

What parents need to know about Twitch

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 apps which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about TWITCH

Twitch is a livestreaming service which tends to focus on gaming. Users can publicly broadcast their gameplay and commentary online for other users to watch. It's a community-driven platform where viewers can support their favourite streamers' channels through PayPal donations, "bits" and more. Each streamer or group creates their own community for fans to interact with each other. Twitch has more than 16 million daily active users and includes non-gaming topics such as music, cooking and art. Anyone can create a channel to livestream or watch videos.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

UNCENSORED STREAMS

Uncensored content obviously carries a greater risk of inappropriate language and behaviour (streamers can, however, list their broadcast as unsuitable for children). Twitch has strict rules for streamers to follow, but requires viewers to report any streams which breach these guidelines. Each livestream is accompanied by a text chat which it is the streamer's responsibility to moderate.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Most people are already aware that some video games feature adult content such as violence, sexual content, profanity and so on. Twitch does prevent certain games from being streamed on the platform, but most are still allowed. It is relatively simple, then, for a child to find livestreams of games that aren't suitable for them – including horror games.

HIDDEN COSTS

Twitch is free to use because it's supported by advertisers. Removing the ads requires a subscription to Twitch Turbo – or the Twitch Prime package (free for anyone with an Amazon Prime account), which blocks the ads and offers additional goodies such as bonus games. Streamers earn most of their income by asking users for direct donations or gifts of the virtual currency Twitch Bits.

CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

As well as streamers talking directly to their audience, Twitch enables viewers to use text chat to speak to the person they're watching. It's a social platform which also allows viewers to interact with each other via text while they are watching livestreams – including exchanging private messages. This raises the possibility of a child being approached and messaged online by total strangers.

WEBCAM SHARING

It's common for streamers to use their own webcams, which allows better interaction with their viewers, but also adds risk: the stream might include sponsored content or product placement that isn't child friendly. Using a webcam in livestreams increases the chance of malicious viewers finding out where the streamer lives and provides outlets with visual reactions to their hurtful behaviour.

PRIVATE CHAT ROOMS

Twitch encourages streamers to create their own communities, which extend beyond its platform. Many create a public Discord group, for example, for viewers to join and communicate with each other. Discord is a completely separate entity to Twitch and offers a higher risk of predators, grooming and cyberbullying if your child gets involved in the voice or video chat with strangers.

Advice for Parents & Carers

EXPLORE IT YOURSELF

Twitch doesn't have any parental controls, but it is possible to block troublesome users if it becomes necessary. The best solution is to watch some Twitch channels by yourself or with your child to find some that are suitable. Watching some streams by yourself is also a good route to understanding the sort of content that your child would be consuming regularly on Twitch.

WATCH WHAT THEY WATCH

Twitch does have a lot of child-friendly content, some streamers use a 'family friendly' tag to highlight content that's suitable for children. However, anyone can use this tag – including users who (occasionally or otherwise) stream games with less appropriate adult themes. The best way to monitor this is to view different streams and follow suitable channels for your child to watch.

LEARN HOW TO BLOCK

'Security and Privacy' in Twitch's settings lets your child block messages from specific users. Teaching your child how this works will help them avoid online abuse. If they livestream, knowing how to block people in the chat also helps to prevent cyberbullying or harassment. Enabling online interactions is impossible, of course, so talk to them in advance about boundaries and safe online communication.

LIMIT PAYMENT OPTIONS

Reduce the chance of accidental purchases by ensuring your bank card isn't saved on Twitch or the Amazon account that Twitch Prime could be linked to. Restricting access to your PayPal account is also wise if your child watches Twitch on the device you use to make purchases. Explain to your child that they don't need to subscribe to channels to watch them and that donating or getting 'bits' is optional.

Meet Our Expert

Claire Dodwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2016, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.

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Many people have never even heard of it – but for gamers, Twitch is *big*. On 15 June 2020, for example, 2.3 million users (a record for the platform) were using it to watch someone else play Fortnite. Quite staggering, when you consider it. Perhaps less surprising if we provide the context that Twitch is owned by Amazon and sits among the top 30 most-visited sites on the internet.

Within an online community of roughly 15 million people, however, one will invariably find a proportion of bad apples. Twitch, unfortunately, is no exception – with potential bullying and the chance of unsolicited contact from strangers among the hazards to young people. Our #WakeUpWednesday guide brings trusted adults the essential information on Twitch.

The most popular channels focus (perhaps predictably) on Fortnite, League of Legends, Grand Theft Auto and Valorant – but whatever franchise someone favours, Twitch makes it easy to find fellow devotees to share gaming experiences with in real time, learning from each other and swapping tips and tactics to improve their own skills.

However, as in so many areas of the online world, people on Twitch also exchange hurtful remarks or age-inappropriate content (streams of games which might be too violent or frightening for younger viewers, for example). Our #WakeUpWednesday guide this week assesses the possible risks to young users of Twitch.