

Balancing screen time

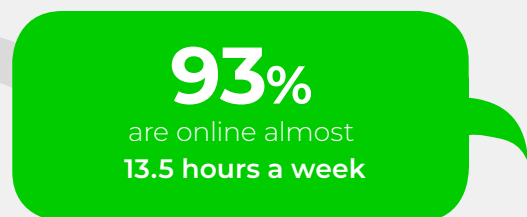
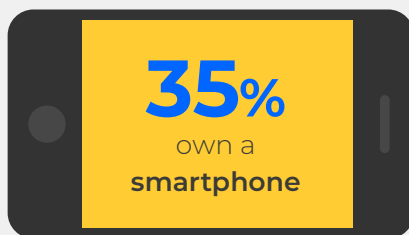
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Top tips to support children aged 7-11 (Key stage 2)

Typically at this age children will start to be more active online so it's important to equip them with the tools to strike a healthy balance between the time they spend on and offline, especially as they start to get their own devices.



How are children using screens?



Source: [Ofcom Children and Parents Media use and attitudes report 2018](#)

What parents tell us

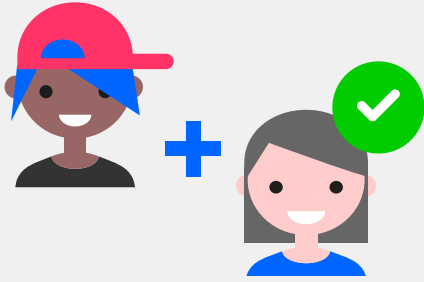
Screens are good for creativity

Nearly 7 out of 10 parents believe that using devices gives children another way of being creative for example a child who enjoys dancing, sharing a new routine online with family and friends.

Screens' impact on physical wellbeing

Nearly half of parents in the UK are worried their children are spending too much time online – with the majority believing it is causing their kids to lead a sedentary lifestyle lacking in physical exercise.

What are the benefits and challenges of screen use?



Screen time benefits

- Screen use provides a range of opportunities for creativity and learning – **70% of parents strongly agree that using devices is essential** for their child's development
Source: [Internet Matters Look both ways report](#).
- Screens can be a great tool to allow children to **maintain relationships** with family and friends.
- **Screens can provide much needed down-time** at the end of the school day.

Screen time challenges

- **Peer pressure from friends to stay online** and the way certain platforms are developed to keep users engaged can make it harder for children to switch off.
- As children get more active online there is an **increased risk that they might stumble across inappropriate content** that can have a negative impact on their digital wellbeing.
- Long periods of passive screen time (i.e bingeing on box sets) **could have a physical effect on their development** (i.e. eyes, brain), sleep cycle and behaviour.



5 top tips to balance screen time

1 Create screen time rules together

To help them stick to digital boundaries **get them involved in the process of setting simple rules** on how they should use screens in and out of the home.

Giving them reasons why it's important to prioritise sleep, homework and family time can help them make smarter choices about when and how they should switch off screens.

Make sure to model the behaviour that you'd like to see in them – children tend to do what you do, not necessarily what you say.

2 Take an active role in their digital life

Get engaged and stay engaged in their digital life as they grow. The more you get involved and understand the things your children do online, the easier it is to gain their respect and influence what they do in their digital world.

Making screens part of family time, like a movie or an online games night is one way to make it more inclusive and engaging.

Also, encouraging them to have a healthy mix of screen activities that encourage creativity, learning & education, connecting with family & friends, as well as using devices for downtime is important.

3 Equip them with know-how to manage risks online

As children become more active online, **have regular conversations with them about ways to deal with a range of risks** that they may be exposed to such as seeing inappropriate content or being cyberbullied.

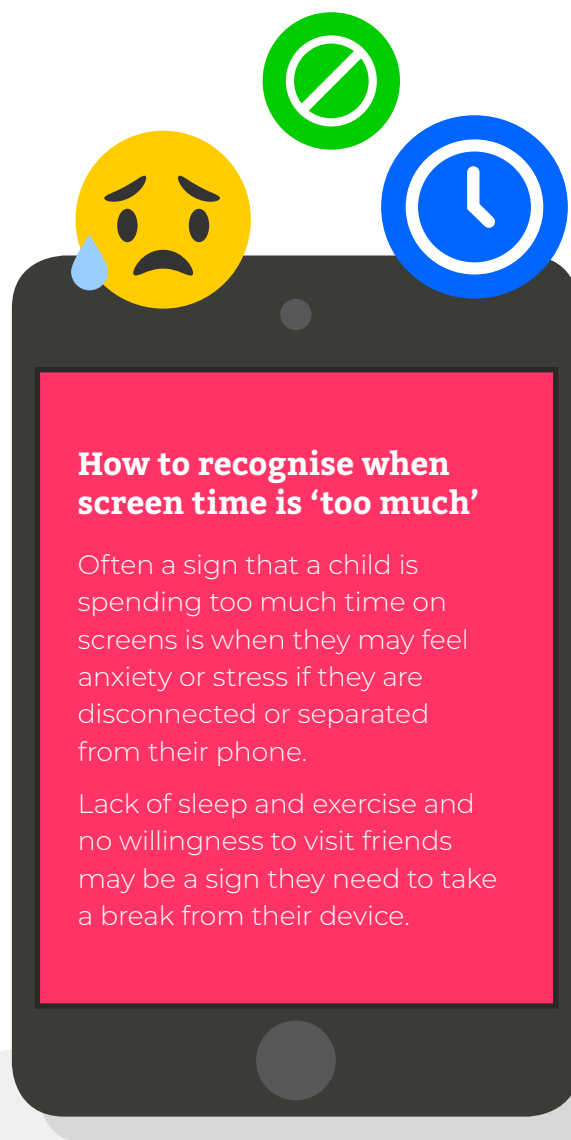
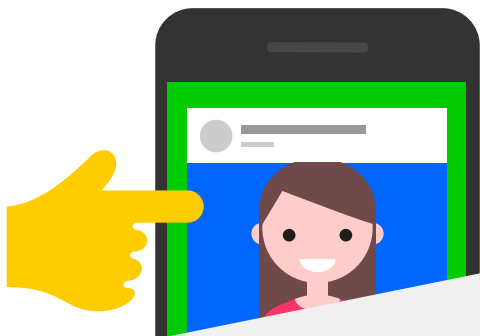
Make sure they know when and where to seek help if they need it and what tools they can use to deal with it.

4 Use tools to manage their screen time & access to media

Whatever device your child uses, be sure to **make use of free and premium tools available** to manage their access to age-appropriate content and review the time they spend on specific online activities.

5 Encourage them to be selective about what they do online

Help them avoid mindless scrolling and be more critical about the media they watch and the platforms they use. Encourage them to explore apps and websites that will compliment what they enjoy in the real world and develop their key skills.



How to recognise when screen time is 'too much'

Often a sign that a child is spending too much time on screens is when they may feel anxiety or stress if they are disconnected or separated from their phone.

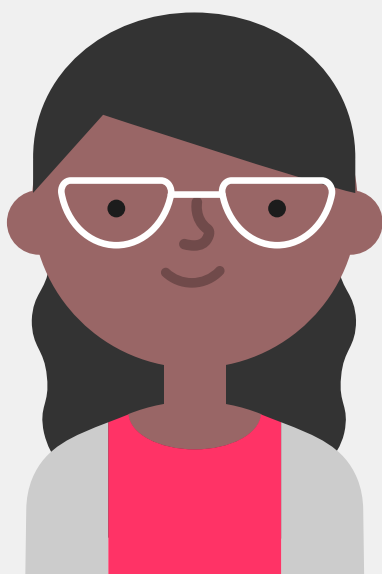
Lack of sleep and exercise and no willingness to visit friends may be a sign they need to take a break from their device.

The truth about screen time

Not all screen time is created equal so it's important to encourage children to have a healthy balance between passive screen time (i.e watching YouTube) and interactive screen time (i.e. creating content or playing games online).

There is no safe level of screen time but it doesn't mean that all screen time is harmful. Lack of evidence has meant that experts have found it hard to recommend a cut-off for children screen time overall.

One size does not fit all when it comes to screen time – it's more about getting it right for your families needs.



Visit internetmatters.org/screentime for more advice

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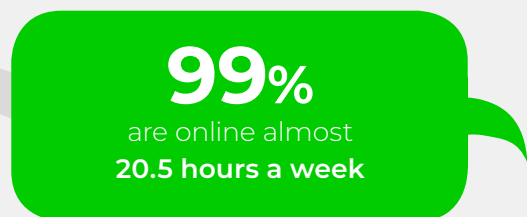
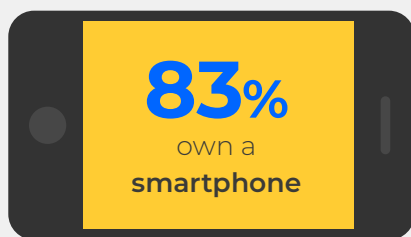
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Top tips to support children 11-14 (Key stage 3)

As children start senior or secondary school and take advantage of their independence, it's likely that they'll be spending a lot more time on their devices. This is a crucial time to talk to them about how to manage their screen time and give them strategies to find a healthy balance between their life on and offline. Find tips and advice to help them do just that.



How are children using screens?



Source: Ofcom Children and Parents
Media use and attitudes report 2018

What do parents say about screen time?

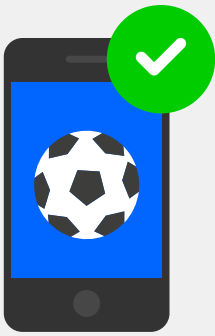
Setting screen time limits

Nearly 9 out of 10 parents take measures to limit their child's use of devices as 54% of parents of 11-13s are concerned about the amount of time their child is spending online.

Screen time and FOMO

Over half of parents of children aged 11-13 feel pressured to allow screen time particularly access to mobile phones so that their child doesn't feel as though they are missing out as they become more independent and start organising their own social lives.

What are the benefits and challenges of screen use?



Screen time benefits

- Screen use provides a range of opportunities for creativity and learning – **70% of parents strongly agree that using devices is essential** for their child's development
Source: [Internet Matters Look both ways report](#).
- Screens can be a great tool to allow children to **maintain relationships** with family and friends.
- **The internet can also be inspirational for children** with a certain passion in particular when discovering content and sharing their own content.

Screen time challenges

- As most children at this age will have their own devices, for parents **it can become increasingly challenging** to stay on top of their screen use.
- As children become more active online, **there is an increased risk that they will be exposed to a range of online issues** such as cyberbullying or oversharing which may negatively impact their digital footprint.
- **Passive screen time** (i.e bingeing on box sets) could have a physical effect on their development (i.e. eyes, brain), sleep cycle and behaviour.



5 top tips to balance screen time



1 Set boundaries to help them build good online habits

Children seek out rules to follow so its best these come from you and not their peers. **Set up a family agreement that you all sign up to**, to manage expectations of what they should and shouldn't be doing online. These boundaries should help them prioritise sleep, face to face interactions and family time to strike a healthy balance.

2 Stay engaged in what they do online

Take an interest in their digital world to better guide them as they become more socially active online and start to draw from friends and online sources to build their identity.

Give them the space to be more independent and build their resilience online to ensure they make smart choices about how they use tech. The more you understand how your child interacts online

and check-in with them about their interest and challenges online, the easier it will be for them to come to you if they are concerned or worried about something.

3 Equip them with know-how to manage risks online

Have regular conversations with them about ways to deal with a range of risks that they may be exposed to such as seeing inappropriate content or being cyberbullied.

Make sure they know when and where to seek help if they need it and what tools they can use to deal with it. Try to reassure them that you won't overreact if they get something wrong.

4 Give them the space to become digitally resilient

As they get older and more confident in their digital world, it's important to

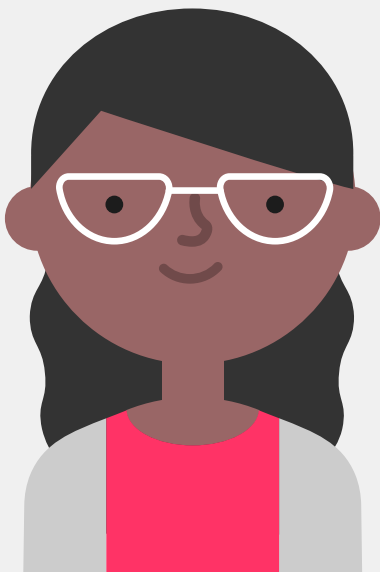
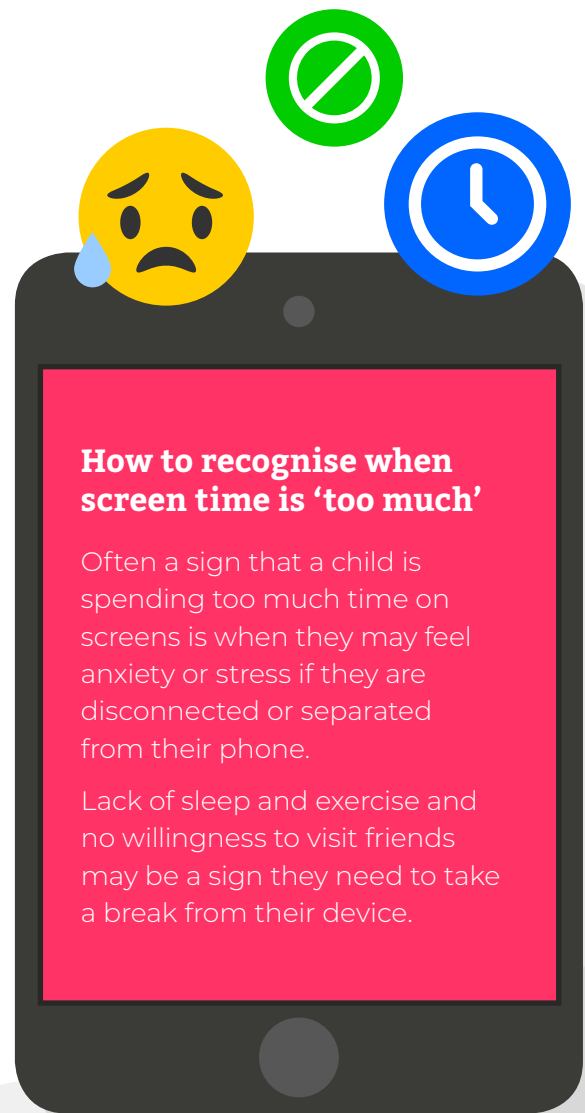
encourage them to be more responsible and aware of how their screen use can impact them and others. Give them the space to thrive online, while also keeping the channels of communications open and being on the lookout for any differences in behaviour that might suggest something isn't quite right is key.

It's a tricky time for young people so it's important to equip them with the tools to make smart decisions and ensure they are able to seek support when they need it most.

5

Encourage children to review when and how they use their screen time with tools

Help young people to make use of the screen-time tools that come with their phone. Most children at this age will say that being more aware of how much time they spend is helpful. They will still need some encouragement to make changes to what they are doing and the amount of time they are spending but it's better that they start to discover and monitor this for themselves where possible.



The truth about screen time

Not all screen time is created equal so it's important to encourage children to have a healthy balance between passive screen time (i.e watching YouTube) and interactive screen time (i.e. creating content or playing games online).

There is no safe level of screen time but it doesn't mean that all screen time is harmful. Lack of evidence has meant that experts have found it hard to recommend a cut-off for children screen time overall.

One size does not fit all when it comes to screen time – it's more about getting it right for your families needs.

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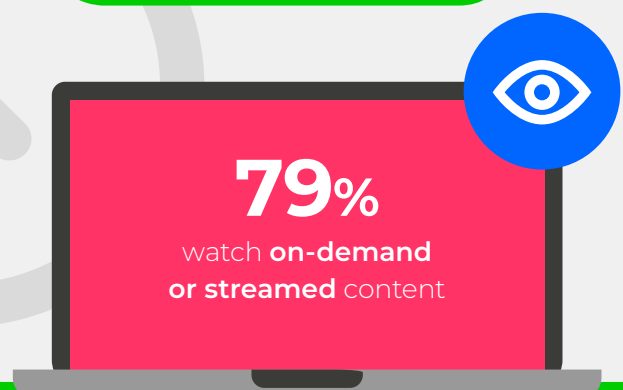
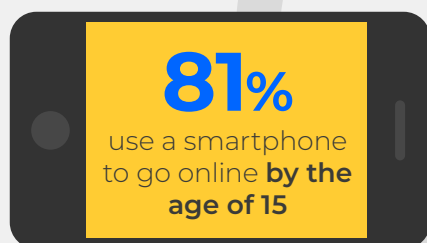
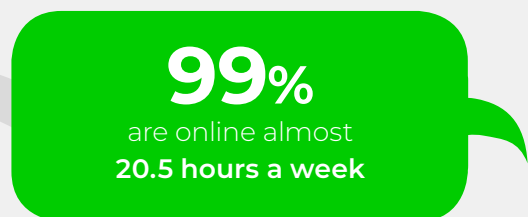
Top tips to support children 14+ (Key stage 4)

Smartphones are central to teen's daily routine, if not integral to it. Whether it's sending something on Snapchat to keep a streak going as soon as they wake up, getting up to speed on news on Twitter or live streaming thoughts about their day on social media, it can be hard to keep teens away from screens.

To support teens, it's more about equipping them with the tools to self-regulate their own screen time and be critical about how it is impacting their well-being. Find tips and advice to help them do just that.



How are children using screens?



Source: Ofcom Adults: Media use and attitudes report 2019

What do parents say about screen time?

Less screen time limits

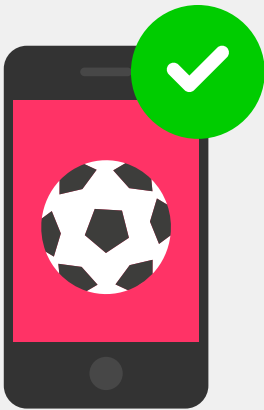
Although overall **almost 9 in 10 parents take measures to limit their child's use of devices**, parents of teens are less likely to take any measures. As they get older it is important that they have more freedom and less restrictions – they need to start to develop the skills to manage this on their own.

Increased use of social media

Half of parents of 14–16s are concerned about their children's use of social media and its impact on their overall mental wellbeing.

Source: *Internet Matters Look both ways report*

What are the benefits and challenges of screen use?



Screen time benefits

- Screen use provides a range of opportunities for creativity and learning – **70% of parents strongly agree that using devices is essential** for their child's development
Source: [Internet Matters Look both ways report](#).
- **Gives children access to a wealth of information** to build their knowledge and technology takes away physical barriers to social connections to make children less isolated.
- **The internet can also be inspirational for children** with a certain passion in particular when discovering content and sharing their own content.



Screen time challenges

- **Peer pressure from friends to stay online and constant use of devices and features** like auto-play on platforms can be habit forming and encourage children to spend longer on screens.
- **An increase in interactions online** can make it more likely that teens may come across fake news or inappropriate content that can influence them in a negative way.
- **Long periods of passive screen time** (i.e bingeing on box sets) can have a physical effect on teens development (i.e. eyes, brain), sleep cycle and behaviour.



5 top tips to balance screen time

1 Help them prioritise key tasks over screens

It can be tempting for children to **multitask with a screen** but often it can become a distraction. To help them strike a healthy balance it's important to set simple rules that they can follow.

Putting their phone on 'do not disturb' when doing important activities like homework, creating device free zones in the home and taking regular breaks from tech are a great start to help them prioritise family time and sleep over screens. Also, setting a good example with your own screen time use is essential.

2 Stay engaged in what they do online

Learn how they communicate with others online to better guide them as they become more socially active online and draw from friends, passions and online sources to build their identity. The more you get involved and understand the things your children do

online, the easier it is to gain their respect and influence what they do in their digital world. Also, making screens part of family time, like a movie or an online games night is one way to make it more inclusive and engaging.

3 Equip them with know-how to manage risks online

Be open and honest about the online risks teens face so they feel confident to talk to you if they get into trouble online – and don't overreact – remember that the dialogue is important and you want them to come back to you the next time they need support.

Also, make them aware of practical things they can do to deal with risks online, like blocking and reporting on the platforms they use. It's also important to remind them to think carefully about what they post and share with others online to help them maintain a positive online reputation that will serve them well later on in life when applying for a job or higher education.

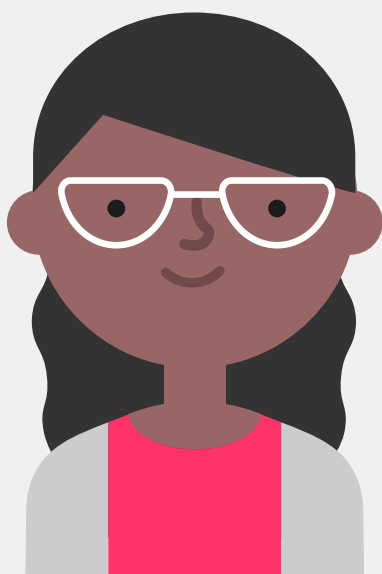
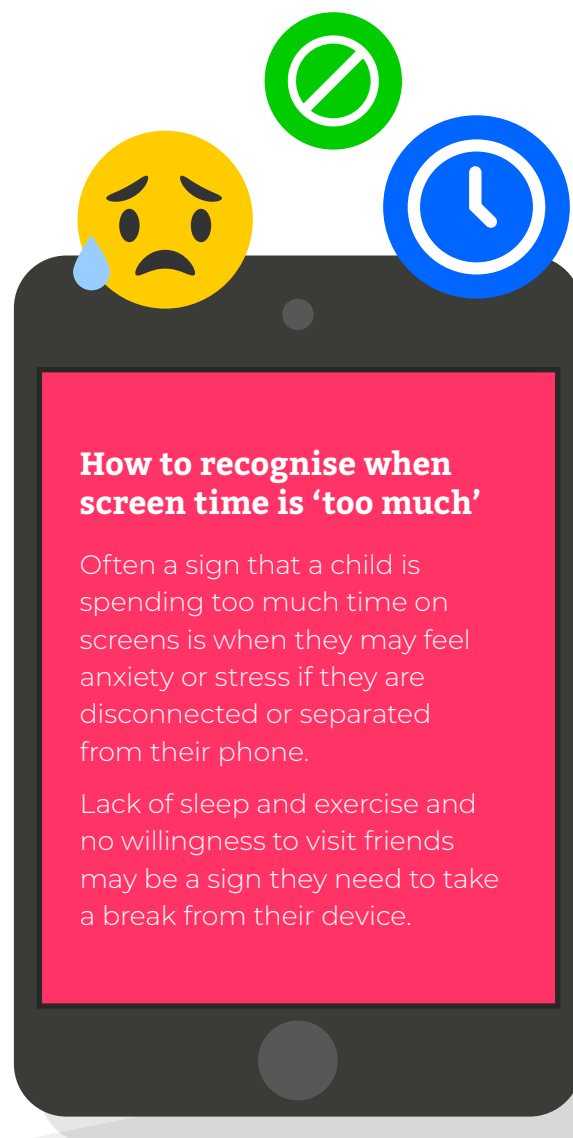
4 Encourage them to self-regulate their screen time

Whatever devices your teen uses, **take the time to sit together and review** the free tools available to help them assess the time they spend online and make them aware of privacy settings they can use to stay in control of what they share. Also, looking at app permissions can be a powerful way to get them to understand what can happen with their data.

All consoles and some social platforms have in-built settings that allow you to set alerts to tell you when you've reached a certain amount of time on the platform and gives you a summary of time spent to support digital wellbeing.

5 Encourage them to be selective about what they do online

It's important to make teens aware that most platforms are purposely built to keep them watching or playing, this can help them avoid mindless scrolling. **Encourage them to be more critical about the media they watch and the platforms they use** and to explore apps and websites that will compliment what they enjoy in the real world and develop their key skills.



The truth about screen time

Not all screen time is created equal so it's important to encourage children to have a healthy balance between passive screen time (i.e watching YouTube) and interactive screen time (i.e. creating content or playing games online).

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Online safety tips for parents of primary school children 6-10 Year Olds

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Checklist:

Agree on boundaries

Be clear about what your child can and can't do online – where and when they can use the internet, how much time they can spend online, the sites they can visit and the type of information they can share. Agree with your child when they can have a mobile phone or tablet.

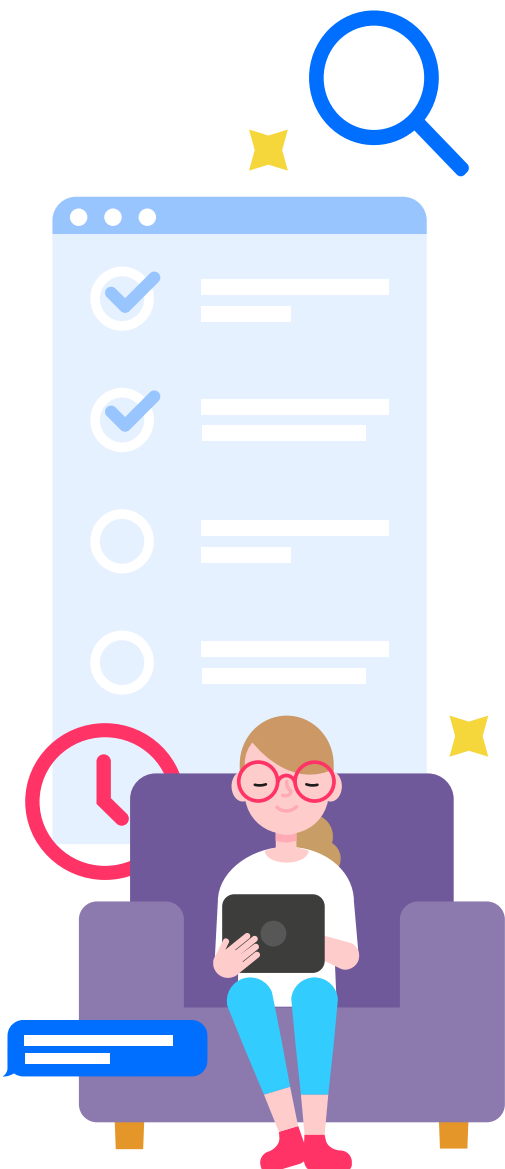
When you do give them their first device make sure that it is set up appropriately for them with the right parental controls in place. It's a good idea to **introduce tech-free meal times** and encourage them to **keep phones out of the bedroom at night** to help them build a healthy screen time balance.

Put yourself in control

Set parental controls on your home broadband and any internet-enabled devices. Set up a user account for your child on the main device they use and make sure other accounts in the household are password-protected so that younger children can't access them by accident.

Explore together

The best way to support your child online is to **talk to them about what they do online** and what sites and apps they like to use. Be inquisitive and ask them to show you their favourites to check they're suitable.



Search safely

If you let your child search independently, **make sure safe search is activated on Google and other search engines**, as well as restricted mode on YouTube. You can set your default search to one designed specifically for children, such as Swiggle, and can save time by adding these to your Favourites.

Check if it's suitable

The age ratings that come with games, apps, films and social networks are a good guide to whether they're suitable for your child. **For example, the minimum age limit is 13 for several social networking sites**, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok.

Make use of platforms and services designed with children in mind like CBBC, YouTube Kids, Sky Kids, BBC iPlayerKids. Although sites aimed at under-10s like Spotlite (Formerly Kudos) also have social networking elements. See other similar social networking sites built for kids in our ['Social networks made for kids' guide](#).

Stay involved

Encourage them to use their tech devices in a shared space like the lounge or kitchen so you can keep an eye on how they're using the internet and also share in their enjoyment.

Talk to siblings

It's a good idea to talk to any older children about what they're doing online and what they show to younger children. **Encourage them to be responsible and help keep their younger siblings safe.**



Know this stuff matters, but don't know where to turn?

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44%

of 5-10 year olds
have their own
mobile phone*

81%

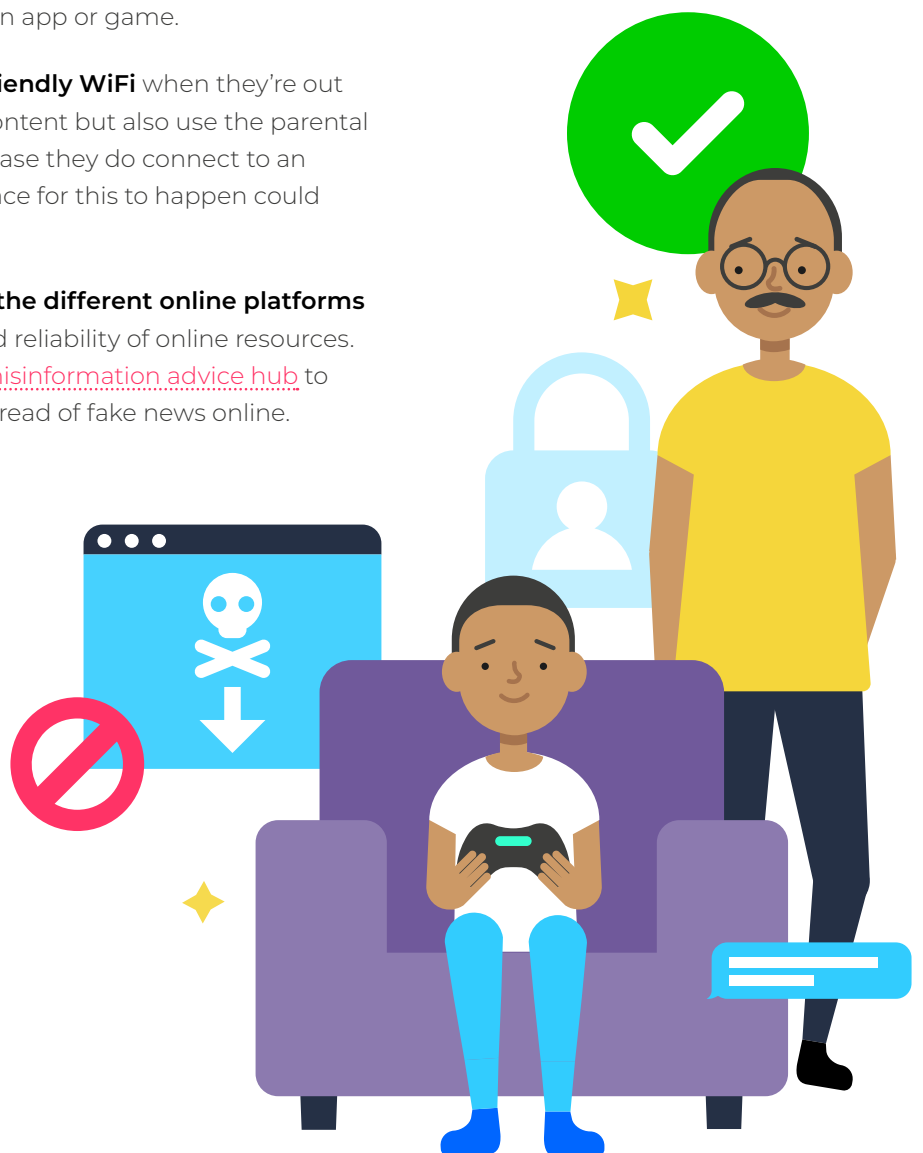
use a tablet
to go online*

*Source: Ofcom Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2022

Learn about it:

Teach your child some simple rules

- Make sure your child knows **not to share personal information** like their phone number or email address online.
- Encourage them to **only talk to real-life friends or family** if they are on sites with a social media or chat element like Roblox.
- **Use privacy settings** wherever they exist to keep their information private - help your child to set these up. Remember that the default on many sites is public.
- **Be a good online friend** and don't say nasty things even if it's just a joke.
- Direct them to use **secure and legal sites to download** music and games to avoid experiencing the risks associated with streaming content from unauthorised sites. Visit our ['Dangers of digital piracy' advice hub](#) more advice.
- Advise them to **Check attachments and pop-ups for viruses** before they click or download anything and ask if they aren't sure. You can set up their phone/tablet so you need to grant permission before they are able to download an app or game.
- **Encourage them to use Public Friendly WiFi** when they're out and about to filter inappropriate content but also use the parental control tools on the device just in case they do connect to an unfiltered WiFi - the most likely place for this to happen could be at a friend's house.
- **Help them to better understand the different online platforms they use** and judge the quality and reliability of online resources. Take a look at our [fake news and misinformation advice hub](#) to help children spot, and stop the spread of fake news online.



Talk about it:

Tips for a meaningful conversation

- Start conversations when your children won't be embarrassed, for example in the car going home from school. **Try to de-personalise it by asking their opinion on a current news story** that relates to an online issue.
- **Be proactive - don't wait until something has already gone wrong** - discuss issues ahead of time - knowing what children of a similar age are doing will help you know more about the environment that your child is living in.
- **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 - **listen to them when they do and try not to overreact** - the important thing is that they have come and told you!
- **Be sensitive and praise them** when they share their online experiences with you.
- If your child comes to you with an issue, **stay calm and listen without judging them.**
- **Talk about online grooming as you would stranger danger** and explain that people they meet online might not be who they say they are.
- Ask them about things online which **might make them (or others) uncomfortable.**



Deal with it

You can find out where to get help and advice on the [Report issue](#) resource page of internetmatters.org, where we include information on how to report problems – and which relevant organisations and agencies to turn to.

On this page, we also provide information on how to deal with any specific issues you may encounter with your child; such as finding inappropriate content and cyberbullying.

Stay safe at secondary school


Exposure to some of these issues increases when children move up to secondary school so make sure your child is prepared – find out more with our pre-teens age guide at [internetmatters.org/advice/11-13](#)

Scan below or visit [internetmatters.org](#) for more advice





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Online safety tips for parents of 11-13 Year Olds

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60% of children age 8-11 have their own social media profile

**Source: Ofcom Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2022*



Checklist:

Have a conversation

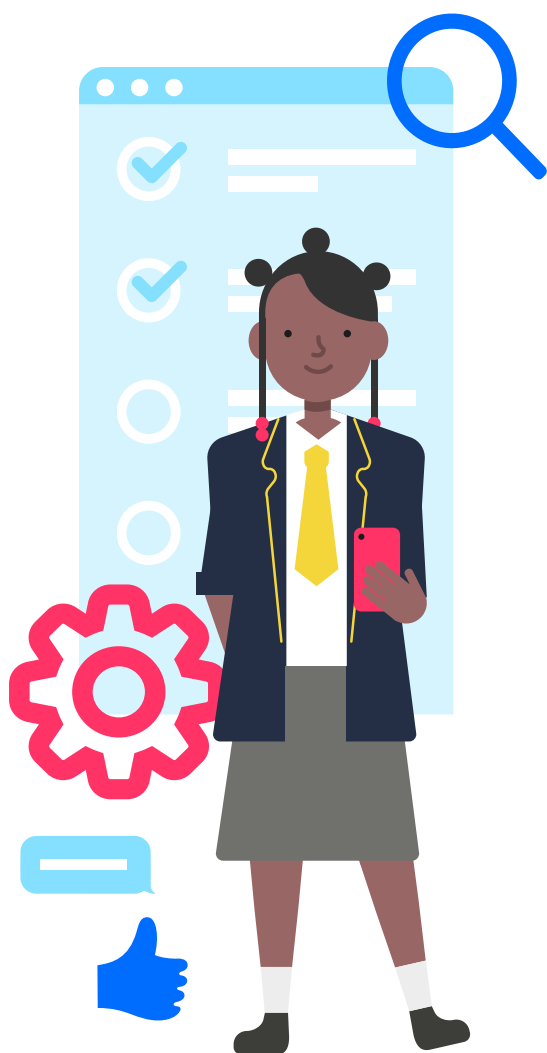
The best way to find out what your child is doing online is to **ask them to tell you about what they do and what sites they like to visit**. Discuss with them what they might come across. There are always stories in the press which will help to start a conversation. [See our conversation starter guide](#) for advice to help children open up about their digital lives.

Agree on boundaries

Have a [family agreement](#) about where and when they can use the internet, how much time they can spend online, the sites they can visit and the type of information they can share. **It's a good idea to introduce tech-free meals times and encourage them to keep phones out of the bedroom at night** to help them build a healthy balance with screen time.

Put yourself in control:

Make use of parental controls on your home broadband and any internet-enabled devices that your child uses. You can [visit our parental control how-to guides](#) to learn how to set these up or visit your broadband or mobile network's provider's website. You can also set up safe search in Google by going to the Google Safety Centre.



If you are giving a child their first device, you can set all this up together before they start using it so they can see how they'll be protected. It can also be an opportunity to have a conversation about online safety.

Remember, although these tools can create a safety net to protect children online, they are not 100% foolproof so **it's important to continue having regular conversations with children** about their online use to equip them with coping strategies to deal with online risks.

Check if it's suitable

The age ratings that come with games, apps, films and social networks **are a good guide to whether they're suitable for your child**. The minimum age limit is 13 for several social networking sites, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. [Visit our guide to check the minimum age of popular apps.](#)

Get them clued up about social networking

Talk to children about the benefits and risks of social networking before they join any sites. Let them know that anything they upload, email, or message could stay around forever online. Help them to set their profile up so that they are in control of who can comment, message them etc. Get tips and insight from [our social media guide](#). If you have a child with SEND, [please visit our Connecting Safely Online hub for tailored advice](#).

Help them to be critical of things they see online and judge the quality and reliability of online sources.



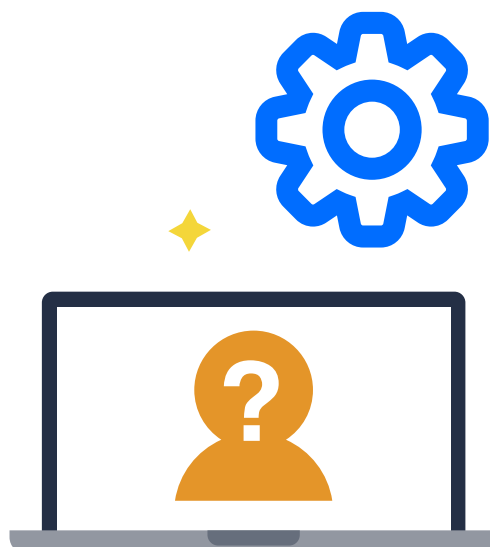
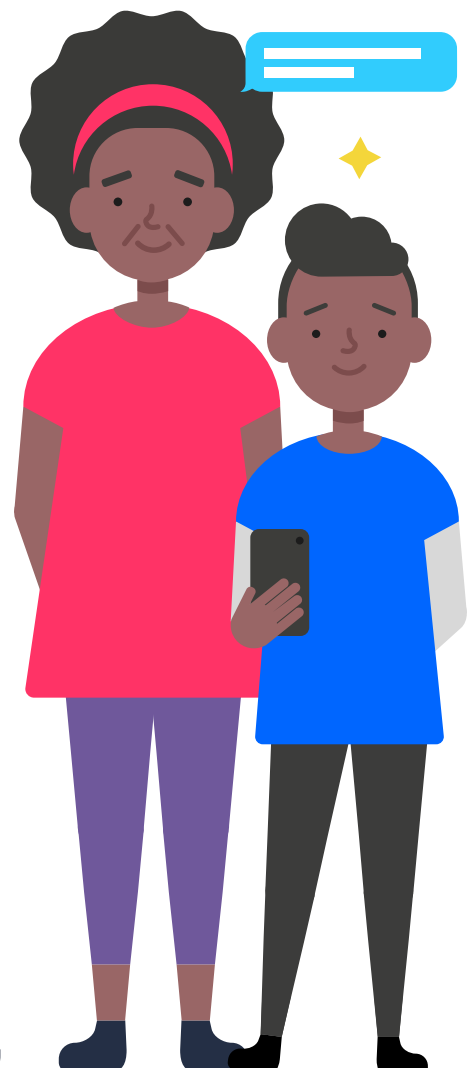
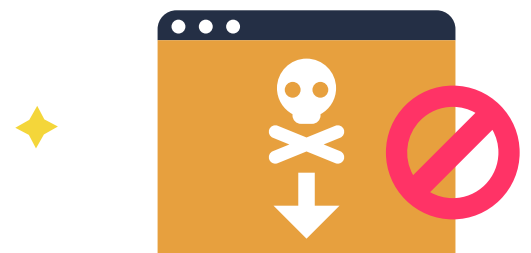
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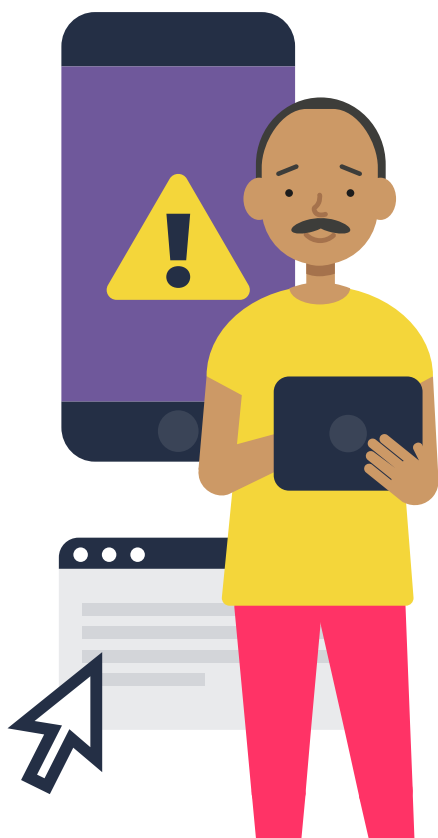
- Make sure your child knows **not to share personal information like their phone number or email address online** and if they need to provide this or similar information to sign up for a service tell them to check with you first.
- Encourage them to only talk to **real-life friends or family** on social media sites and in chatrooms.
- **Show them how to use privacy settings** wherever they exist to keep their information private - remember that the default on many sites is set to public. [Visit our social media privacy guides for support.](#)
- As children may go online to widen their group of friends, **set some boundaries when it comes to new friends online.**
- **Advise them not to arrange to meet with people in real life** that they've only talked with online without talking to you about it and getting your support.
- **Advise them to use secure and legal sites to download music and games** to avoid experiencing the risks associated with streaming content from unauthorised sites. [Visit our 'Dangers of digital piracy' advice hub more advice.](#)
- **Check attachments and pop-ups for viruses** before they click or download anything.
- Use Public Friendly WiFi when they're out and about to filter inappropriate content. **Also, encourage them to use the parental control tools on their device** just in case they do connect to an unfiltered WiFi - such as at a friend's house.
- Make sure they know **not to post things online that they wouldn't want you to see**



Talk about it:

Tips for a meaningful conversation

- **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** and remember to listen and not overreact.
- **Be sensitive and praise them** when they share their online experiences with you
- Make sure they know **how to block abusive comments and report content** that worries them.
- If your child comes to you with an issue, **stay calm and listen without judging them**
- **Tackle peer pressure** by explaining that if they are talked into bullying someone online or sending inappropriate images it may get reported to their school or even the police. Read this guide – So you got naked online– aimed at kids to get insight on [how to deal with sexting incidence](#).
- Teach them to treat others as they'd like to be treated online and set a good example with your own internet use. [Use the Stop, Speak, Support code](#) to encourage them to call out cyberbullying when they see it.



Deal with it

You can find out where to get help and advice on the [Report issue page of internetmatters.org](#), where we include information on how to report problems - and which relevant organisations and agencies to turn to.

On this page, we also provide information on how to deal with any specific issues you may encounter with your child; such as [cyberbullying](#), finding [inappropriate content](#), your child's [online reputation](#), [online pornography](#) and [child grooming](#).

Learn more about apps


It can be difficult to stay on top of what apps your child is using and who they are talking to online – [find out more about the latest apps at internetmatters.org/apps](#).

Scan below or visit [internetmatters.org](#) for more advice





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Online safety tips for parents of teenagers

14+ Year Olds

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99% of 12-17-year-olds have their own mobile phone

98% use video-sharing platforms

92% have their own social media profiles

75% play games online

*Source: [Ofcom Children and parents: media use and attitudes 2022 report](#)



Checklist:

Keep talking

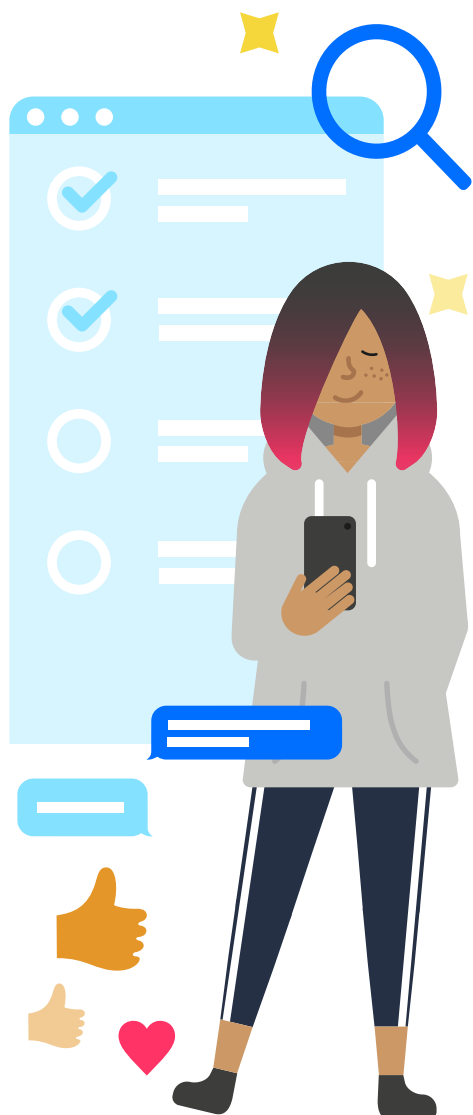
Stay interested in what they're doing online and discuss what they might have come across. **Don't be afraid to tackle difficult subjects like cyberbullying, and sexting and pornography.** Help them to be critical of things they see online and judge the quality and reliability of online sources. Acknowledge that this is difficult considering how content can be manipulated online to persuade even the most savvy people. Talk together about how to manage some of these challenges and why it is important.

Manage their online reputation

Let them know that anything they upload, email or message could stay online forever. **Remind them that they should only post things online that they wouldn't mind you, their teacher or a future employer seeing.** There are lots of stories in the media that highlight the importance of online reputation and clearly demonstrate how things that happened years ago can resurface in the future. See our [online reputation advice hub](#) to get tips to support young people on this issue

Adjust controls

Adjust the [parental controls](#) on your broadband and internet-enabled devices, depending on your child's age. Your broadband provider can tell you how. Find out how to set up safe search in Google by going to the [Google Safety Centre](#). Remember that at this age they are likely to have friends with unfiltered devices and whilst parental controls and filtering is important this needs to be done alongside dialogue and discussion.



Privacy matters

Make sure they set high privacy settings on social networks. Encourage them to regularly change their passwords and never to share or put online any of their personal details like phone number, address or their school. [Use our social media privacy how-to guides](#) to support them.



Stay safe on the move

Make sure safety and privacy settings are activated on their mobile devices and they aren't sharing private information. Be aware that using public WiFi might not filter inappropriate content, so look for friendly WiFi symbols when you're out and about. **Also, encourage them to use the parental control tools on their device** just in case they do connect to an unfiltered WiFi - such as at a friend's house.

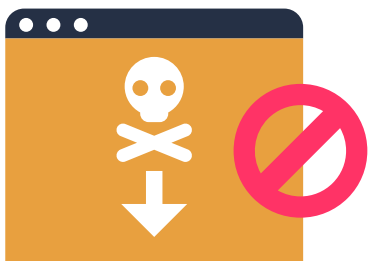


Know this stuff matters, but don't know where to turn?

Internet Matters is a free online resource for every parent in the UK. We'll show you the best ways to protect your children online – with information, advice and support on all the big online safety issues.

Learn about it: Teach your child some simple rules

- Make sure your child knows how to **block abusive comments and report content** that worries them.
- Teach them to **respect others online and think about comments before they post them** and discuss how easily comments made online can be misinterpreted.
- Don't arrange to meet people in real life that they've only talked to online and **remind them that some people may not be who they say they are.**
- **Advise them to use secure and legal sites to download music and games** to avoid experiencing the risks associated with streaming content from unauthorised sites. [Visit our 'Dangers of digital piracy' advice hub](#) more advice.
- **Check attachments and pop-ups for viruses** before they click or download anything.
- When using the internet for homework, **make sure they use information appropriately** and explain things in their own words rather than copying.



Talk about it:

Tips for a meaningful conversation

- Make sure your child knows **they can come to you if they're upset by something they've seen online** and make sure that you listen and don't overreact - the important thing is that they have come to you for help and support.
- **Tell them you trust them to do the right thing** rather than over monitoring their internet use.
- If your child comes to you with an issue, **stay calm and listen without judging them** and don't threaten to take away their devices.
- **Tackle peer pressure** by explaining that if they're talked into bullying someone online or sending inappropriate images it may get reported to their school or even the police. [Learn how online actions can affect young people's reputation with our advice hub](#)
- **Talk to them about how much time they spend online** and make sure this is balanced against other activities. [See our 'Screen time guide for 14+' for age-specific advice.](#)
- Discuss how they can **report any harmful or inappropriate content or behaviour** that they encounter online - empower them to take control themselves.



Deal with it

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