Screen time: how to keep your child safe this summer

Screen time can be an easy way to keep children entertained during the holidays. Know the risks, and what you can do to keep your child safe and healthy.

The risks

Spending time on mobile phones, tablets, laptops, computers and game consoles can be positive and trouble-free, but it can also put your child at risk of:

- Online bullying
- Seeing sexual or violent photos, videos or other images
- Grooming (when someone builds a relationship with a child to exploit or abuse them)
- Not getting enough exercise

UK doctors also say that children with higher screen time:

- Tend to eat less healthily and show more signs of obesity
- Tend to have more depressive symptoms
- Are likely to have worse educational outcomes, sleep and fitness levels

This may be because the screen time is replacing other activities, like exercise or sleeping. Face-to-face interaction also seems to be better for children's development.

4 steps you can take to protect your child this summer

1) Set parental controls on devices

Use the instructions on the next few pages to restrict your child's access to things that could be harmful (e.g. explicit or age-rated content, in-app purchases, and how long they can spend on the device).

You'll most likely need to set a password for these parental controls, so make sure it's different from the password for unlocking or accessing the device – and that your child doesn't know it.

2) Agree rules on screen time

There's no recommended 'safe' amount of screen time, and what counts as 'too much' is still hotly debated.

As a starting point, agree some limits that mean screen time does not interfere with your child's sleep or what you want to do as a family:

- Make a plan with your child, and stick to it. You could set media-free times and zones, like during meals or in bedrooms
- Model the behaviour you want to see – which may mean no screen time for you at the times agreed with your child. Children are more likely to learn from example
- Avoid screens **an hour before** your child's planned **bedtime**
- Try to minimise snacking during screen time
- Turn the idea of not using screens into a game. For example, Forest is an app-based game where a child can grow a forest, but only by not using the phone or tablet until a timer runs out (https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/expert-opinion/need-help-managing-kids-screen-time-the-forest-app-can-help/)

3) Talk to your child about staying safe online

- Talk about what apps or sites they use and how they use them. Be aware of what they might come across on them (e.g. harmful photos, unkind comments, being contacted by strangers), and talk to them about what's appropriate
- Encourage your child to tell you if they see something they find worrying or upsetting. Reassure them that you're just looking out for them, and won't overreact
- Make sure they know how to report inappropriate content or messages on the apps they use, how to block someone, and how to keep their information private
- Tell your child not to give out any personal information or anything that can identify them or their location, such as their school name or street name

The NSPCC has more guidance for parents on this here: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-your-child-staying-safe-online/

4) Encourage off-screen activities

- Get your child active for the recommended 60 minutes a day:
  - See www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities for free ideas for activities and games
  - Try an app that's designed to get children active – see the examples at www.internetmatters.org/resources/apps-guide/apps-to-help-kids-get-active/
- Find out if there are any free summer holiday events for children at your local library
- Try out some of these child-friendly recipes to get your child involved in cooking – https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/kids-baking
- Develop your child's communication and reading skills with the activities (for 0 to 5 year-olds) recommended here: https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/

How to set parental controls on your devices

Please note: when following the instructions below, the exact steps you need to take may be a little different depending on the device and software version you're using.

iPads

Set a screen time passcode

- Go to 'Settings' (a grey icon with a circular pattern on the home screen) and tap 'Screen Time'
- Tap 'Continue', then choose whether it's your device or your child's
  - If it's your device and you want to stop your child changing your settings, tap 'Use Screen Time Passcode' to create a passcode. Re-enter the passcode to confirm
  - If it's your child's device, follow the prompts on the device until you get to 'Parent Passcode' and enter a passcode, then re-enter it to confirm

Block in-app purchases

- Go into Settings > Screen Time > Content and Privacy Restrictions. Enter your passcode if asked
- Tap 'iTunes & App Store Purchases'
- Choose a setting (for example, in-app purchases) and set to 'Don't allow'

Block explicit content and set controls on apps

- Go to Settings > Screen Time > Content & Privacy Restrictions > Content Restrictions
- Choose the settings you want for each feature or setting under 'Allowed Store Content'

Filter website content

This sets restrictions on what websites children can access.

- Go to Settings > Screen Time > Content & Privacy Restrictions
- Enter your screen time passcode
- Tap 'Content Restrictions', then 'Web Content'
- Choose 'Unrestricted Access' (access to any website), 'Limit Adult Websites' (to block access to adult content in Safari) or 'Allowed Websites Only' (to set specific websites as 'approved websites' and limit access to only these websites)

Read more here: https://support.apple.com/en-gb/HT201304

Fire Tablet

Set a parental controls password

- Swipe down from the top of the screen, then tap 'Settings' (a cog icon)
- Tap 'Parental Controls'
- Tap the switch next to 'Parental Controls'
- Enter a password, confirm it, then tap 'Finish'

Restrict apps, features and content

- In ‘Parental Controls’, tap ‘Amazon Content and Apps’ to choose which content or apps you want to block
- You can set your device so that you can only play videos and Twitch (a live streaming platform), and access WiFi and location services, by entering your parental controls password. Go into ‘Password Protection’ in ‘Parental Controls’ to toggle these on
- To block access to Amazon, go to ‘Parental Controls’ and press ‘Amazon Stores (excluding Video)’

Block in-app purchases

- Go to the Amazon Appstore on your device
- Select Account > Settings > Parental Controls
- Tap ‘Enable Parental Controls’, and then enter your account password. Once you’ve done this, your child won’t be able to buy anything in the app without your Amazon password

Restrict available content

- Create a child profile and select which apps and content are available to that profile
- Go Parental Controls > Amazon Content and Apps
- Toggle categories to ‘Blocked’ to block access to relevant apps and games

Set times when your child can use the tablet

- Go to ‘Parental Controls’
- Tap the switch next to ‘Set a Curfew’, then tap ‘Curfew Schedule’
- Set the day and time limits you want

To unlock a device during a curfew, enter your parental controls password.

Read more at https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=201829940 and https://www.laptopmag.com/articles/parental-controls-fire-tablet

See here for more information on settings for specific devices, as they can vary: https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=200127470

Microsoft devices (Windows computers and Xbox)

You’ll need to have a family account set up, with ‘child’ profiles for your children. Learn more here: https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/12413

You can’t change existing adult accounts to child accounts.

Set screen time limits

- Go to https://account.microsoft.com/family and sign in to your Microsoft account
- Find your child’s name and select ‘Screen time’
- Switch ‘Use one screen time schedule’ to ‘On’ to use the same schedule for all devices. Or scroll down and switch on screen time for different devices individually if you want to have separate schedules

You can set time ranges for using devices, and how many hours per day, for each day.

Set age limits for apps, games and media

Online:

- Sign in to your Microsoft account, as above, and find your child's name
- Select 'Content restrictions'
- Go to 'Apps, games and media' and switch 'Block inappropriate apps, games and media' to 'On'. Under 'Allow apps and games rated for', select the age limit you want to apply to your child

On Xbox:

- Sign in with an adult account
- Press the Xbox button on the controller to open the guide, and then select System > Settings > Account > Family
- Select the child account you want to put controls on, select 'Access to content', then select the age limit you want to set

Block inappropriate websites

Online:

- Sign in to your account, find your child's name, and select 'Content restrictions'
- Scroll down to 'Web browsing' and switch 'Block inappropriate websites' to 'On'
- To block specific sites, add links to them under 'Always blocked'
- To make it so your children can only access websites you've explicitly allowed, check the box next to 'Only allow these websites'

Xbox:

- Sign in to an adult account, press the Xbox button and follow the steps to get family settings above
- Select the child account you want to put controls on, then select 'Web filtering'
- Select the dropdown to see the available options, and choose the level of filtering you want

Manage purchases in the Microsoft Store

Online:

- Sign in to an adult account, as above, find your child's name and select 'Content restrictions'
- Under 'Ask a parent', switch 'Needs adult approval to buy things' to 'On'

Xbox:

- Go into your family settings, as explained above, and choose a child account
- Select Privacy & online safety > Xbox Live privacy > View details & customize > Buy & download and then select 'On' in the 'Ask a parent' box

Read more here: https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/hub/4294457/microsoft-account-help#manage-family

PlayStation

You'll need to set up accounts for family members, with adult and child accounts, and make sure you and other adults have family manager or parent/guardian status. Read more about how to do this here: https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/get-help/help-library/my-account/parental-controls/family-management/

Set a login passcode and system restriction passcode

A login passcode means that only you can log in to the 'family manager' user on the system.

To do this:

- Go to Settings (this should be shown by a toolbox icon) > Login Settings > Login Passcode Management
- Set a 4-digit passcode using the controller, then re-enter it to confirm

Using a system restriction passcode will prevent your child from changing parental control settings. To do this:

- Go to Settings > Parental Controls/Family Management > PS4 System Restrictions
- Enter the existing system restriction passcode (if you haven't set one before, the default is 0000)
- Select 'Change System Restriction Passcode'
- Enter a new 4-digit passcode using the controller, then re-enter it to confirm

The PlayStation website also explains how to disable new user creation and guest login: https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/get-help/help-library/my-account/parental-controls/ps4-parental-controls/

Set spending limits

- Go to Settings > Parental Controls/Family Management > Family Management
- Select the user you want to set a spending limit for
- Select 'Applications/Devices/Network Features' under the 'Parental Controls' section
- Select 'Monthly Spending Limit' and press X

Restrict access to network features

- Go to Settings > Parental Controls/Family Management > Family Management (you may need to enter your account password)
- Select the user you want to set restrictions for
- Select 'Applications/Devices/Network Features' under the 'Parental Controls' section
- Under 'Network Features', you can choose whether to allow a child user to communicate with other players on the PlayStation Network, or view content created by other players

Set age rating levels for games, Blu-ray Discs and DVDs

- Go to settings > Parental Controls/Family Management > Family Management (you may need to enter your account password)
- Select the user you want to set the age level for
- Select 'Applications/Devices/Network Features' and select the content you want to restrict

Sources used in this factsheet

This factsheet was produced by **Safeguarding Training Centre from The Key**: **www.thekeysupport.com/safeguarding**

- Guidelines issued on activity and screen time for babies and toddlers, NHS https://www.nhs.uk/news/pregnancy-and-child/who-guidelines-screen-time/
- Talking to your child about staying safe online, NSPCC https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-your-child-staying-safe-online/
- The health impacts of screen time: a guide for clinicians and parents, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/health-impacts-screen-time-guide-clinicians-parents
- Physical activity guidelines for children and young people, NHS https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-children-and-young-people/