

Discovering digital at primary school

Tips for navigating online risk and harm

internet
matters.org



Online risks & challenges at primary

While the internet can offer children many benefits, there is also risk of them coming across online harm.

Explore some of these risks below along with tips to keep your child safe.

Scan to
see the
full guide



Accessing inappropriate content

Children are curious creatures. Online, they might seek out content they learn about from friends or unknowingly look up inappropriate words they hear in a song.

They might also come across inappropriate content by:

- Joining apps and platforms before reaching the minimum age allowed.
- Playing games, using apps or watching content aimed at older children or adults.
- Watching livestreams where content isn't always predictable.

Tips to keep them safe

- Set up parental controls across broadband, devices and apps to limit access to websites, apps and content.
- Talk with them about what to do if they have questions about something (like asking you).
- Discuss what is appropriate for 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.



Sharing private information

While many children in primary might know that they're not supposed to share private information, they might not know what this looks like in practise, which can lead to oversharing.

This can lead to:

- Scammers or bullies using this information to target them.
- Losing accounts on popular platforms.
- Coercion or manipulation from harmful people.
- Unwanted contact from spammers and strangers.

Tips to keep them safe

- Talk about private information, including what it is and why it needs to stay private.
- Talk about how strangers might pretend to be someone else. Together, identify what 'red flag' behaviours might look like.
- Discuss pressures they might feel to share images or information for likes or because an online friend wants it, and how to navigate that pressure.
- Review communication and friends settings in the platforms they use to make sure strangers can't interact with them.



Too much screen time

Not all screen time is created equal. If your child uses their device to connect with others, learn or develop new interests, they're more likely to feel good about their screen time.

If they're watching 'brain rot' or playing games they don't enjoy, they're more likely to feel negative impacts on their wellbeing.

Tips to keep them safe

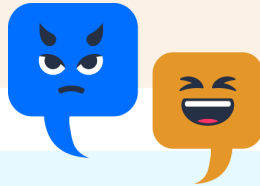
- Create a family agreement together to decide when, where and for how long they can use a device or platform.
- Check-in on their experiences by asking how they feel during and after playing a game or watching a video to help them become more mindful.
- Offer alternatives to make their screen time more active. For example, if they love playing Roblox, maybe they'd enjoy creating their own game in Roblox Studio.
- Use built-in screen time tools on their devices and in their apps.



Cyberbullying & online hate

Cyberbullying in primary school can happen over messaging apps, in games they play or on other social platforms. It can come from people they know as well as strangers.

Setting a good foundation of healthy behaviour can help your child understand when something needs to be reported or blocked and when they need to tell you.



Tips to keep them safe

- Talk about 'internet manners' and the importance of being kind online.
- Let them know that telling you or a teacher is always the right thing to do if they're bullied or see bullying happening to others.
- Teach them how to report and block users on the platforms they use (and when to use them).

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 coming to harm.



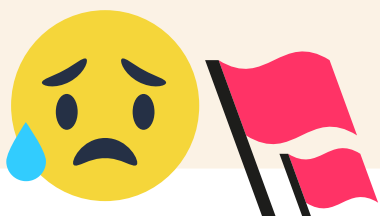
Tips to keep them safe

- Review parental controls built-in to your child's apps and devices to make sure only people you agree on can contact them.
- Check-in regularly on their friends lists and ask questions about anyone you don't recognise. Review private messages as well.
- Together, explore the platform's reporting and blocking tools. Talk about how to use them and when.

Feelings of loneliness

While many children benefit from going online, research shows that increasing numbers of children feel more lonely online. This can lead them to trying to find community and support online.

Finding community online can be a good thing, but it can also leave the open to risk from more extreme communities.



Tips to keep them safe

- Explore opportunities for socialisation beyond school like clubs or teams to help your child find positive community.
- Regularly talk with your child about their experiences online - what they enjoy doing, what they dislike, how they feel.
- Encourage your child to be mindful of how the online space makes them feel and what actions they can take if they feel lonely.

Navigating mis- and disinformation

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.



Tips to keep them safe

- Create a simple fact-checking rules together. For example, if something they read online seems surprising or upsetting, encourage them to find 2 more trusted sources before believing it's true.
- Let them know that they can always ask you for help if they're ever unsure.
- Discourage them from use AI chatbots like ChatGPT as a search engine. It can give wrong answers, so they should use a search engine if they're looking for facts.
- Explore AI tools and appropriate use of these tools together. This can help show your child what positive and supportive use looks like.

Helpful resources & activities

Use these activities and resources to help your child develop their media literacy to support them as they grow.



6-10s age guide: Learn about the online life of children aged 6-10 and get tips for apps, online safety and more.



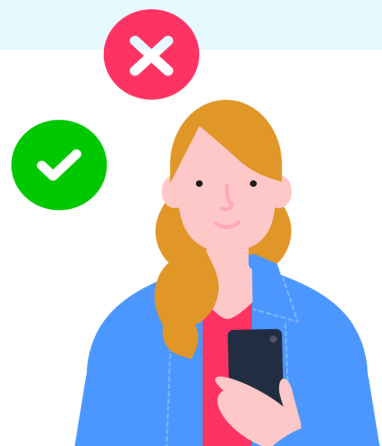
Step-by-step parental controls: See how to set restrictions across networks, devices, apps and platforms your child uses.



Apps and platforms guides: Explore popular platforms or find a new app to help your child manage their wellbeing or gain new skills.



Additional needs hub: If your child has SEND or additional needs, use this hub for strategies to make their time online safer.



Find the Fake: Complete any of these 4 quizzes with your child to help them think more critically about things they see online.



The Online Together Project: Complete these quizzes about stereotypes and hate to help your child keep their online experiences positive.



Check-in templates: Use these templates to check-in with your child about their online life.