Online Safety Guide

Children's use of the internet is becoming more mobile and interactive offering young people more opportunities to interact and meet new people, so it's never been more important to make sure you are helping your child stay safe in the digital world.
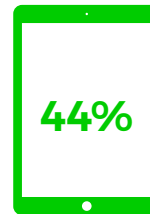
15 hours a week

Children's internet use has reached record highs, 5-15 year olds spend 15 hours a week online

2x

The number of children with a social media profile doubles between the age of 10 and 11. 43% of 11 year olds have a social profile

44%

44% of 5-15 year olds have their own tablet and together with smartphones are the most popular for going online.

Get in control of parental controls

If using a smartphone, check content lock is set

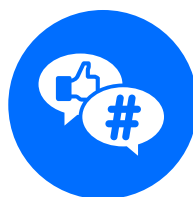Set parental controls on your home broadband

Control app downloads and purchases

Make the games console safe and secure

Use safety mode on YouTube and Google

If using social networks, check privacy settings

Go to **internetmatters.org/controls** for step-by-step guides

Managing privacy settings on apps

11-15 year olds use on average 5 different websites and apps to communicate with friends at home, the most popular being Instagram (60%).

Whatsapp   Snapchat   Instagram   YouTube

If your child is using these networking sites and respective apps, get up to speed on how they can manage their privacy settings with our "How to guides".

Go to **internetmatters.org/ back-to-school** to download our "How to guides".

Helping parents keep their children safe online.

internet matters.org

Get familiar with regular conversations

- ☑ Start a conversation when your children will be more receptive and engaged, such as on the way to or from school

- ☑ Ask them for advice on how to do something online and use this as a conversation starter

- ☑ Make sure they know they can come to you if they're upset by something they've seen online

- ☑ Be sensitive and encourage them when they share their online experiences with you

- ☑ If your child talks about an issue with you, stay calm and listen without judging them

Check they know the rules

- ☑ Don't share personal information like their phone number or email address online

- ☑ Only talk to real life friends or family if they are on sites with a social media element

- ☑ Explain that people they meet online might not be who they say they are

- ☑ Tell them to be a good online friend and not to say nasty things even if it's just a joke

- ☑ Use secure and legal sites to download music and games

- ☑ Make sure they check with you before downloading any programs to avoid viruses

Key issues you may want to discuss

Cyberbullying

Prevention is always better than the cure when it comes to this issue. Help your child understand the consequences of what they share online and encourage them to be "kind online". If they are the target of cyberbullying, be sure to keep all messages as evidence and block the bullies on social networks.

For more advice about cyberbullying visit **internetmatters.org/issues/cyberbullying**

Sexting

There are many reasons why young people get involved in sexting; exploring sex and relationship or pressure from a partner or friends. Having an open and honest conversation about it can help them understand the implications of sending a nude image and highlight that it is illegal.

If your child has sent a nude image and it has been put online; report it to CEOP and contact Childline who can help you get all known copies removed from the internet **internetmatters.org/issues/sexting**

Want more help?

For step by step guides and advice go to **internetmatters.org**

To report an issue around a sexual image of a child visit **ceop.police.uk/Ceop-Report/**

ONLINE GAMING:
An introduction for parents and carers

1: An introduction to online gaming

Online gaming is hugely popular with children and young people. Annual research conducted by OFCOM shows that gaming is still one of the top activities enjoyed by 5-16 year olds online, with many of them gaming via mobile devices and going online using their games console.

From sport related games to mission based games and quests inspiring users to complete challenges, interactive games cater for a wide range of interests, and can enable users to link up and play together.

Most games now have an online element to them; allowing users to take part in leader boards, join group games or chat to others. Internet connectivity in a game adds a new opportunity for gamers as it allows players to find and play against, or with, other players. These may be their friends or family members or even other users in the game from around the world (in a multi-player game).

We know that parents and carers do have questions and concerns about games, often about the type of games their child plays, who they may be speaking to and for how much time their child is playing.

This leaflet provides an introduction to online gaming and advice for parents specifically related to gaming.

2: Online gaming: how and where to play

There are many ways for users to play games online. This includes free games found on the internet, games on smartphones, tablets and handheld consoles, as well as downloadable and boxed games on PCs and consoles such as the PlayStation, Nintendo Wii or Xbox. Here are some of the most common devices on which online games are played.

Consoles: These games are played on home entertainment consoles designed to work with a TV. Consoles are capable of connecting to the internet via a home network just like other devices. This allows users to purchase and download games, purchase additional content for games (eg extra levels, characters, features) as well as playing online, although a subscription may be required to use a particular gaming network. The main manufacturers (Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft) include parental controls in their consoles that are linked to age ratings systems (FAQ 3).

Mobile App Games: Mobile games can be free or chargeable and are downloadable through app stores like Google Play or Apple App Store. There may be costs associated with mobile gaming as within some games, even free ones, there are opportunities to purchase added functionality such as 'in-app' purchases. However, these functions can be deactivated, either through settings on a device or via settings on an account used to access the app store.

Handheld Games: Handheld games are played on small portable consoles. As with other devices, handheld games are also internet enabled. This allows gamers to download games, purchase additional content, get new features and play and chat to other gamers.

Web Games: Some games are accessed through unique websites hosting hundreds of different games. Many of these games are free of charge online, although some may have paid-for components. These sites have become hugely popular with many young people as they often offer a creative element which allows a user to create their own games.

PC Games: These games are played on a computer the same way as other software programmes. There are also a large number of 'free games' available to download and play that offer limited features with an option to buy extra features or unlock all features via a monthly subscription. Many PC games make use of the internet, and many 'Massively Multiplayer Online' (MMO) games, where gamers interact together in virtual spaces, are PC games.

Augmented Reality (AR): This is an element of games where a live view of the real-world environment is altered to include moveable graphics allowing players to experience digital game play in the real world. It is usually achieved by using the camera on a mobile device and can be seen in games like Pokémon Go where Pokémons appear to be actually stood in front of you.

Virtual Reality (VR): This is immersive wearable technology which creates environments and allows you to explore them as if you are actually there. Experiences can vary but most contain sensors which allow you to mimic your movements in the virtual world. This is usually achieved through wearing headsets, which range in terms of price and experience. Inexpensive cardboard structures have also been developed which allow you to turn your smart phone into a VR headset by downloading an app. Manufacturers are currently recommending that under 12s are to be supervised by an adult when using a VR headset.

3: Online gaming, the risks

Internet safety advice is directly applicable to the games environment because risks of **Content, Contact, Conduct** and **Commercialism** also apply to games.

C **Content:** inappropriate material is available to children online.

The quality of graphics in many games is very sophisticated and realistic. Some games might not be suitable for your child's age as they might contain violent or sexually-explicit content or scenes intended to invoke horror or fear.

C **Contact:** potential contact from someone online who may wish to bully or abuse them.

If your child takes part in multiplayer games on the internet (where they play against other people, potentially from all around the world) they might be at risk of hearing offensive language from other players, being bullied, or making themselves vulnerable to contact by those with a sexual interest in children if they give out their personal details. Bullying on games is known as 'griefing'. This is when players single out others specifically to make their gaming experience less enjoyable by sending hurtful messages or destroying parts of their gaming world.

C **Conduct:** children may be at risk because of their own and others' online behaviour, such as the personal information they make public.

Specific conduct risks for gamers include excessive gaming use to the detriment of other aspects of their lives. This is sometimes referred to as 'addiction'. Some websites might not have the game owner's permission to offer a game as a download i.e. copyright infringement, the same as for music and film, and by downloading it the user might be breaking the law.

C **Commercialism:** young people's privacy can be invaded by aggressive advertising and marketing schemes.

Children and young people can get themselves into difficulty by inadvertently running up bills when playing games online. Some online games offer enticing 'in app' purchases, eg buying more lives or gems to complete a level.

4: Online gaming, Top-tips

» It may seem daunting, but one of the best things you can do is to engage with the gaming environment and begin to understand what makes it is so attractive to young people as well as the types of activities that they enjoy! If you're not sure what they are, ask them to show you how they play and have a go yourself.

» Read game reviews to understand more about potential risks or difficulties other players have experienced and content they have seen. App store and Google Play offer reviews but you can also find app reviews on www.net-aware.org.uk or game reviews on www.commonsensemedia.org.

» Some games may offer children the chance to chat with other players by voice and text. Ask them who they are playing with and find out if they are talking to other players. If chat is available, look at the type of language that is used by other players.

» Remember that much of the chat within games can be simply about the game itself and different strategies. Speak to your children about never revealing personal information or agreeing to meet up offline.

» Remember that the same safety rules for going online apply to playing games on the internet. Familiarise yourself with the **SMART rules**, and encourage your children to do so as well.

5: SMART rules

S **Safe:** Keep safe by being careful not to give out personal information when playing online. This includes your e-mail address, phone number and password, as well as images and videos of yourself, friends and family

M **Meeting:** Meeting someone you have only known online can be dangerous. Remember that no matter how long you have spoken to someone for, or how nice they are, if you have never met this person before then they are still a stranger. If anyone asks to meet up then tell an adult immediately.

A **Accepting:** Accepting gaming requests, direct messages or clicking on links from people you don't know can lead to problems – they may contain viruses, inappropriate content or nasty messages!

R **Reliable:** People we speak to online might not always be who they say they are as it is very easy to give away false information online. Try to only speak to your friends and family.

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.

6: Online gaming, FAQS

1. How can I keep my child safe whilst they chat in games? What tools are available to help?

Many games offer users the ability to chat with other gamers during the game. Players can communicate by typing messages which can be seen by all players or by sending private messages to just one player. Some games also allow users to chat using a headset which is similar to talking on the phone.

Parental control tools are available on PCs and consoles, and these can limit gameplay functionality, including chat. Make sure your children know how to protect their privacy by locking down privacy features. These could include using a voice mask to disguise their voice in a multiplayer game as well as how to block and report other players and use the mute function which can disable chat in many games.

Advise them never to give out any personal information (including pictures of themselves) or agree to meet someone in person when using online chats or sharing information in their user profile. Encourage your child to use an appropriate screen or character name (sometimes called gamertags) that follow the rules of the game service.

In addition, many gamers chat on community forums about the games they are playing. Gamers use these sites to exchange information about the games as well as to provide tips and hints to others. It is important to encourage your child to be positive and respectful as well as manage their privacy on these sites too and locate the means for reporting any issues they encounter.

2. How do I know which games are appropriate or suitable for my child?

The Pan European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system exists to help parents make informed decisions when buying or downloading games, similar to the BBFC ratings for films. The rating on a game confirms that it is suitable for players over a certain age, but is not indicative of the level of difficulty. PEGI age labels appear on the front and back of games packaging, on sites and services that sell games online and on some app stores (such as Google Play and the Windows Apps store).

Additional 'descriptors' shown on the back of the packaging indicate the main reasons why a game has received a particular age rating. Encourage your child to only access online games that are appropriate and always check the age rating on any game before buying it for your child, as well as considering whether it has an online component. Remember most games will have an online element to them which may not be apparent from the game packaging or description.

3. Do games have parental controls?

Lots of games have safety or privacy features to keep young gamers safe which you can set based on your child's age and maturity. These settings may limit who players can chat with or what they can say. These features may also control the game content they can play. Games and services will approach privacy and safety in a variety of ways so it is worth getting to know the features on the games your child plays. However, these controls aren't a substitute for parental involvement. You can find out more information about how to set up the parental controls on each device by visiting www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech.

4. How can I report inappropriate behaviour by other users?

Sadly cyberbullying can occur in online games. If your child is being harassed by another player on a game, follow the game's reporting guide to report this behaviour or visit www.childnet.com/resources/how-to-make-a-report. Inappropriate behaviour can also be reported to the moderator on a moderated game and in many instances you can contact the customer support team for further assistance. If your child does encounter inappropriate behaviour in an online game, encourage them to block that user.
If you are suspicious that another player is wishing to meet up with your child, or asking them to share personal information or images and videos of themselves, then you can report them to the police at www.ceop.police.uk.

5. How long should I let my child play games for?

Consider what is appropriate for the users in your house and their gaming needs. This may depend on the type of game they are playing, as quest based games for example are unlikely to be completed within 30 minutes.

Agree together rules of playing games online, which as well as covering safety considerations could include play time limits. You may find it more appropriate to set a weekly quota for their internet use or to agree that certain games should only be played at a weekend. UKIE, the body that represents the interactive entertainment industry in the UK recommends that all games should form part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle and as a guide games players should take five minute breaks every 45 – 60 minutes.

You could use our Family Agreement as a way of structuring these rules, which can be found at www.childnet.com/resources/family-agreement

6. What else should I consider?

As well as staying safe when playing online games, it's also important to stay legal. It may be tempting to download cheat programmes to skip to a higher level, but these, and downloading games for free (and infringing copyright), can expose users to unsuitable content and viruses affecting your devices.

7: Support and information

Childnet resources and websites

Childnet: Childnet International is a non-profit organisation working in partnership with others around the world to help make the internet a great and safe place for children. The Childnet website hosts all the online resources detailed below, as well as a number of recommended resources for young people, parents, carers and teachers. **www.childnet.com**

UK Safer Internet Centre: Childnet is part of the European Commission appointed UK Safer Internet Centre. Together with partners the **Internet Watch Foundation** and the **South West Grid for Learning**, we raise awareness about internet safety, develop information materials and resources and organise high profile events such as Safer Internet Day. You can access a range of resources from across the UK, Europe and wider afield at **www.saferinternet.org.uk/parents**.

Need help? Information about what to do if a child comes to you for help and advice about how to report online concerns such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content or illegal behaviour. **www.childnet.com/parents-help**

Information and tools for parents and carers

Parents' Guide to Technology: The UK Safer Internet Centre has created this guide to answer commonly asked questions and introduce some of the most popular devices used by children, highlighting the safety tools available and empowering parents with the knowledge they need to support their children to use these technologies safely and responsibly. **www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech**

Safety Tools on Social Networks and Other Online Services:
Information and advice on the safety tools, age requirements and terms and conditions for a variety of online services popular with young people. **www.saferinternet.org.uk/safety-tools**

NetAware: NSPCC and O2 have created a guide with information and advice for parents and carers on the most popular social networks and interactive apps and games used by children and young people. The information is also available in an app for Apple and Android devices. **www.net-aware.org.uk**

Common Sense Media: A US non-profit organisation that provides independent reviews, age ratings and other information about movies, games, apps, TV shows, websites, books and music for families and children. **www.commonsensemedia.org**

Online gaming

Childnet's gaming hot topic: On our website you can access hot topics on a range of issues, including online gaming. The **Parents and Carers** area also contains key advice, information on reporting and on setting up a family agreement **www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/gaming**

Ask About Games: Information and advice for parents and gamers about the PEGI age rating system for video games and how to play games responsibly and safely. **www.askaboutgames.com**

UKIE: The Association for UK interactive entertainment (UKIE) is a trade body for the UK's games and interactive entertainment industry. They offer advice about how to play games safely and sensibly from the 'playsafe' area of their website. **www.ukie.info/playsafe**

PEGI: Visit the Pan European Game Information website to find out more about age ratings and content descriptors used on the packaging of games and in app stores when downloading games. **www.pegi.info/en/**

Where to report

Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP): A police agency tackling child abuse on the internet. This website includes a unique facility that enables parents and young people to make reports of actual or attempted abuse online. **www.ceop.police.uk**
CEOP's **Think U Know** website contains information for children and parents, as well as a link for children to report abuse online. **www.thinkuknow.co.uk**

ParentPort: A website run by the UK's media regulators, allowing you to report content unsuitable for children found in a programme, advert, film, video game, newspaper/magazine or other forms of media. **www.parentport.org.uk**

A Parents' Guide to

Instagram

Top 5 Questions Parents Have About Instagram

1. *Why do kids love Instagram?*

Because they love media, sharing it and socializing with it on their phones, and Instagram makes all that doable in a simple, eye-catching way. Teens like taking, cropping, enhancing, sharing and commenting on photos and videos. But the commenting isn't just commenting – in effect, they're socializing in mixed-media conversations that include plenty of likes and links too.

2. *Does Instagram have a minimum age?*

Yes, it's 13, in compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. But Instagram doesn't ask users to specify their age, and there are many younger children who use the service, often with their parents' permission. Whether Instagram is "safe" depends more on how it's used than on the age of the user, but Instagram will delete underage accounts if they're notified and can verify the users are under 13.

3. *What are the risks in using Instagram?*

Though there's nothing inherently dangerous about Instagram, the main things parents worry about are typical of all social media: mean behavior among peers and inappropriate photos or videos that can hurt a child's reputation or attract the wrong kind of attention. Parents are also concerned that people their kids don't know can reach out to them directly. Kids can learn to manage these risks, which is why we wrote this guide.

4. *What's the best way to help kids stay safe on Instagram?*

As with all social media, being respectful of ourselves and others makes us safer. Our posts and comments reflect on us and others in our photos and videos. Whether serious or silly, they become part of our public image. Respecting others in how media is shared, tagged and commented on reduces risk. While most kids are smart about this, it doesn't hurt for parents to be sure kids aren't posting provocative images or having inappropriate interactions with people they don't know, which leads to the next question...

5. *Should my child's profile be private?*

For many kids, part of the fun of Instagram is developing a big following – a good thing for parents and kids to talk about. Having a public account on Instagram means anyone can follow you. A private account means that you have to approve anyone who wants to follow you, so many parents have their kids start using Instagram with a private account. But there's no guarantee your child won't be seen on Instagram or any other photo-sharing service, because people post photos of each other. *Even not having an Instagram account can't ensure a child won't appear in a photo there.* How positive or negative a young person's experience is on Instagram or anywhere online depends as much on the person and his or her friends as on the app.

Instagram is a simple photo- and video-sharing app with a huge and growing following, especially among young people. Like everybody, kids use it to capture special moments, but also to carry on conversations in a fun way – using photos, filters, comments, captions, emoticons, hashtags and links elsewhere to talk about things and share interests. It runs on the Apple iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch as well as Android phones.

Using Instagram is easy: You take a picture or up to 15 seconds of video and customize your media with filters and other enhancement tools. You add a caption and, for video, choose a cover frame to represent it. Then you hit Next (Android users, tap the green arrow) and choose how you want to share – just to your Instagram followers or outside the app, via email, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media services.

Basically, there are three ways to share on Instagram: privately, publicly and directly. With Instagram Direct, you have the option to share a particular photo privately to a limited number of people (15 max), whether or not you follow them or they follow you.


Instagram lets you shoot video or still images.

If your kids are using Instagram, the best way for you to learn about how it works is to ask them how. Kids are often glad to teach their parents about their favorite tech tools, and asking them about Instagram is not only a great way to learn about the app itself but also about how your children interact with their friends in social media. That's very individual, which is why we suggest you ask them about it, but if you want a little *general* information about using and staying safe in Instagram, here goes:

Responsible sharing

- *You control your privacy.* By default, photos and videos you share in Instagram can be seen by anyone (unless you share them directly) but you can easily make your account private so you get to approve anyone who wants to follow you. To do that, tap Profile 🔳 on the bottom right, then Edit Your Profile next to your profile picture. Scroll down to see if "Posts Are Private" is turned on or off. If turned off, you can make your photos private by toggling the switch to on. (Android users, tap Profile 🔳 and Edit Your Profile. Be sure "Posts are Private" is checked.) [If you update or reinstall the app, make sure your settings are still the way you want them.]

- *Instagram Direct is automatically private.* Anyone, including people you don't follow, can send you an image or video that *only* you and up

3

to 14 other people can see or comment on. If you follow that person, the image will be sent to your Direct folder. If you don't follow the person, it'll arrive in a Request folder, and that person's Instagrams will keep going to your Requests folder until you approve that person. If you choose to ignore the person, he or she won't be able to send you an Instagram unless you go back and change that setting later.

- *Privacy can't be perfect.* Even if your posts are private, your profile is public (anyone can see your profile photo, username and bio). You can add up to 10 lines of text about yourself, so parents and kids may want to talk about what's appropriate to say on their bio screens.

- *Respect other people's privacy.* If someone else is in a photo you post, make sure that person's OK with your sharing or tagging them in it.

- *Your posts have impact.* Think about how media you post affects others – whether they're in there or not. Sometimes it's the friends not in the photo or video who can be hurt, because they were excluded.

- *Think about your location-sharing.* The "Add to Photo Map" feature gives you the option of adding a location to a photo. It's turned off by default, but it's "sticky" – so, once turned on, it stays on until you turn it off. You can always turn it back on but, for each posting you share, think about whether you really want people to know where it was snapped or recorded.

- *Sharing beyond Instagram.* By default, you're sharing your media only on Instagram but you have the option to share more widely by clicking on "Email," "Facebook," "Twitter," etc., then Share. If you do share elsewhere, be aware of the privacy settings on that service. For example, unless your profile's private, Twitter shares to everyone by default. Facebook, by default, will share media posted from Instagram to friends only. But after you share on Facebook, you can change that setting in Facebook by selecting it and changing the audience.

Options	**SHARE SETTINGS**	
Facebook		>
Twitter		>
Email	0 saved	>
Tumblr		>
Flickr		>
foursquare		>
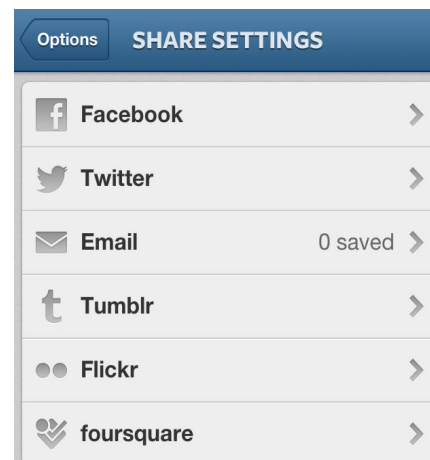
How you represent yourself

- *Your media represents you.* That probably seems obvious, but remember it can keep on representing you well into the future, because content posted online or with phones is pretty impossible to take back. So it's a good idea to think about how what you post now

will reflect on you down the line. If you think it might hurt a job prospect, damage a relationship or upset your grandmother, consider not sharing it.

- *Manage your visibility.* The photos you're tagged in (videos can't be tagged) appear in the "Photos of You" section of your profile (for now, Photos of You is only available for the iPhone and Android apps). They can be visible to anyone unless your account's private. Others can tag you in photos they post but, if you don't like the way you're shown, you can hide a photo from your profile or untag yourself (it'll still be visible on Instagram but not associated with your username and not in your profile). If you don't want photos to appear in Photos of You automatically, you can prevent that by turning off "Add Automatically" – just tap Profile ▣, then the Photos of You tab ⬆ and the gear button ⚙ and choose "Add Manually." (Android users, tap the Photos of You tab ⬆, then the three small squares ⦙.)

- *Consider the whole image.* What's in the background of a photo or video could indicate where it was taken or what the people in it were doing at the time. Is that information you want to convey?

- *Your media could show up anywhere.* Instagram videos can be embedded in any website, and it's important to remember that anything digital can be copied and shared by others. So even if you limit the audience, be careful not to share anything that could be a problem if someone were to pass it around.

- *Use a strong password, and don't share it.* This gives you some control over how you're represented in social media because other people won't be able to use your password to impersonate you. Also use different passwords for different services (for advice on passwords visit passwords.connectsafely.org).

What to do if you're being harassed

- *You can untag yourself.* Only the person who posts can tag people in the post, but – if that person's profile is public – anyone tagged by the poster can untag themselves. You can untag yourself by tapping on your username in a post, but only if the post is public or if you follow the person who tagged you.

- *Block someone if necessary.* If someone's harassing you, such as repeatedly tagging you in photos you don't like or sending you a lot of direct messages or trying to engage you in a creepy conversation, you can block them so they can't tag you, contact you directly or mention you in comments. They also won't be able to see your profile or search for your account. To block a user, go to his or her profile and select the Menu button ⤴ on the top right side, then select Block User. (Android users, go to the profile you want to block and tap the three small squares ⋮. Select Block User.)

- *You can delete your posts.* If you ever want to delete one of your own pictures or videos, just click on the three dots in the lower right corner under it (see screenshot) and select Delete. That menu also lets you share or email your post. But if you're sharing media on Facebook, Twitter or other services, deleting from Instagram doesn't delete them elsewhere.

- *Be picky about who you share with.* Instead of sharing a photo with all your followers, you can select who can see it. Click on the Instagram Direct icon in the top right corner and choose who to share it with (up to 15 people).

- *Flag problematic posts.* You can report other people's inappropriate photos, videos or comments – or users who violate Instagram's community guidelines. Just click on the dots at the bottom of the screen below the post, then on Report Inappropriate. If it's urgent, email Instagram from the Help Center. You can find the Help Center by tapping Profile 🔳, then the gear button ⚙. (Android users, tap Profile 🔳, then the three small squares ⋮.) That takes you to a screen where you can click Support.

- *Ignore messages in your "Request" list.* When photos or videos are sent to you, only those of people you follow go to your Direct folder. Photos from anyone else go into your Requests folder. So if you don't want to receive an Instagram from anyone you don't know, ignore any images in your Request folder. If you ignore them for two weeks, the content will just go away. If you want to see images only from people you know, limit who you follow.

A few closing thoughts for parents

Young people communicate and socialize in all kinds of digital media tools and services, from apps to videogame chat to texting on phones. Instagram is one of thousands of social media apps for smartphones. But it might help

to know that all this is just an extension of their "real world" social lives, giving them new chances to hang out with their friends during in-between moments – from waiting for a ride to catching up between classes. As socializing gets more mobile, no single service, app or tool covers all digital social activities or even a single category, but research shows that socializing face-to-face is still the main event to teens. But you could talk with your kids about the wisdom of keeping their Instagram experience anchored in their offline life and friendships.

Remember that your kids can be on Instagram even if they're not on Instagram. Sounds unlikely, but not in social media. Even if a parent bans all social media, his or her child's photo and other information can be posted by friends via their accounts. And there's a risk of social marginalization for kids who are not allowed to socialize in this way that's now so embedded in their social lives. Wise use tends to be better than no use.

There are many options for digital socializing, with new ones popping up on different platforms all the time. Some do a better job of protecting privacy and safety than others, and parents can't possibly be on top of all of them. We also can't always understand the context of photos, videos and comments our kids are part of in social media. That's why it's important to keep the lines of communication with your kids as open as possible and work together to figure out what's appropriate for them, in terms of safety, privacy, reputation and time management. It generally just works better to talk with our kids about their favorite tools – with genuine interest, not fear – because they're more likely to come to you if they ever need help.

A Parents' Guide to

Snapchat

Top 5 Questions Parents Have About Snapchat

1. Why do kids love Snapchat?

They love the spontaneity of it. It's been (rightfully) drummed into their heads for years that photos and videos you share are on the Web forever and are really hard to take back, so Snapchat's a relief in a lot of ways. It's playful and "in the moment" – a nice change from the self-presentation and reputation issues in social media services that display photos and videos indefinitely.

2. Does Snapchat have a minimum age?

Yes, the minimum age is 13, in compliance with the U.S. Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Snapchat ask for a date of birth when you download it, and if your birthday indicates you're under 13, you're not allowed to use the app.

3. What are the risks in using Snapchat?

Though there's nothing inherently dangerous about Snapchat, early news coverage fairly predictably associated disappearing photos sent on phones with "sexting." Many assume Snapchat's [biggest draw](#) is the temporary nature of its messages, which encourages people to share racy images without worrying about the repercussions. But most people – including most teens -- don't use Snapchat that way. They use it because it's fun.

4. What's the appeal of having your messages disappear in seconds?

Because photos and videos go away and aren't on display anywhere, there isn't the reputation anxiety or image-curation fatigue people feel in other services. The ephemeral aspect also adds a degree of safety, as long as people don't have a false sense of security about it. Images can be saved as screenshots or captured with another phone or a third-party app. So, as always with digital media, 100% safe sharing doesn't exist.

5. What's the best way to help kids stay safe on Snapchat?

As with all social media, respect toward self and others makes us safer. Whether the experience is positive or negative depends so much on how people use the app or service, whether or not they're really friends, and how they treat each other on Snapchat. Friends may kid around, but most kids treat their friends well. It just never hurts to have a conversation (never a lecture) with them about how they use Snapchat just to be sure.

Snapchat, a media-sharing and chat app, is all about spontaneity. By default, the text, photos and videos you send disappear seconds after they're viewed – you get to decide how long your friends have to view them. One thing users love about that is they can share a moment that's digital footprint-free – they don't have to think about how their photos, videos or comments make them look to some unknown audience somewhere out in the future. Also, Snapchat is "in the moment." It's not about taking pictures to look at later in life but to let people experience them right now and then move on. It's as if photos are part of a conversation rather than as fodder for memories.

However, as we'll show you below, there are ways to save what you share. So no one should develop a false sense of security.

Snapchat runs on Android phones and tablets and on the iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch, which are sometimes used by young children.

Snapchat's features

- **Media-sharing**. You can share both photos and videos on Snapchat, and both are called "Snaps." Each time you take a Snap, you choose how long the viewers you select can view it, from 1 to 10 seconds. For the most part, Snaps are about sharing a moment and aren't captured with a screenshot. When they are, Snapchat is set up to notify you, but people have found workarounds for that, including third-party apps that capture Snaps. So share with that in mind.

  "Stories," another feature that lets you string videos and photos together into, well, stories - stay available a little longer – 24 hours, in fact. Once you create a Snap, you have the option to start a Story with it. Then you can add more Snaps that help tell that Story.

- **One-on-one video or text chat.** Swipe Snapchat's main camera screen to the right, and you can either search your Friends list for someone to chat with or swipe a friend's name to the right to get into a chat with that friend. Like photos and videos, chats generally disappear quickly too. Once both parties have left the chat, the messages are gone.

- **Filters.** Swipe right on a Snap preview to customize the look of your Snaps. Use Geofilters – special design overlays that are available at specific locations or events around the world – for extra customization.

- **Snapcash**. Snapchat's payment feature is not for users under 18, but parents will want to know about it so nobody "borrows" their debit card to pay someone back or receive money via Snapchat. Snapchat partnered with Square, Inc., to enable users to link their Snapchat and debit card accounts to be able to make "peer-to-peer" payments.

Sharing a moment

- *Be nice – it really helps.* Just as in physical settings, people generally react, interact and share things in a friendly way on Snapchat too. Among friends sharing – especially with photos on mobile devices – it's usually a lighthearted thing, sometimes even goofy. It's just a shared moment like always, only now it can also be shared from the other side of the planet.

- *Who to share with.* Snapchat was originally designed for sharing with friends in "real life" – or at least people in your phone Contacts. You decide who's best for sharing particular Snaps and Stories. If you like to share moments that only close friends or relatives would "get," set your Privacy Settings to optimize Snapchat for that preference. The Stories feature can be used in a very different way. Some celebrities have built huge audiences for their Stories and use the feature to communicate with their fans. You could build a fan base that way too; the nice thing about Stories is that, in your Privacy Settings, you have an extra option of customizing who can see them.

- *Context is key.* A positive experience on Snapchat truly depends on the situation being Snapped and the relationship you have with the friends you're sharing with. So, as in all other relating in life, help your kids understand that there's safety in kindness.

Optimizing Snapchat for security and privacy

- *Manage your settings.* Snapchat's settings are really basic, but there are some settings that can help a lot: the "WHO CAN" ones. If you don't want just anybody sending you Snaps, make sure you're using the default setting to only accept incoming media from "My Friends." Here's how to be sure:

  Tap the ghost icon at the top of the camera screen to access your profile, then tap the gear icon in the upper-right corner to access the settings menu.

  By "Who Can Send me Snaps," be sure it says "My Friends" not "Everyone." That way, only people you've "added" (or friended) on Snapchat can send you a photo or video.

  For more help with this, visit
  https://support.snapchat.com/a/privacy-settings

- *Screen capture is possible*. Snapchat doesn't support saving the Snaps you receive, but smartphone operating systems do allow users to take screenshots – capture what's on the phone's screen and save it on your phone – and there are third-party apps that can also copy Snaps. It's also possible to take a picture of the screen with another camera. So it never hurts to remind kids *never to snap photos that are illegal, could get them in trouble now or in the future, or would be*

embarrassing if seen by people like grandparents, future love interests or college admissions officers.

- *Don't screen-capture without permission.* Some people think of this as basic good manners – to record someone on the phone or capture an embarrassing moment without permission has always been considered rude, and the same is true on Snapchat. If someone shared a photo of you asleep in a car with your mouth hanging open, you probably would not be ok with that. Most teens probably already know that's the kind of behavior people want to avoid on Snapchat, but it doesn't hurt to ask them.

- *You'll be notified (most of the time)*. Snapchat lets you know your message has been opened and – usually – if it has been captured and saved by the recipient. We say "usually" because it doesn't work 100% of the time and there are workarounds.

- *Protect passwords:* Like all services, make sure you have a strong and unique password and, parents, please remind your kids not to share their passwords with anyone, even their best friends. If someone has their password, it's possible for them to impersonate and embarrass them. For more on this, visit www.passwords.connectsafely.org.

- *Keeping it real:* Snapchat is a service mostly designed for "real life" friends, but there are still ways to find people you don't know (such as finding their Snapchat username on other services, or using the "Add Nearby" feature, which locates Snapchatters based on your physical location).

- *Sexting concerns:* Of course parents worry about sexting – kids sending nude or sexually explicit pictures of themselves on social media – but it's not nearly as common as some media reports have suggested. In fact, research shows it's pretty rare among younger teens. Still, sexting certainly can happen. Teens need to know what the implications of sexting are. For more on this, see www.sexting.connectsafely.org.

What to do about harassment or unwanted Snaps

- *Block the user*. To block someone from sending you Snaps, go to your profile by tapping the ghost on the camera screen, then tap "My Friends," find the person's name in the list and tap it to reveal a little gear icon to the right of the person's name. Tap the gear and a screen will pop up giving you the option to block or delete that user. For more information visit https://support.snapchat.com/a/block-friends.

- *Report abuse.* If a child receives inappropriate photos or someone's harassing him or her, contact Snapchat via safety@snapchat.com or by going to Snapchat.com and clicking on Support. In the unlikely event you encounter anything that appears to be illegal or dangerous, or if you have reason to believe

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someone is at risk of harm or self-harm, contact your local police or dial 911 (in the United States) immediately.

- *Delete the account:* If Snapchat isn't for you (or your kid), you can delete the account by going to https://accounts.snapchat.com/accounts/delete_account as long as you have the username and password. If you wish to delete the account and your child won't give you his or her password, you can submit a deletion request at www.snapchat.com/static_files/deletion_request.pdf.

Some closing thoughts for parents

Snapchat is one the most popular messaging apps that kids use but new apps are popping up all the time, and parents can't possibly be on top of all of them. That's why it's important for kids to develop critical thinking skills to help them stay safe in media and all aspects of their lives.

And speaking of critical thinking, there's no need to panic every time you hear a media report about something awful happening in social media. The reason the news media cover awful situations is because they're rare. How often do you see headlines about planes landing safely? We only hear about the ones that crash. Of course kids can get into trouble using Snapchat or any other service, but the same can be said for swimming pools. That's why we teach them how to swim.

As for our job as parents, it's important to keep the lines of communication with your kids as open as possible and work together to figure out what's appropriate for them, in terms of safety, privacy, reputation and time management. It generally just works better to talk with our kids about their favorite tools – with genuine interest, not fear – because they're more likely to come to you when they need help and you're much more likely to be kept in the loop about all the cool technology that they use and you get to learn about. And just because you may have heard stories about some kids misusing Snapchat or any other app, doesn't mean that applies to your child. Kids' use of social media is very individual and largely a reflection of their values and social circles.