decision** and **The Internet is like a Puddle**
- **Agree together what is appropriate** for them to do online so they feel part of the decision making process
- Create a safe place for them to **talk to you or a trusted adult** if they run into issues online
- **Show them that not everything they see online is true** and tell them to always try and check other sources. Remind them that if something appears 'too good to be true' then it probably is!
- **Use parental controls** to block access to adult and inappropriate sites

Support from schools

All schools are required by law to use filtering tools to block access to inappropriate content. They should also teach children the basics about online safety such as the importance of keeping things private, where to go for support if something goes wrong online and how to recognise good and bad behaviour online.

Sharing too much information

With the growth of Vloggers and YouTubers, young children are also starting to aspire to be more like those they see online, sharing their world with the wider world to get likes, views and comments.

According to the latest Ofcom report **almost a quarter of 8 – 11-year-olds** have a social media profile although the minimum age for most social platforms is 13.

Although children do learn how to share safely online, there is a clear difference between what they learn and how they apply this rule in real life.

What can you do to help?

- **Have a chat about personal information** and what they understand this to be and why it's important
- Discuss the fact that **anything you put online** has the potential to be there for a long time
- At one time or another your child may be talking to strangers online, its important to **teach them how to recognise when a person's intentions might not be what they seem** and steps to take if they run into trouble through sharing too much information
- **Use the NSPCC Net Aware platform** to get advice on which apps are most suitable for them to use to limit the risks
- Talk about the pressure to **post things just to get likes** and comments and how to challenge this
- **Review the privacy settings** available on the platform they use to ensure they are set to the right level
- **Work together** on a family agreement to create digital boundaries so they are more aware of your values on what is safe to share online

Support from schools

Issues around who to trust, what to share and when and how to protect personal data forms part of the **Education for a Connected World** framework which schools are encouraged to use when considering what children should be taught about online safety.

Screen time

The time children spend online nearly doubles from 7 hours per week between the ages of 3 – 7 to 13 hours by the time they're 8.

Although most parents and children believe that they have a good balance of time on and offline, research from UK Safer Internet Centre found that there was a clear link between the amount of time children spend online and their exposure to upset, risk and issues related to well-being.

It's not just about time but also what they are doing online that matters. Assessing children's online activities to minimise risks and maximise the opportunities they bring is key at this stage.

Ages 3–7 hours spent online

Ages 8+ hours spent online

What can you do to help?

- Give them opportunities to **think about how what they do online** can affect their well-being, i.e. sleep, feelings, learning
- Talk about ways to combine what they love online, offline, i.e. using apps that **encourage you to move and play outdoors**
- **Put in place a family agreement** and agree an appropriate length of time that they can use their devices for
- **Use tech tools and parental controls** to help them to manage the time they spend online and the apps they use
- For younger children find ways to **combine touch screen use with creative and active play**
- **Get the whole family to unplug** and create 'screen free' zones at home

Support from schools

As well as other topics, children should learn about how to manage and self-regulate their screen time as part of the curriculum. More and more schools are also making use of tech in the classroom by giving children access to virtual learning environments to introduce children to the online world.

Cyberbullying

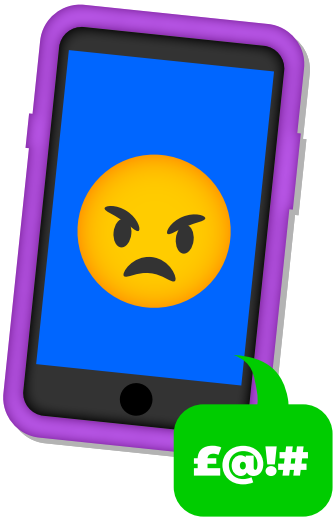
As with friendships in real life, the internet can become a place where children play out disagreements or express issues they have with each other without a full grasp of the potential consequences of what they say.

Research shows that it's normally towards the end of primary school that issues of cyberbullying occur as children start using more messaging apps to talk to friends outside of school.

Although it may not affect younger children as much as those in secondary school, teaching them about 'netiquette' and how to be kind online early on can give them a good foundation to build on when they start to interact with others online.

What can you do to help?

- **Highlight the need to be 'kind online'** and support those who may be being picked on, online
- **Talk about reasons why** people may bully others and how it makes people feel
- Encourage them to **speak out if they experience cyberbullying**
- **Discuss the power they have** to do the right thing when it comes to supporting other online and share the **'Stop Speak Support'** online code
- **Teach them how** to report or block people on the apps they use
- **Be aware of what the school policy** is just in case you need support



Support from schools

The **government Internet Safety Strategy** states that where bullying outside of school is reported to teachers, it should be investigated and acted upon. Parents should feel that they can approach the school for help and support if they feel that their child is being bullied.

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