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### Where do we start?

The internet has changed all of our lives, particularly our children's. For parents and carers this opens up a whole new world of things to be aware of. For many of us, this can all be a bit too much.

You might be struggling to keep up with the things your child is doing online, you might wonder whether what they are doing is safe, and you might also be thinking how can I be as good a parent online as I am offline?

This site aims to make online parenting simple.

Even if the only search engine you use is a pair of binoculars, do not despair. Here you'll find practical tips and simple guidance.

What is my child doing online?

How do I talk to my child about what they're doing online?

What risks might my child face?

What tools are there to help me keep my child safe?

### Top Tips

- Talk to your child about what they're up to online.** Be a part of their online life; involve the whole family and show an interest. Find out what sites they visit and what they love about them, if they know you understand they are more likely to come to you if they have any problems.
- Watch Thinkuknow films and cartoons with your child.** The Thinkuknow site has films, games and advice for children from five all the way to 16.
- Encourage your child to go online and explore!** There is a wealth of age-appropriate sites online for your children. Encourage them to use sites which are fun, educational and that will help them to develop online skills.
- Keep up-to-date with your child's development online.** Children grow up fast and they will be growing in confidence and learning new skills daily. It's important that as your child learns more, so do you.
- Set boundaries in the online world just as you would in the real world.** Think about what they might see, what they share, who they talk to and how long they spend online. It is important to discuss boundaries at a young age to develop the tools and skills children need to enjoy their time online.
- Keep all equipment that connects to the internet in a family space.** For children of this age, it is important to keep internet use in family space so you can see the sites your child is using and be there for them if they stumble across

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### What is my child doing online?

Playing Games

Making friends

Talking to people

Sharing

Searching

Using a mobile phone

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## Gaming

Playing games is great fun and for many children gaming will be their first experience of computers and the internet. Your child may be playing on the computer on sites like Club Penguin, CBeebies, Moshi Monsters or Neopets. They may have a console, like a Wii or an Xbox – remember, most consoles connect to the internet.

As they grow and develop they may start to explore more complex gaming like 'online role playing' or 'social gaming'. Wherever their gaming takes them, it's important that you're involved in your child's experiences from the very start.

Things children do online: Gaming



DAN WOOD  
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS MANAGER,  
THE ASSOCIATION FOR UK INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Gaming is great fun, but just as with anything online, there are **risks you should help your child navigate**. It's important that you're involved in your child's experiences, even if it feels like a different world!

[Click here for tips on helping your child game safely.](#)

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## Making friends

Many of the services we use online enable us to create a network of 'friends', this is no different for your children. The games they play will ask them to make friends with other 'characters', and on social networking sites they have the option to 'accept' or 'reject' friend requests.

In most cases, allowing someone to be your friend enables them to communicate with you, share things with you and often find out information about you.

Things children do online - Social networking



It is important to help your children understand the following areas:

- Know who their friends are – because 'friends' can talk to your child and have access to their personal information. Children this age should only be friends with people online that they are friends with in the real world.
- Know what they can see – being someone's 'friend' often gives them access to your personal information. Your children should think about the information that their 'friends' can see and whether it could be used to bully or manipulate them – [for more information on the risks, click here.](#)
- Know what to do if people are being mean – sometimes 'friends' can be mean online and it's important that your child is aware of what they can do to block or report this – [for more information on steps you can take, click here.](#)

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## Talking to People

Children use the internet to talk to people in a number of different ways: emailing, instant messaging, webcam and chat rooms. Chatting online can feel different to chatting face-to-face. It can be easier to say and reveal things that you wouldn't in the real world.

At this age, you should make sure that you are happy with the people that they talking to so you can help to protect them from any **risks** they might encounter – for more information on the risks click here

### What is instant messaging?

Instant messaging (IM) is instant text chat between two or more people. This tends to be private un-moderated chat. You can build a list of 'friends' or 'buddies' that you can chat to, they can see when you are online and start conversations with you. It is important for children to know how to manage this list, for example by blocking contacts they don't want to talk to.

Windows Live Messenger is a popular IM service, however, many sites, including Facebook, provide instant messaging.

### What is webcam chat?

Webcams let you see the person you're talking to while you're chatting. Services like Skype are very popular and free. This can be a fun way for children to chat to each other; however, it is important to remember that what appears on webcam can be recorded and shared with other people in ways that you wouldn't want.

### What are chat rooms?

A chat room is a forum where groups of people meet to chat online – this can sometimes be about a particular topic, or can be friends meeting to discuss something. Sometimes chat rooms are moderated; this means that someone, or a computer program, is looking out for inappropriate language or behaviour.

### Should my child have an email account?

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## Sharing

Many of the sites your children will be using encourage them to share bits of information about themselves with others. They might share things like:

- Opinions – such as what they like and don't like
- What they are doing
- Pictures of themselves
- Information about themselves – such as their name and where they live
- Videos and music

The internet is a great tool for sharing information like this and it can be fun to see what your friends are doing. However, it is important that children think before they share as there can be risks with sharing personal information – **for more information about the risks of sharing**

You can help your child share safely by teaching them to:

- Not share pictures and videos without your permission.
- Limit the amount of personal information shared – for example, not to share their address or which school they go to.
- Only share personal information with their friends.

Show them the film **'Jigsaw'** to look at some of the consequences of sharing personal information.

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## Searching

Search engines can make our lives easier. They make sense of the chaos of the web, linking us to the sites we need, when we need them. Google, Bing and Yahoo are all search engines and some of the most visited sites in the world.

With a world of information at their fingertips, it's easy for children to stumble across things that might upset or disturb them. They might also come across sites which aren't suitable for their age.

Remember, this can happen by accident and, while most parents and carers trust their children online, children are naturally curious. They may search 'rude' words, without thinking about the results they might get.

A simple way to help stop your child from accidentally coming across things that shouldn't be is to change the 'search settings' on search engines. These aim to prevent the search engine from showing them things that might not be suitable for children.

Note: No filter is 100% accurate and if they see something that upsets them, they should tell a trusted adult.

Visit the Google home page - [www.google.co.uk](#)

The most popular search engine in the world is Google. It's a website where you can find almost anything you need. To help protect children, Google has a 'SafeSearch' filter. This means that when you search for something, Google won't show you any pictures or websites that might be scary or upsetting.

When you search for something, you can choose to turn 'SafeSearch' on or off. To turn it on, you need to click on the 'SafeSearch' link in the bottom right corner of the page. This will take you to a page where you can turn it on. Once it's on, you'll see a message that says 'SafeSearch is on'. This means that Google will only show you safe results.

Scroll down the page and change the filtering options to suit your family's needs. Make sure you lock the safe search, otherwise these settings can easily be changed without your knowledge.

Advertising Programmes | Business Solutions | About Google | Go to Google.com | Privacy | Change background image

SafeSearch: On (strict) | SafeSearch: On (moderate) | SafeSearch: On (off)

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## Using a mobile phone

Whether your child needs a mobile phone or not is a decision for you and can be a tough one to make.

Owning a mobile phone is a big responsibility. If you are considering buying your child a mobile phone, it's important that you are able to help them manage their usage.

A mobile is a great way for your child to stay in touch. It can give you peace of mind and your child greater contact with their friends.

Increasing numbers of children now own mobiles from a young age, and the devices themselves are becoming ever more powerful. Remember... mobile phones have come a long way. Most modern phones are like mini computers and offer the same functions you might have on a computer. Many mobile phones can now:

- Access the internet – this is no different to accessing the internet through a computer. Children can go on any site that you can find online, including sites like Facebook, YouTube and also potentially age inappropriate sites.
- Take and share photos and videos – most phones have a fully functioning camera. Children can take images and videos and these can be shared quickly, easily and for free through text message, email or uploading to the internet.
- Chat with instant messaging, video and text – children can take part in private chats with people through their mobile phone.
- Share your location – through GPS, many phones can now identify their user's location in real time. This can then be shared on social networking sites and through other sites and applications.
- Play games – children can use their mobile to play games and download new ones, sometimes these can come at a cost. See our [playing games section for more advice](#)
- Add and buy 'apps' – apps are programs that you can add to your phone that enable you to do a wide range of things, from playing simple games to finding up-to-date train times. Some of these apps have a cost.

With all of these functions available, talking to people is now only a small part of what mobile phones are used for. It can be difficult to keep tabs of what your child is up to on a mobile phone.

Looking at this list you may feel uncomfortable about managing your child's use of such a sophisticated phone. Remember, you can still buy phones without these functions. We feel this is more appropriate for this age group.

### How can I help my child use their mobile phone safely?

Safety precautions which you have set on the real world should be adapted and set to their mobile.

**Parental settings** – some mobile phone service providers allow you to set certain controls over your child's phone. This can include, blocking access to certain sites and monitoring your child's activities. When buying a mobile, speak to the sales representative to find out more about what services they offer. You can find out more about what controls are available looking at the [parental controls](#) page.

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## Let them teach you

The people who know best about what your children are up to online, are your children! Get them to tell you about the sites they're using. Ask them questions such as:

- Why do they like the site?
- What can they do on it?
- What's so fun about it?
- Who uses it at school?
- Who you can talk to?
- Who are their friends on it?

This is a good way to develop a trusting relationship with your child about what they are up to online.

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## Reach an agreement

A good way to set boundaries with your child about what they can and can't do online is to set an agreement with them. Here are some examples of the areas you might want to discuss:

- Limits on the amount of time your child spends online, or playing computer games.
- Having regular screen breaks – at least five minutes every 45-60 minutes.
- Not sharing any pictures they wouldn't be happy to share with you.
- Not giving out personal details, such as mobile phone number and address, to people they don't know and trust.
- Coming to you if they are concerned. Or, if not, knowing where they can go for independent help and support.

Why not introduce an agreement after watching one of the **Thinkuknow** films?

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Go to the movies

Your child may have watched one of our Thinkuknow cartoons or films at school, they are a great way to start conversations with your child about what can happen online and what they can do about it.


Ask your child if they have seen any of the films below and why not sit down and watch one together and discuss the topics. We would recommend that you watch the film on your own beforehand so that you're aware of the topics it covers.



Watch Lee and Kim's Adventure



Watch Jigsaw



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