

A parent's guide to:

Discovering digital at primary school

internet
matters.org

*Online safety tips
to support children*



What are kids doing online?

Before they've even learnt to read, most children can navigate through devices to play games and watch videos.

The more time that children spend online, the more likely they are to face risks of online harms. However, there are also a lot of great benefits.

Use this guide to stay on top of common issues your child might face online during primary school and how you can help them stay happy and safe.

Popular online activities at primary

- Watch videos and livestreamed content on apps like **YouTube** and **TikTok**
- **Play a range of online games** like Minecraft, Fortnite and various games on Roblox
- Despite age **minimums of 13**, some children in primary also use social media platforms
- Use the internet to support their **learning and schoolwork**
- **Use AI chatbots** like ChatGPT for a range of purposes

What risks and challenges do they face?



While the internet can offer children many benefits, there is also risk of them coming across online harms that range from too much screen time to seeing adult content.

As your child starts to communicate with others through gaming or social media, they might accidentally overshare personal information, say unkind things, become a victim of cyberbullying or receive messages from harmful strangers.

Choose a risk below to learn how you can protect your child from harm:

- ▶ [Seeing inappropriate content](#)
- ▶ [Sharing personal information](#)
- ▶ [Too much screen time](#)
- ▶ [Cyberbullying and online hate](#)
- ▶ [Harmful contact from strangers](#)
- ▶ [Feelings of loneliness](#)

You can also explore a range of [useful resources](#)

Seeing inappropriate content

Like looking up rude words in the dictionary before the internet, children remain curious creatures.

They might seek out content they learn about from friends or unknowingly look up inappropriate words they hear in a song. Or they might accidentally stumble upon inappropriate content during these activities:

- **Joining apps and platforms** before reaching the minimum age (13 for most social media platforms)
- Playing games and using **apps designed for older children or adults**
- Watching **livestreams where content is less able to be controlled**



Support from schools

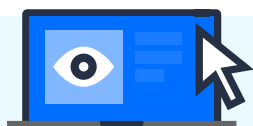
All schools are required by law to use filtering tools to block access to inappropriate content on devices connected to the internet. They should also teach children the basics about online safety such as the importance of keeping things private, where to go for support if something goes wrong online and how to recognise good and bad behaviour online. Most schools will want to work in partnership with parents and will provide support when things go wrong.

What can you do to help?

- **Set up parental controls** across broadband, devices and apps. These can help you limit access to websites, apps and content.
- Talk with them about what do to if they have **questions or a curious about something** they hear (e.g. asking you).
- **Discuss what is and isn't appropriate for them** based on their age, maturity and media literacy skills.
- **Explain what to do** if they come across scary or confusing content by accident such as telling you and using in-built reporting tools.



More resources



Inappropriate content advice hub ▶



Protecting children from online violence ▶



Parental controls guides ▶

Sharing personal information

With the growth of YouTubers and influencers, some young children aspire to follow a similar career path.

They might want to share their ideas with a worldwide audience to get likes, views and comments.

However, while many children in primary might know not to share personal information, they might not know what this looks like in practise.

Oversharing personal information can lead to loss of accounts, scams or contact from harmful people.



Support from schools



Issues around who to trust, what to share and how to protect personal data is likely covered in lessons around computing or wellbeing, such as RSHE lessons in England.

The [Digital Matters learning platform](#) covers a range of topics, including privacy and security to help children aged 9-11 learn about keeping personal information private.

What can you do to help?



- **Have a chat about personal information**, what it means and why it's important to keep that information private
- Explain that once they put something online, **it can be really difficult to take it back.**
- **Explain that strangers online aren't always who they say they are.** Teach them to recognise unsafe behaviour (such as asking for information) and how to get help (tell you).
- **Discuss the pressures they might feel** to share images and other content because people want it or because getting likes feels good, but that it can negatively impact their happiness online.
- **Review the privacy settings** available on the platform they use to ensure communication settings are limited or turned off.
- **Work together** on a family agreement to create digital boundaries around what is and is not safe to share online.

More resources



What is cyber security? ►

How a strong password protects from data breaches ►



How to create secure accounts ►

Too much screen time

4 in 10 children say they feel like they spend too much time online.

This feeling of 'too much' often comes from passive screen time – like watching YouTube or scrolling through content. But through more active screen time, like playing co-op games or learning new skills, children's screen time can feel more balanced. This can help support their digital wellbeing and overall happiness.



What can you do to help?



- **Help them use devices mindfully.** Ask them questions about how they feel while playing a game or watching a video.
- **Offer alternatives to the things they love doing to help make their screen time more purposeful.** If they like playing Roblox, get them to create their own game in Roblox Studio. If they like adventure games, explore apps like Geocaching to bring the adventure outside.
- **Create a family agreement together** to decide when, where and for how long your family can use their devices.
- **Use tech tools and parental controls** to help them to manage the time they spend online and the apps they use.
- For younger children find ways to **combine touch screen use with creative and active play**.
- **Get the whole family to unplug** and create 'screen free' zones at home.



Support from schools

As well as other topics, children should learn about how to manage and self-regulate their wellbeing or mental health as part of the curriculum, which can include screen time. More and more schools are also making use of tech in the classroom by giving children access to virtual learning environments to introduce children to the online world and build good digital habits.

More resources



Screen time advice hub ▶



Screen time tools ▶

Cyberbullying & online hate

Just like offline, children can bully and say hurtful things to others online. Children can also be targets of hate speech and bullying in online spaces they enjoy.

Cyberbullying in primary school usually occurs with older children who start to use messaging apps to talk with friends outside of school. However, any child who accesses social spaces can see or experience bullying and [hate online](#).

So, it's important to set a good foundation of healthy behaviour so they understand when something needs to be reported or blocked and when they need to tell you.



Support from schools



All schools should have a policy for teachers to tackle bullying in the classroom or between children from the same school, even if it happens outside the school walls (such as online). If your child is bullied, you should be able to get support from the school.

Schools also regularly talk about treating people well and educate children on the concept of bullying. The Digital Matters learning platform can help your child learn about positive ways to deal with cyberbullying and hate.

The [Digital Matters learning platform](#) follows the EfCW framework to help children in key stage 2 learn about tackling online bullying.



What can you do to help?



- **Highlight the need to be kind online** and what actions they can take to get help if someone is unkind to them or others.
- **Talk about reasons why** people may bully others and how it makes people feel.
- Encourage them to **speak out if they experience cyberbullying themselves or if they see it happening to others**.
- **Discuss the power they have** to do the right thing when it comes to supporting others online.
- **Teach them how** to report or block people in the apps and platforms they use.
- **Be aware of what your child's school policy** is just in case you need support.
- **Practise positive behaviour** and being an upstander with the [Tackling Online Hate](#) and [Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes](#) quizzes.

More resources



Cyberbullying advice hub ►



Conversation guide ►

Harmful contact from strangers

While most people your child plays games with or interacts with online are likely to be friendly and safe, some strangers might seek to do harm.

That's why it's important to equip your child with the skills to navigate interactions online confidently. If they can recognise risk of harm and know how to get help, they are more likely to avoid negative experiences.



What can you do to help?



- **Review parental controls** built into your child's favourite apps or platforms to see which communication restrictions you can set.
- **Together, decide on rules around who they can add to Friends lists.** For example, you might say they can only add friends who they know from school or clubs.
- **Check-in regularly** on who they've added to their Friends lists and ask questions about anyone you don't recognise.
- **Review the platform's blocking and reporting tools** with your child and encourage them to use these if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or upset.
- **Try our age specific [online hate quiz](#) together** – it's a fun and interactive way to help children learn how to recognise harmful behaviour and understand what to do if they experience it.

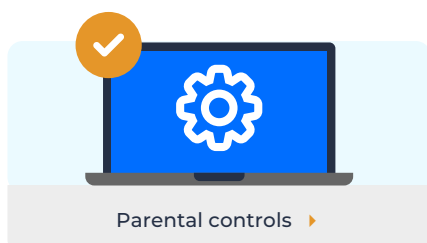


Support from schools

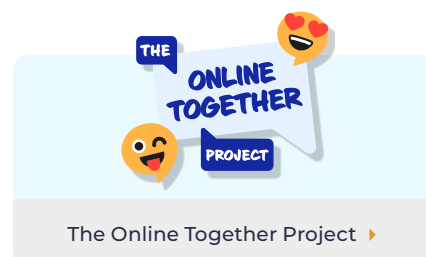
If you're concerned about your child's safety because someone anonymous is contacting them, flag it with their school. Schools have safeguards in place to protect all students in their care.

If you suspect the anonymous person is another child at the school, speak with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Collect any evidence of contact from the stranger (such as screenshots) to help the school respond effectively.

More resources



Parental controls ▶



The Online Together Project ▶

Feelings of loneliness

Many parents worry about the impacts of the internet on their child's wellbeing. While many children benefit from going online, research shows that increasing numbers of children do feel more lonely online.

If a child feels lonely, they might try to find community online. While this can be positive, in rare cases children may come across harmful or extreme content. This could include rigid beliefs about gender roles or identity, sometimes referred to as part of the '[manosphere](#)', that influence how children see themselves and others.



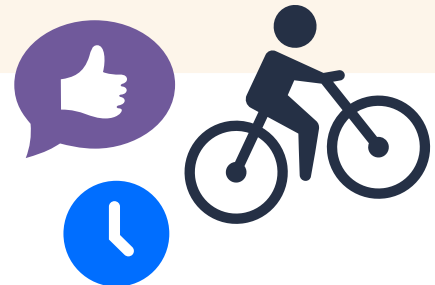
Support from schools

Most schools have systems in place to support children's wellbeing. If you have a concern, reach out to your child's school for advice. They might be able to provide suggestions or recommend clubs or activities that can help your child feel more connected and supported.



What can you do to help?

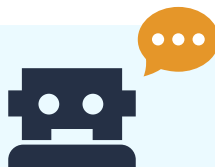
- **Help your child develop a healthy balance** of screen time by encouraging regular breaks and using a variety of apps, games and activities.
- Explore opportunities for socialisation offline such as in clubs or teams outside of school to **help your child find positive community**.
- **Talk with your child about their experiences online** – what they enjoy doing, what makes them feel uncomfortable and how they feel while using certain apps or platforms.
- **Encourage your child to practise mindfulness.** This includes asking themselves how something makes them feel and, if they feel lonely, taking action to get support.



More resources



Tech's effects on loneliness ▶



What are AI chatbots? ▶



Parasocial relationships ▶

Navigating information online

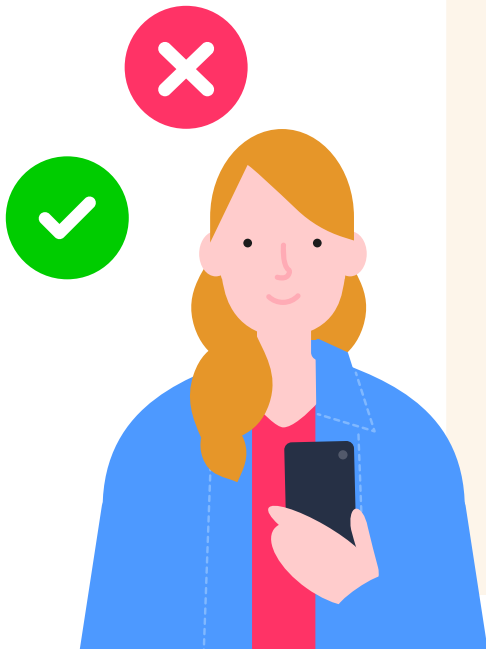
The widespread use of the internet means that children can find information and news with just a quick search. However, at this age, they may not always know how to tell what's real and what's not.

Artificial intelligence (AI) adds an additional layer of risk when it comes to trusting information online. AI chatbots as well as people online can share incorrect information, whether on purpose or not, which can lead to confusion and cause strong emotions like anger or fear.



What can you do to help?

- **Create a simple fact-checking rule together.** For example, if something they read online seems surprising or upsetting, encourage them to check it using two other trusted sources first.
- Encourage them to **ask you for help** if they're ever not sure of information.
- **Avoid letting children use AI chatbots on their own.** Most platforms are designed for age 13+, so if your child is using one, do it together and talk about how to use it safely.
- If you explore AI tools together, show them how to ask questions and check the answers – just like you would with a search engine.
- Talk about how the videos and posts they click on can influence what they see next, and how to recognise and report anything misleading or upsetting.



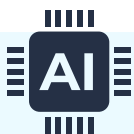
Support from schools

As a part of your child's school curriculum, your child will learn different ways to assess information, whether online or offline. This might be found in English classes, Computing classes or subjects like PSHE.

Reach out to your child's teacher to see how they address this topic at their school and in what year. You can also explore the Digital Matters platform for support.



More resources



Using artificial intelligence ▶



Fake news & misinformation hub ▶



Find the Fake quiz ▶

Where to get help and useful resources

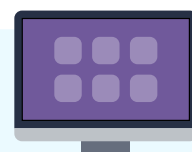
Search on internetmatters.org to explore these top resources:



[6-10 online safety guide](#)



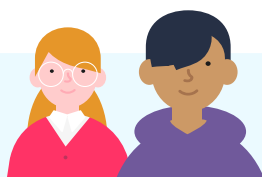
[Parental controls guides](#)



[Apps and platforms guides](#)



[The Online Together Project tool](#)



[Check-in templates](#)



[Report online harm](#)

Get personalised advice straight to your inbox

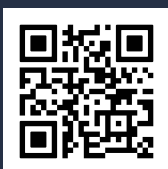
Want support to stay on top of your kids' digital lives? Together, we've got this, with our free personalised family digital toolkit. By completing the form you'll get:

- Age-specific checklists and guides
- Safety information on the latest apps and platforms
- Resources to tackle online concerns by age
- Interactive tools to encourage discussions on key topics

Scan the QR code or go to internetmatters.org/toolkit




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