

Online Safety for Under 5s: Ten Top Tips for Parents and Carers

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

ONLINE SAFETY FOR UNDER 5s

10 Top Tips for Parents and Carers

According to Ofcom's most recent research, a significant proportion of children are already online by the time they start school, with 17% of 5-year-olds owning their own mobile phone and 50% using messaging platforms. As becoming familiar with technology is generally encouraged in younger children – and has been essential for education during the pandemic – it is crucial that trusted adults recognise both the benefits and the risks of infants and toddlers using digital devices. We've compiled our top tips to help the under-5s start their online safety journey.

- USE DEVICES TOGETHER**
This lets you monitor and control what your child is using the device for. It also provides the interaction that supports children's understanding of what they're seeing – allowing them to ask you questions, and so on.
- ACTIVATE PARENTAL CONTROLS**
Most digital devices have built-in parental controls that can limit the type of content children have access to. If your little one uses any device (even borrowing yours), it's a good idea to explore what controls the device has and enable them whenever they have access to it.
- MANAGE SCREEN TIME**
This can be tricky, especially if your child is interested in a certain video, app or game. Try to agree on some ground rules and get your child into a routine which involves certain times of the day when they go without devices.
- TALK ABOUT BEING SAFE ONLINE**
Just like we teach children about being safe in the real world, we need to educate them about how to stay safe online. Use age-appropriate language to help them understand, and plenty of hand gestures can reinforce what you're telling them.
- SET A GOOD EXAMPLE**
Children often learn by watching and copying those around them, and using digital devices is no exception. When you're around your child, try to follow the same rules that you've set for them. Let them see you balancing your time online with interacting with people in real life, too.
- BLOCK IN-APP PURCHASES**
If your child uses a device that's linked to a payment method (such as a bank card), use the parental controls to block buys from app stores, as well as in-app purchases. That will prevent your child from accidentally spending money while on your device.
- CHOOSE SAFE APPS AND SITES**
There are some fantastic apps and platforms that are specifically designed to be safer for children. Always check the PEGI age rating before downloading an app, and test it yourself before allowing your child to use it.
- INVOLVE THE FAMILY**
If your toddler has older siblings, it's likely that their rules for device use will be different – and that they'll access content that isn't appropriate for younger ones. (A particular worry if they share devices). Encourage the whole family to be good role models and help little ones stay safe online.
- IF IN DOUBT, ASK**
The easiest way to find out what your child is doing online is usually just to talk about it with them. Developing an open dialogue at an early age helps them grow up feeling able to talk to you about their digital life – providing opportunities to intervene if you're concerned.
- SUPPORT CREATIVE & ACTIVE PLAY**
Physical and creative activities are important for a child's wellbeing, and there are plenty of ways to incorporate technology into that. For example, you could encourage games that require physical movement, dance and sing along to songs your child loves, and follow step-by-step crafting videos.

Meet Our Expert
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For today's pre-schoolers, digital devices are as much a part of their everyday entertainment as Lego and colouring books were for previous generations. With many parents and carers having justified concerns, however, over problems like exposure to inappropriate content and picking up unhealthy screen-time habits, online activities can be tricky to introduce.

Our #WakeUpWednesday guide has advice for parents and carers of younger children who are just starting to discover the excitement of exploring, playing and learning in the digital world. From general safety and security tips to suggestions on how to manage little ones' screen time without any tears, you're sure to find some useful – and realistic – guidance here.

Young children are becoming more comfortable with internet-enabled devices at an increasingly early age. The latest figures from Ofcom, for example, indicate that a remarkable 89% of 3 to 4-year-olds in the UK are using video-sharing platforms such as YouTube – while 50% of in that age bracket who go online already use messaging sites or apps.

While little ones' ability and confidence around technology is something to be encouraged, giving them access to internet-enabled devices of course presents its own significant worries. The online world, after all, isn't always a safe and friendly place. Our #WakeUpWednesday guide has some suggestions for helping the under-5s to understand the basics of online safety

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