



## **Online Safety – Information for Parents**

*At Brierley, we understand the responsibility to educate our pupils in online safety issues; teaching them the appropriate behaviours and critical thinking to enable them to remain both safe and legal when using the internet and related technologies, in and beyond the context of the classroom.*

*Our online safety curriculum is taught in the following stands:*

- *Self-image and identity*
- *Online relationships*
- *Online reputation*
- *Online bullying*
- *Managing online information*
- *Health, well-being and lifestyle*
- *Privacy and security*
- *Copywrite and ownership*

*This pack is intended to provide parents with further information regarding popular online games and apps used by children.*

### **Contents**

<i>Age Ratings .....</i>	<i>Pages 2 – 5</i>
<i>WhatsApp.....</i>	<i>Pages 6 – 7</i>
<i>TikTok.....</i>	<i>Pages 8 – 9</i>
<i>Roblox.....</i>	<i>Pages 10 – 11</i>
<i>Minecraft.....</i>	<i>Pages 12 – 13</i>
<i>Snapchat.....</i>	<i>Pages 14 – 15</i>
<i>YouTube.....</i>	<i>Pages 16 – 17</i>

*Information taken from [www.nationalonlinesafety.com](http://www.nationalonlinesafety.com)*



What you need to know about...

# AGE RATINGS

What are they?

‘Age Ratings’

A game's age rating can be used by adults to make an informed choice as to whether or not a game is suitable for their child. The PEGI (Pan European Game Information) system rates games and, instead of indicating the level of ability required to physically play a game, it indicates the suitability of content for that age group. 3, 7, 12, 16 and 18 are the labels that can be awarded to games and a variety of content descriptors such as violence, bad language and fear are used to further clarify why the label was assigned.



The biggest and most obvious risk of not following the age rating system is that children may view or hear age-inappropriate content. Many games now include scenes of a violent or graphic nature which could be upsetting or considered too intense for younger players.

Peer pressure has a large role to play in age rating being overlooked. Children don't want to be the ones left behind and can put their parents under pressure to allow them to play a game beyond the recommended suitability, especially when all of their friends are playing it already.

Playing a game with a label that is higher than their age can be viewed by some children as a challenge and to gain a good reputation amongst their friends. Kudos is attributed to the child playing the age-inappropriate game resulting in more children wanting to follow suit.

In order for a game to be released on popular platforms, such as PlayStation and Xbox, game developers must pay for a PEGI rating. However, smaller development teams are sometimes reluctant to pay these fees and games are often released on other platforms such as Steam, without any age restrictions.





# Spot the Signs



## Being vague

Be aware of children being vague around the content of what they want to play. If they are unwilling to supply you with information about what the game is about, this can be an indicator that you wouldn't allow them to purchase it if you knew.

## Unofficial sites

There are plenty of indie games that can be bought using online stores that don't necessarily have age restrictions. If you notice your child using sites such as GOG or itch.io rather than official channels such as the Google Play Store, they might be accessing games that aren't officially rated but still aren't age appropriate.

## Unfamiliar terminology

Your child might start using phrases or terminology that is new to them or mimicking actions that they have learnt from a game without realising their inappropriateness.

## Wanting to be secluded

Be aware if suddenly your child wants to move the device that they play their games on into a more secluded area of the house away from adults. It is a good idea for your child to play online games in a shared area where you can see the screen.

## Be aware of spending

Setting up accounts with online stores require bank account details. Keeping an eye on your bank balance means that you will be able to tell if there has been a new purchase and can provide you with an opportunity to ask about what new game they've purchased.

Be aware of children being vague around the content of what they want to play. If they are unwilling to supply you with information about what the game is about, this can be an indicator that you wouldn't allow them to purchase it if you knew.

There are plenty of indie games that can be bought using online stores that don't necessarily have age restrictions. If you notice your child using sites such as GOG or itch.io rather than official channels such as Google Play Store, they might be accessing games that aren't officially rated but still aren't age appropriate.

Your child might start using phrases or terminology that is new to them or mimicking actions that they have learnt from a game without realising their inappropriateness.

Be aware if suddenly your child wants to move the device that they play their games on to a more secluded area of the house away from adults. It is a good idea for your child to play online games in a shared area where you can see the screen.

Setting up accounts with online stores requires bank account details. Keeping an eye on your bank balance means you will be able to tell if there has been a new purchase and can provide you with an opportunity to ask about what new game they've purchased.



# Safety Tips

## Do your research

If you've noticed a new game that your child has downloaded then use quality resources to make sure that your knowledge is up to date. Online websites, such as National Online Safety, can provide you with the information you need.

## Review parental controls

Review your parental controls on the stores where you buy games from. Most sites allow parents to set parental controls to block games with certain age restrictions from being downloaded.

## Encourage open dialogue

Encourage dialogue with your child. You don't want to be in a position where they won't talk to you if something has made them feel uncomfortable in a game because they are worried they will get in trouble for playing the game in the first place.

## Discuss ratings

Talk to your child about what the game has been awarded a certain label. Debate the positives and negatives of playing a game and decide on some ground rules together.





## What Parents & Carers Need to Know about



# WHATSAPP

WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service, with around two billion users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, as well as making voice and video calls. Its end-to-end encryption means messages can only be viewed by the sender and any recipients: not even WhatsApp can read them. Updates to its privacy policy in 2021 (involving sharing data with parent company Facebook) caused millions to leave the app, but the



WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service, with around two billion users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, as well as making voice and video calls.

It's end-to-end encryption means messages can only be viewed by the sender and any recipients: not even WhatsApp can read them. Updates to its privacy policy in 2021 (involving sharing data with parent company Facebook) caused millions to leave the app, but the new policy was widely misinterpreted – it only related to WhatsApp's business features, not to personal messages.

### SCAMS

Fraudsters occasionally send WhatsApp messages pretending to offer prizes – encouraging the user to click on a link to win. Other common scams involve warning someone that their WhatsApp subscription has run out (aiming to dupe them into disclosing payment details) or impersonating a friend or relative and asking for money to be transferred to help with an emergency.

### DISAPPEARING MESSAGES

Users can set WhatsApp messages to disappear in 24 hours, 7 days or 90 days by default. Photos and videos can also be instructed to disappear after the recipient has viewed them. These files can't be saved or forwarded – so if your child was sent an inappropriate message, it would be difficult to prove any wrongdoing. However, the receiver can take a screenshot and save that as evidence.

### ENABLING FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp has unfortunately been linked to accelerating the spread of dangerous rumours. In India in 2018, some outbreaks of mob violence appear to have been sparked by false allegations being shared on the app. WhatsApp itself took steps to prevent its users circulating hazardous theories and speculation in the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### POTENTIAL CYBERBULLYING

Group chat and video calls are great for connecting with multiple people in WhatsApp, but there is always the potential for someone's feelings to be hurt by an unkind comment or joke. The 'only admins' feature gives the admin(s) of a group control over who can send messages. They can, for example, block people from posting in a chat, which could make a child feel excluded and upset.

### CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

To start a WhatsApp chat, you only need the mobile number of the person you want to message (the other person also needs to have the app). WhatsApp can access the address book on someone's device and recognise which of their contacts also use the app. So if your child has ever given their phone number to someone they don't know, that person could use it to contact them via WhatsApp.

### LOCATION SHARING

The 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, allowing friends to see their movements. WhatsApp describes it as a "simple and secure way to let people know where you are." It is a useful method for a young person to let loved ones know they're safe – but if they used it in a chat with people they don't know, they would be exposing their location to them, too.





Continued...

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# WHATSAPP

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### CREATE A SAFE PROFILE

Even though someone would need a child's phone number to add them as a contact, it's also worth altering a young person's profile settings to restrict who can see their photo and status. The options are 'everyone', 'my contacts' and 'nobody' – choosing one of the latter two ensures that your child's profile is better protected.



### EXPLAIN ABOUT BLOCKING

If your child receives spam or offensive messages, calls or files from a contact, they should block them using 'settings' in the chat. Communication from a blocked contact won't show up on their device and stays undelivered. Blocking someone does not remove them from your child's contact list – so they also need to be deleted from the address book.



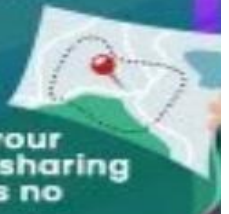
### LEAVE A GROUP

If your child is in a group chat that is making them feel uncomfortable, or has been added to a group that they don't want to be part of, they can use WhatsApp's group settings to leave. If someone exits a group, the admin can add them back in once; if they leave a second time, it is permanent.



### THINK ABOUT LOCATION

If your child needs to use the 'live location' function to show you or one of their friends where they are, advise them to share their location only for as long as they need to. WhatsApp gives a range of 'live location' options, and your child should manually stop sharing their position as soon as it is no longer needed.



### DELETE ACCIDENTAL MESSAGES

If your child posts a message they want to delete, WhatsApp allows the user seven minutes to erase a message. Tap and hold on the message, choose 'delete' and then 'delete for everyone.' However, it's important to remember that recipients may have seen (and taken a screenshot of) a message before it was deleted.



### CHECK THE FACTS

You can now fact-check WhatsApp messages that have been forwarded at least five times, by double-tapping the magnifying glass icon to the right of the message. From there, your child can launch a Google search and decide for themselves whether the message was true or not.



### REPORT POTENTIAL SCAMS

Young people shouldn't engage with any message that looks suspicious or too good to be true. When your child receives a message from an unknown number for the first time, they'll be given the option to report it as spam. If the sender claims to be a friend or relative, call that person on their usual number to verify it really is them, or if it's someone trying to trick your child.







## What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION  
**13+**

TikTok is a video-sharing social media app which lets people create, view and download looping 15-second clips. Typically, these are videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to popular songs or soundbites (often for comic purposes) enhanced with filters, effects and text. Designed with young people in mind, TikTok skyrocketed in popularity in 2019 and has featured near the top of download charts ever since. It now has around a billion users worldwide.

### AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Most videos appearing on a child's feed are light-hearted and amusing. However, some clips have been reported for featuring drug and alcohol abuse, themes of suicide and self-harm, or young teens acting in a sexually suggestive way. The sheer volume of uploads is impossible to moderate entirely – and since TikTok Jump's introduction in mid-2021, users can view third-party content outside the app.

18

CENSORED

### EXPLICIT SONGS

TikTok primarily revolves around videos of users lip-syncing and dancing to music. Inevitably, some featured songs will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the app's young user-base, there is a risk that children may view older users' videos and then be inclined to imitate any explicit language or suggestive actions.

W&H\*!

### TIKTOK FAME

The app has created its own celebrities: Charli D'Amelio and Lil Nas X, for example, were catapulted to fame by exposure on TikTok – leading to many more teens attempting to go viral and become "TikTok famous". While most aspiring stars hoping to be 'the next big thing' will find it difficult, setbacks may in turn prompt them to go to even more drastic lengths to get noticed.



### HAZARDOUS VISIBILITY

Connecting with others is simple on TikTok – including commenting on and reacting to users' videos, following their profile and downloading their content. The majority of these interactions are harmless, but – because of its abundance of teen users – TikTok has experienced problems with predators contacting young people.

### ADDICTIVE NATURE

Like all social media, TikTok is designed to be addictive. It can be hugely entertaining – but that also makes it hard to put down. As well as the punchy nature of the short video format, the app's ability to keep users intrigued about what's coming next mean it's easy for a 5-minute visit to turn into a 45-minute stay.



### IN-APP SPENDING

There's an in-app option to purchase 'TikTok coins', which are then converted into digital rewards for sending to content creators that a user likes. Prices range from 99p to an eye-watering £99 bundle. TikTok is also connected with Shopify, which allows users to buy products through the app.







Continued...

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### ENABLE FAMILY PAIRING

Family Pairing allows parents to link their TikTok account with their child's and control their settings remotely. Parents can then, for example, turn on Restricted Mode (reducing the chances of a child seeing inappropriate content); set screen time limits; and manage their child's ability to send messages (and to whom). Children can't alter these settings without parental approval.

### MAKE ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Although under-16s will have their TikTok account set to private by default, bypassing this setting is relatively easy. However, parents have the ability to manually set their child's account to private – meaning that their videos won't be visible to strangers and they won't be able to exchange messages with people who aren't on their friends list.

### LIMIT IN-APP SPENDING

If your child is using an iPhone or Android device to access TikTok, you can alter the settings to prevent them from making in-app purchases. We'd recommend that you enable this feature, as it's quite easy for a young person – without realising what they're doing – to spend a significant amount of real money buying TikTok coins so they can unlock more features of the app.

### DISCUSS THE DANGERS

If your child wants to use TikTok and you're happy for them to do so, it's crucial to talk about the potential risks in this type of app. For example, ensure they understand not to share any identifying personal information – and that they realise they could be exposed to inappropriate content. Thinking critically about what they see on TikTok can help children become generally more social media savvy.

### READ THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that your child might be spending too much time on TikTok, or that they've been emotionally affected by something inappropriate or upsetting that they've seen, it's important to know how to spot the possible signs. Increased irritability and a lack of concentration are potential red flags, as are failing to complete homework or regularly not eating meals.





## What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# ROBLOX

Roblox is one of the most popular video games on the market. By 2020, the game's makers were claiming that more than half of children in the USA play it. As a 'sandbox' title, Roblox offers a huge amount of creative freedom: it lets players create their own

AGE RATING  
PEGI  
7

Roblox is one of the most popular video games on the market. By 2020, the game's makers were claiming that more than half of children in the USA play it. As a 'sandbox' title, Roblox offers a huge amount of creative freedom: it lets players create their own gaming experiences with the Roblox studio to build custom levels and games, which can then be shared with other players online. Roblox fosters creative thinking and enjoys a robust online community of fans.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

#### CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

Roblox encourages players to communicate online (including a group chat facility). This could expose children to risks such as scammers, online predators, harassment, griefers and more. The in-game chat has some filters, but isn't perfect: players can still send harmful messages to others – such as general hostility – while predators can reach out to children directly.

#### PUBLIC SERVERS

Roblox has private or VIP servers which allow people to play exclusively with their friends, but this costs money. Most Roblox players will instead be on public servers that anyone can join. Servers can host games which focus on all kinds of aspects, including direct player interaction. Some games and servers, therefore, will put children more at risk of contact from strangers than others.

#### ONLINE DATERS

These are also called 'ODers' and are quite common in Roblox. An ODer is an individual who joins a game with the intention of finding someone to date online – and eventually meet in person. Such online dating is against the Roblox community guidelines, but this usually doesn't deter ODers. Some player-built Roblox game worlds have even been designed with online dating specifically in mind.

#### IN-APP PURCHASES

Roblox is actually free to download and play, but bear in mind that there are some hidden costs. Players are encouraged to make purchases in the game, for example, using real money. People can also buy extra Robux (the in-game currency) to spend on cosmetic items in the game, and some private or VIP servers also have a cost.





Continued...

# ROBLOX

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### SET PARENTAL CONTROLS

Roblox comes with several parental control options, which are explained well on the game's official website. It's essential to enter the correct date of birth for your child, as that allows Roblox to automatically apply the appropriate chat filters. The game also allows parents and carers to set monthly spending restrictions and monitor their child's account.

### DISABLE PRIVATE MESSAGING

Roblox's private messaging function raises the risk of children being contacted by people they may not want to speak with – potentially leading to bullying, harassment, toxicity and scam attempts. The game allows you to disable messages from anyone who hasn't been added as a friend on your child's account.

### PRIVATE SERVERS

If your child has genuine friends who they play Roblox online with, paying for a private or VIP server decreases the risk of contact from strangers. Even then, however, some players could invite other people – who might not necessarily be child friendly – into the private server. If your child is a Roblox fan, it's important to talk with them regularly about who they are playing the game with.

### MONITOR SPENDING

If they don't understand they're using real money, it's easy for children to accidentally spend a sizeable amount in the game. Using parental controls to place limits on their spending will help avoid any nasty financial surprises. Ensuring that you have two-factor authentication on your payment accounts also makes it harder for your child to spend money inadvertently.

### DEALING WITH STRANGERS

At some point in their development, your child will need to learn how to deal with strangers online. Show them how to block and report any users who are upsetting them or asking uncomfortable questions. Talking to them about what's OK to discuss – and what they should never tell a stranger online – will help them understand how to communicate with others safely in the digital world.





# What parents need to know about **MINECRAFT**

Minecraft has approximately  
**74m**  
users each month

Children use their imagination to build three-dimensional worlds with virtual building blocks in a digital, pixelated landscape. It is classed as a 'sandbox' game; which means players have the freedom to build their own creations with 'blocks' they collect and also have the opportunity to explore other people's creations with their characters. Players can choose from thousands of different 'servers' to join, which are created by other players, making every experience of Minecraft unique.



## GROOMING

As the majority of users who play Minecraft are children, this makes it an 'appealing' gateway for groomers. It has been reported that some users have created worlds in Minecraft to lure young people into a conversation to ask for explicit photos. There have even been more serious cases in which children have been persuaded to meet these people in real life.

## CYBERBULLYING & GRIEFING

In multiplayer mode there is a live chat feature which allows players to talk to other players through text. This chat functionality includes basic filtering to block out external links and offensive language being shared, but varies between each server. Griefing is when someone purposely upsets another player during the game. This can be done by ruining somebody's creation or generally doing something to spoil gameplay for another. Essentially, 'Griefing' is a form of cyberbullying and can be extremely frustrating for players.

## COMMUNICATING WITH STRANGERS

Minecraft incorporates thousands of servers to choose from which are a single world or place created by the public and allow users to play the game online or via a local area network with others. No two servers are the same and each has its own individual plug-ins which are controlled by the creator. This means that some servers will allow communication with strangers.

## VIRUSES & MALWARE FROM MODS

There are several websites that offer downloadable 'mods' which modify gameplay in a number of ways. Most of the mods will be safe to use, but as they have been created by the public, they will often contain viruses that can infect your child's device and potentially try and find personal information about you or your child.





Continued...



### SCAN 'MODS' FOR MALWARE

Minecraft 'mods' add content to games to give extra options to interact and change the way the game looks and feels. However, although 'mods' can bring fun for a child, it's important to consider that downloading and installing 'mods' could potentially infect their device with a virus or malware. In 2017, security company Symantec stated that between 600,000 and 2.5 million Minecraft players had installed dodgy apps, which hijacked player's devices and used them to power an advertising botnet. Install a malware scanner on every device that your child plays Minecraft on and make sure it's regularly kept up-to-date.

### PLAY IN 'CREATIVE' OR 'PEACEFUL' MODE

Even though the age limit is 10+, Minecraft can be quite overwhelming at times, especially for younger players or SEND children. We suggest restricting your child to play in 'creative mode' or 'peaceful mode' which takes away the survival element and removes the 'scarier' monster/zombie characters.

### SET TIME LIMITS

With 'Gaming Disorder' becoming an official health condition, we suggest setting a reasonable time limit when playing Minecraft. Parents can use parental controls on devices to limit the time a child plays games. It is worth having a conversation with your child to understand which 'mode' they are playing the game. This may help you decide on the amount of time you would like them to play. For example, a mini game will have an 'end,' but this will depend on how long the game creator has made the game last. In 'survival mode,' the game has no end as there is no goal to be achieved other than the child's own e.g. after they have built something.

### CHOOSE SERVERS CAREFULLY

To protect your child from engaging in conversation with strangers, advise them to only enter servers with people they know and trust. Your child can also create their own multiplayer server and share this with their friends, which is safer and more controlled than joining a stranger's server.





## What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION  
**13+**

Snapchat is an instant messaging app which allows users to send images, videos and texts to people in their friends list. One of Snapchat's unique features is that pictures and messages 'disappear' 24 hours after they have been viewed; however, this content isn't as temporary as many believe- with some users saving screenshots of using another device to take a photo of their screen. Snapchat have recently added 'My AI': a customisable chatbot with which people can chat and share secrets as well as asking for advice and suggestions of places to visit.

### CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

Even if your child only connects with people they know, they may still get friend requests from strangers. The Quick Add option lets users befriend people the app recommends – but these 'friends' are merely a username, which could have anyone behind it. Accepting such requests reveals children's personal information through the Story, SnapMap and Spotlight features, potentially putting them at risk from predators.

### EXCESSIVE USE

Snapchat works hard on user engagement, with features like streaks (messaging the same person every day to build up a high score). Spotlight Challenges tempt users into spending time producing content in search of cash prizes and online fame, while it's easy for children to pass hours watching Spotlight's endless scroll of videos.

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some videos and posts on Snapchat aren't suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so even an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature also makes it easy for young people (teens in particular) to share explicit images on impulse – so sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat.

### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

My AI is Snapchat's new chatbot, which replies to questions in a human-like manner. However, the software is still in its infancy and has significant drawbacks, such as biased, incorrect or misleading responses. There have already been numerous reports of young users turning to AI for medical help and diagnoses, which could be inaccurate and therefore potentially dangerous.

### ONLINE PRESSURES

Although many of Snapchat's filters are designed to entertain or amuse, the 'beautify' effects on photos can set unrealistic body-image expectations – creating feelings of inadequacy if a young person compares themselves unfavourably with other users. Snapchat now also has 'priority' notifications (which still get displayed even if a device is in 'do not disturb' mode), increasing the pressure on users to log back in and interact.

### VISIBLE LOCATION

Snap Map highlights a device's exact position on a virtual map which is visible to other users. There are options to restrict who can see this information: all friends, only you (Ghost Mode) or selected friends. Snapchat also has real-time location sharing, which is intended as a buddy system to ensure friends have reached home safely – but which could also be used to track a young person for more sinister reasons.





Continued...

# SNAPCHAT

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### TURN OFF QUICK ADD



The Quick Add feature helps people find each other on the app. This function works based on mutual friends or whether someone's number is in your child's contacts list. Explain to your child that this could potentially make their profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add, which can be done in the settings (accessed via the cog icon).

### CHOOSE GOOD CONNECTIONS



In 2021, Snapchat rolled out a new safety feature: users can now receive notifications reminding them of the importance of maintaining connections with people they actually know well, as opposed to strangers. This 'Friend Check Up' encourages users to delete connections with users that they rarely communicate with, to maintain their online safety and privacy.

### CHAT ABOUT CONTENT



It may feel like an awkward conversation (and one that young people can be reluctant to have) but it's important to talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting. Remind your child that once something's online, the creator loses control over where it ends up – and who else sees it. Likewise, it's vital that children understand that some challenges which become popular on the platform may have potentially harmful consequences.

### KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE



Profiles are private by default, but children may make them public to gain more followers. Snap Stories are visible to everyone your child adds, unless they change the settings. On SnapMaps, their location is visible unless Ghost Mode is enabled (again via settings). It's safest not to add people your child doesn't know in real life – especially since the addition of My Places, which allows other Snapchat users to see where your child regularly visits and checks in.

### DISCUSS AI

Although My AI's responses can often give the impression that it's a real person, it's essential that young people remember this certainly isn't the case. Encourage your child to think critically about My AI's replies to their questions: are they accurate and reliable? Remind them that My AI shouldn't replace chatting with their real friends, and that it's always better to talk to an actual person in relation to medical matters.



### BE READY TO BLOCK AND REPORT

If a stranger *does* connect with your child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending sexual images to them, your child can select the three dots on that person's profile and report or block them. There are options to state why they're reporting that user (annoying or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example).







# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about **YOUTUBE**

YouTube is a video-sharing social media platform that allows billions of people around the world to watch, share and upload their own videos with a vast range of content- including sport, entertainment, education and lots more. It's a superb space for people to consume content that they're interested in. As a result, this astronomically popular platform has had a huge social impact: influencing online culture on a global scale and creating new celebrities.

## INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

YouTube is free and can be accessed via numerous devices, even without creating a YouTube account. Some content is flagged as 'age-restricted' (requiring the user to be logged into an account with a verified age of 18), but children can still view some mildly inappropriate material. This can include profanity and violence, which some young users may find upsetting.

## CONNECT WITH STRANGERS

YouTube is a social media platform which allows people to interact with other (usually unknown) users. Account holders can leave comments on any video they have access to, as well as messaging other users directly. Connecting with strangers online, of course, can potentially lead to children being exposed to adult language, to cyberbullying and even to encountering online predators.

## SUGGESTED CONTENT

YouTube recommends videos related to what the user has previously watched on their account, aiming to provide content that will interest them. This is intended to be helpful but can also lead to binge-watching and the risk of screen addiction, especially if 'auto-play' is activated. Users without an account are shown popular videos from the last 24 hours, which might not always be suitable for children.

## HIGH VISIBILITY

Content creators can also be put at risk – especially young ones who try to make their online presence as visible as possible. Creating and uploading content exposes children to potential harassment and toxicity from the comments section, along with the possibility of direct messaging from strangers. Videos posted publicly can be watched by anyone in the world.

## TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

YouTube is teeming with trends, challenges and memes that are fun to watch and join in with. Children often find these immensely entertaining and might want to try them out. Most challenges tend to be safe, but many others may harm children through either watching or copying. The painful 'salt and ice challenge', which can cause injuries very quickly, is just one of many such examples.

## SNEAKY SCAMMERS

Popular YouTube channels regularly have scammers posing as a well-known influencer in the comments section, attempting to lure users into clicking on their phishing links. Scammers impersonate YouTubers by adopting their names and profile images, and sometimes offer cash gifts or 'get rich quick' schemes. Children may not realise that these users are not who they claim to be.





# YOUTUBE

Continued...

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### APPLY RESTRICTED MODE

Restricted Mode is an optional setting that prevents YouTube from showing inappropriate content (such as drug and alcohol abuse, graphic violence and sexual situations) to underage viewers. To prevent your child from chancing across age-inappropriate content on the platform, we would recommend enabling Restricted Mode on each device that your child uses to access YouTube.



### TRY GOOGLE FAMILY

Creating a Google Family account allows you to monitor what your child is watching, uploading and sharing with other users. It will also display their recently watched videos, searches and recommended videos. In general, a Google Family account gives you an oversight of how your child is using sites like YouTube and helps you ensure they are only accessing appropriate content.



### CHECK OTHER PLATFORMS

Influential content creators usually have other social media accounts which they encourage their fans to follow. Having an open discussion about this with your child makes it easier to find out how else they might be following a particular creator online. It also opens up avenues for you to check out that creator's other channels to see what type of content your child is being exposed to.



### MONITOR ENGAGEMENT

YouTube is the online viewing platform of choice for billions of people, many of them children. Younger children will watch different content to older ones, of course, and react to content differently. You may want to keep an eye on how your child interacts with content on YouTube – and, if applicable, with content creators – to understand the types of videos they are interested in.



### CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

YouTube gives users the option of uploading videos as 'private' or 'unlisted' – so they could be shared exclusively with family and friends, for example. Comments on videos can also be disabled and channels that your child is subscribed to can be hidden. If your child is only uploading videos that are protected as 'private', they are far less likely to receive direct messages from strangers.



### LIMIT SPENDING

Although YouTube is free, it does offer some in-app purchases: users can rent and buy TV shows and movies to watch, for example. If you're not comfortable with your child purchasing content online, limit their access to your bank cards and online payment methods. Many parents have discovered to their cost that a child happily devouring a paid-for series quickly leads to an unexpected bill!

