

Buying tech for kids?

Make safety your first feature

Give children independence safely – know what to look for before you buy.



Technology helps children learn, play and connect, but the best device isn't the newest one, it's the safest one.



Before you buy, think about how the device will fit your child's age, needs and confidence. Safety features can help you manage screen time, block inappropriate content and protect your child's privacy, giving them freedom to explore safely as they grow.

Children's needs will change over time:

- **Ages 6-10** – stronger limits, simpler features and more supervision
- **Ages 11-13** – a balance of independence and support
- **Ages 14+** – greater privacy, guided by trust and open conversations
- **Children with additional needs** – look for accessibility and customisation options that make using tech easier and safer

Find buying advice for a range of devices:

▶ Before you buy checklist

▶ Mobile phones

▶ Laptops & tablets

▶ Games consoles

▶ Smart TVs

▶ Smart gadgets

▶ Monitoring software



Before you buy checklist

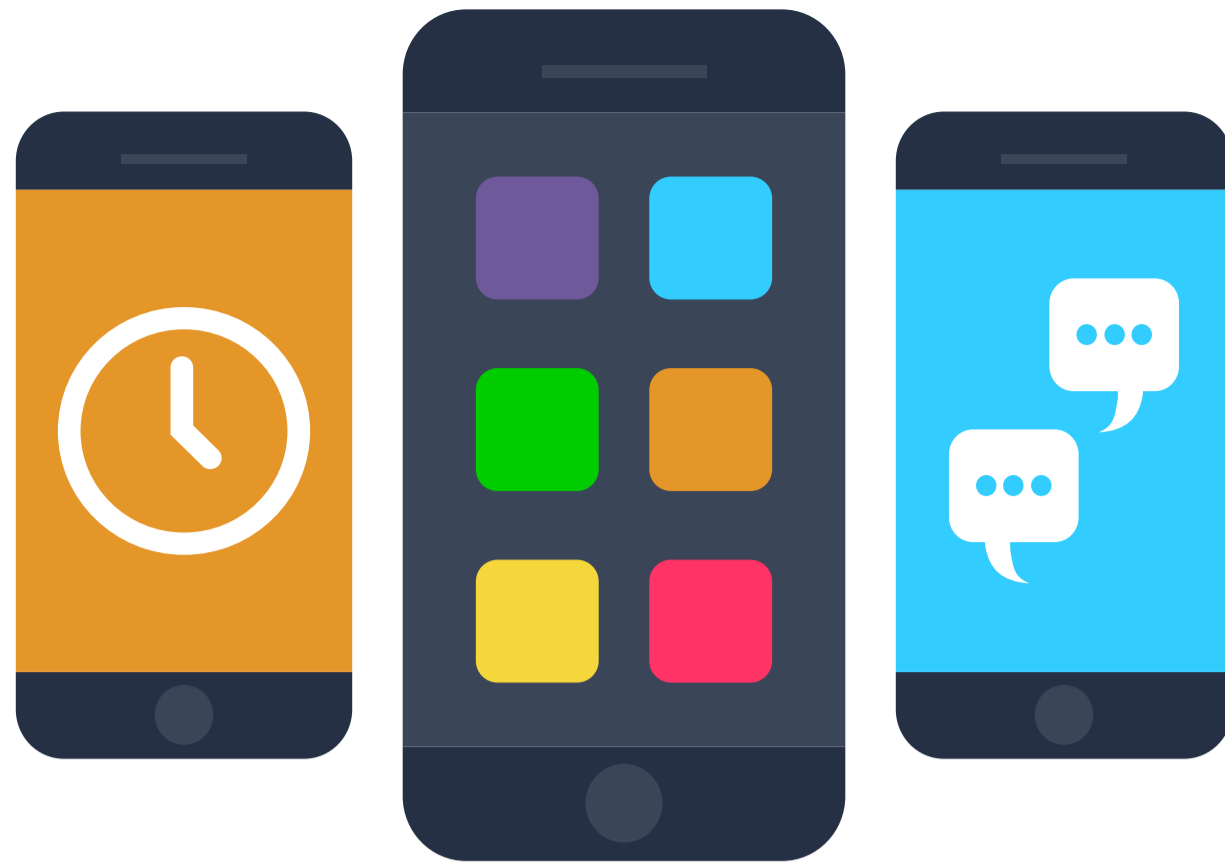


Before choosing any new device, ask yourself:

1. Does it include clear parental controls and privacy settings?
2. Can I adjust them as my child grows?
3. Does it work with other tools we already use?
4. Is it accessible for my child's needs?
5. Do I know how to set it up safely?

Also consider:

- **A protective case** or insurance for peace of mind
- **Child-friendly data plans** with capped usage
- Setting **consistent digital** rules across devices



Mobile phones

A mobile phone can help children stay in touch and gain independence, but it's important to choose one that suits their age and maturity.

Younger children (around 6-10):

Many younger children don't yet need a mobile phone. However, if you decide they're ready, it's best to choose a **feature phone (sometimes called a "dumb phone")** rather than a smartphone. These simpler devices allow calls and texts but have limited or no internet access, which helps children stay connected safely without the risks that come with full online access.

Older children and teens:

Smartphones offer more flexibility for learning, creativity and communication, but they need clear boundaries and the right settings in place. Also, it's important to discuss how they will use the phone to choose the right one for them.

Questions to consider



- Is it just for safety on their way to and from school?
- Will they need to access the internet or download apps for school, socialising and entertainment?
- What do they want to do with their phone?

Features to look for



- Built-in **parental controls** (e.g. Screen Time on Apple devices or [Parental Controls](#) on Android devices)
- **Content filters** for apps and web use
- **Contact management** for trusted communication
- **Location sharing** that can be switched on/off
- **Data and spending limits** to manage use and costs
- **App store controls** to restrict or require approval for new app downloads
- **Child-friendly network plans**, such as capped-data tariffs or safer SIMs for teens

Buying tips



- Check that the phone model still gets security updates to protect from malware and scams.
- Pick a **network with child-safe features** consider child-safe features offered by some networks (eg. EE Safer SIMs).
- Look for durable, budget-friendly models with good battery life.
- Get insurance to protect against damage or loss of devices.
- Choose a phone that supports parental controls.
- Consider phones designed specifically for children, like HMD Fuse or Fusion X1.

For **hand-me down phones**, make sure to reset and update before giving them to a child.

- ▶ Explore our **mobile phone safety guide** for setup steps and advice by age.





Laptops & tablets

Children often use laptops and tablets for schoolwork, gaming and creativity, so safety and usability both matter.

Questions to consider



- Is this mainly for schoolwork, creative play or both?
- Will the device be shared, or is it just for your child?
- Where will it be used – mostly at home, or on the go?
- Do you need a device that can be monitored easily or kept in a shared space?

Features to look for



- Ability to create **child or supervised accounts**
- **Web filtering and app permissions** for age-appropriate content
- **Privacy settings** to manage data sharing and ads
- Built-in or easy-to-install **parental controls**
- **Durability and usability** suited to their age

Buying tips



- Choose devices that support **family accounts** (e.g. [Windows](#), [Samsung Kids](#), macOS, [ChromeOS](#)).
- For younger children, look for **“kids mode”** or restricted profiles to simplify use.
- Prioritise **durability**, invest in a sturdy case and consider extended warranty or insurance.

▶ Visit our **laptops and tablets guide** for setup steps and safety settings.



Games consoles

Consoles offer fun, creativity and connection with friends, but they're also social spaces where children can interact with others.

Questions to consider



- Will your child mostly play solo games or online with friends?
- Do they already play online at a friend's house?
- How much time do you want them to spend gaming each day?
- Are you comfortable with in-game chats and purchases?

Features to look for



- **Age and [PEGI-based restrictions](#)** for games and apps
- **Chat and friend controls** to manage who children can talk to
- **Spending limits** to prevent unapproved purchases
- **Screen time settings** to encourage balance
- **Privacy options** to limit data sharing and streaming

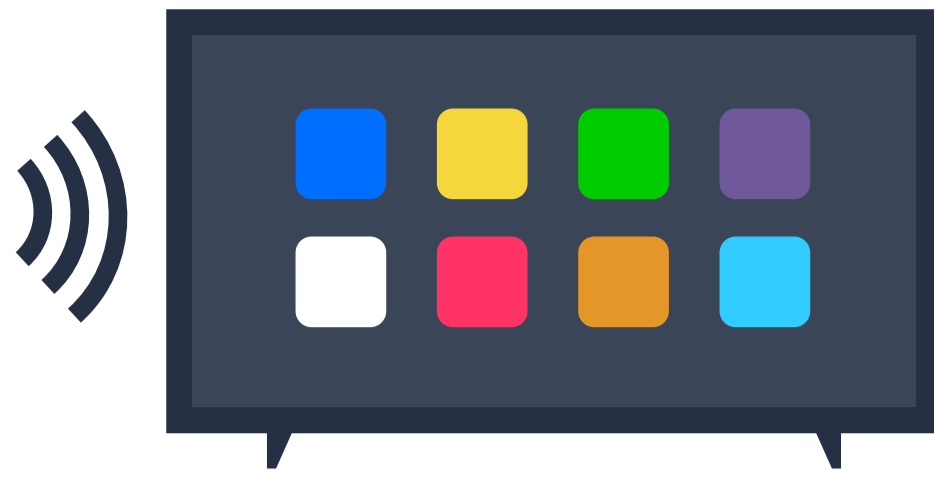
Buying tips



- Choose consoles that support **individual child accounts** with separate settings.
- Check **subscription requirements** (for online gaming) before buying.
- Consider consoles with **offline or local play** options for younger players.
- Download the **console's family app** ([PlayStation](#), [Xbox](#), [Nintendo](#)) to manage settings easily.

- ▶ Visit our **games console guide** for setup instructions and parental control tips.





Smart TVs

Smart TVs give access to streaming platforms, apps and games, but not all come with the same controls built in.

Questions to consider



- Who will use the TV - is it shared or mainly for your child?
- Which streaming platforms do they watch most often?
- Does the TV need to connect to voice assistants like Alexa or Google?
- How easy is it to manage apps and content filters?

Features to look for



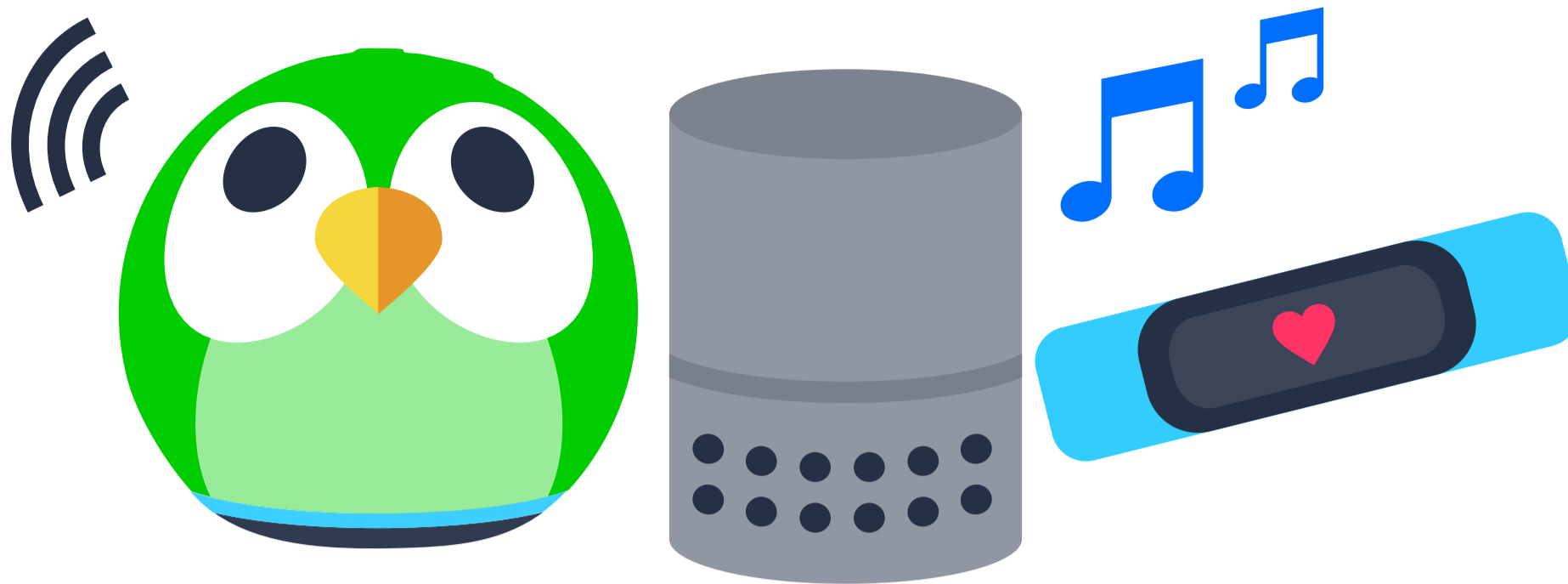
- Ability to create **separate child and adult profiles**
- **App and channel filters** for age-appropriate viewing
- **PIN protection** for purchases and mature content
- **Voice assistant controls** to manage recordings

Buying tips



- Check whether controls are **set on the TV or in the app** (e.g. Netflix, YouTube).
- Choose TVs that make it easy to apply **content filters across apps.**
- Review default privacy settings, you can often turn off data collection or voice logs.

▶ Read our **smart TV guide** to learn how to apply safety settings.



Smart gadgets (wearables, speakers, toys)

Connected devices are becoming part of everyday life, but they can collect data and allow communication, often without parents realising.

Questions to consider



- Does the gadget connect to Wi-Fi, Bluetooth or mobile data?
- What information does it collect and where is it stored?
- Will your child use it mainly indoors, at school or while out?
- Can you manage who they can message or call?

Features to look for

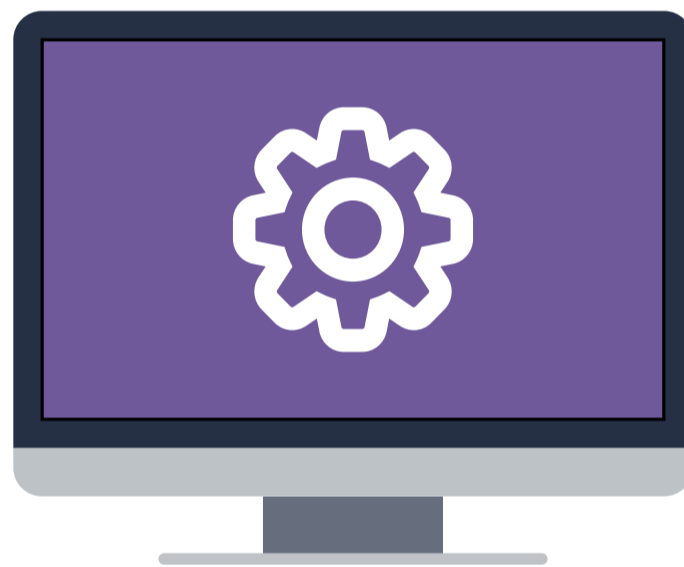


- Clear **privacy settings** and data policies
- Options to **limit contacts** and disable open communication
- **Voice control settings** that let you turn off always-on listening
- **Durable, age-appropriate** designs

Buying tips

- Choose **child-specific models** designed with safety features built in.
- Avoid devices that require **open Wi-Fi or unsecured Bluetooth connections.**
- Prefer products from brands that offer **parent dashboards.**
- Check battery life, durability and location tracking accuracy before buying.

▶ Explore our **connected devices guide** for tips on setting up safely.



Monitoring software

Monitoring tools can help keep children safe online, but they work best alongside honest conversations about trust and responsibility.

Questions to consider



- What level of oversight feels appropriate for your child's age?
- Do you want to monitor one device or several?
- What are your main concerns - screen time, content or location-tracking?
- Have you talked to your child about why you're using it?

What to look for



- **Transparency:** children should know what's being monitored
- **Age-appropriateness:** detailed tracking for younger children, lighter touch for teens
- **Balanced features:** screen time, app use and location alerts rather than constant tracking
- **Data privacy:** check what's collected and how it's stored

Buying tips



- Look for apps that are **simple to manage** across devices (i.e. [Qustodio](#)).
- Avoid tools that monitor secretly or share too much personal data.
- Read **recent reviews** for ease of use and reliability.
- Use monitoring to **support conversations**, not replace them.

▶ See our **monitoring apps guide** for a comparison of trusted tools.



Find more support

Get full guides, setup steps and family resources at internetmatters.org/resources/tech-guide

