



App Safety and Restrictions

Children of primary school age increasingly use tablets, smartphones, games, and apps. While technology can support learning and creativity, it also brings risks. This information sheet explains why app safety matters, common risks, and how parents can keep children safe.

Why App Safety Is Important

Primary school-age children are still developing emotionally and socially. They may:

- Not understand online risks
- Trust people too easily
- Struggle to recognise inappropriate content or behaviour

Unsafe or unrestricted apps can expose children to:

- Inappropriate content (violence, sexual content, strong language)
- Online strangers and grooming
- Cyberbullying
- In-app purchases and hidden costs
- Excessive screen time and addiction

Good app safety helps children:

- Stay protected online
- Develop healthy digital habits
- Use technology positively and safely

Age Ratings and App Restrictions

Most apps, games, and videos have **age ratings**. These are there to protect children.

Common age ratings include:

- **PEGI** (for games): 3, 7, 12, 16, 18
- **App store ratings** (Apple App Store / Google Play)

Why age ratings matter:

- Content may not be suitable for younger children
- Older-rated apps may include chat features, violence, or advertising

Parents are encouraged to:

- Check age ratings before downloading apps
- Avoid allowing children to use apps designed for teenagers or adults

Common App and Online Risks

Parents should be aware of the following risks:

- **Chat and messaging features** – children may talk to strangers
- **Online games** – voice chat and messaging can expose children to inappropriate language
- **Social media apps** – most have a minimum age of 13
- **In-app purchases** – children may accidentally spend money
- **Adverts** – some apps include unsuitable ads

How Parents Can Keep Children Safe

1 Use Parental Controls

Parental controls can:

- Block inappropriate apps and content
- Set age restrictions
- Limit screen time
- Control in-app purchases

You can set parental controls on:

- Smartphones and tablets (Apple and Android)
- App stores
- Games consoles
- Streaming services

2 Check Apps Regularly

- Know which apps your child is using
- Read app descriptions and reviews
- Remove apps that are no longer suitable

3 Set Clear Rules

Agree rules with your child, such as:

- Which apps and games they can use
- How long they can spend on screens
- Never talking to strangers online
- Telling a trusted adult if something worries them

4 Talk to Your Child About Online Safety

Regular conversations help children feel safe to speak up.

Talk about:

- Being kind online
- Not sharing personal information (name, school, address)
- What to do if they see something upsetting

Signs a Child May Be Unsafe Online

Be alert to changes such as:

- Becoming upset after using devices
- Wanting to hide screens or apps
- Sudden behaviour changes
- Unexpected charges or purchases

If you are concerned, talk calmly with your child and seek support.

Helpful Support and Advice

- **NSPCC / Net Aware** – <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/net-aware>
Reviews of apps and games, and online safety advice
- **UK Safer Internet Centre** – <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk>
Guides and resources for parents
- **Childline** (for children) – 0800 1111
Free, confidential support for children