E-SAFETY UPDATE

LIONHEART EDUCATIONAL TRUST

HALF TERMLY UPDATE

Welcome to our latest update! Lionheart Educational Trust is now sending out an e-safety update every half term, prior to the school holidays, in order to support parents and students. Due to the nature of widespread internet use at the moment, you will find this is a bumper edition this half-term, containing advice and support from a wider range of sources.

This update will feature resources by the National Online Safety organization; SWGfI (a charity dedicated to empowering the safe and secure use of technology globally) and UK Safer Internet Centre.

A FREE ONLINE SAFETY GUIDE ON MANAGING DEVICE STRESS AND ANXIETY

We can access new music and movies in seconds. We can get products delivered to our door the very next day. We can chat or play games with people on the other side of the planet. For all of the remarkable benefits the digital age has brought us, however, it's also presented us with a whole new raft of pressures and anxieties that, in truth, we're all still learning to cope with.

From continual notifications inflaming a fear of missing out to the risk of public embarrassment or slanging matches on social media, today's children and young people have stresses to manage that previous generations simply never encountered. This guide examines these uniquely modern worries, highlighting ways to reduce the anxiety that digital devices can bring.

A FREE ONLINE SAFETY GUIDE ON OFCOM'S CHILDREN & PARENTS: MEDIA USE & ATTITUDES REPORT 2023

Ofcom's annual 'Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes' report provides a comprehensive picture of how young people used and interacted with the internet in the preceding year. It's a fascinating snapshot of what games and apps young people are currently favouring, how long they spend online and how tastes change at certain ages.

While some of Ofcom's latest findings will probably come as scant surprise (YouTube being by far the most popular platform among under-18s, for instance), other conclusions may raise an eyebrow or two. This guide presents some of the report's most eye-catching facts and figures in an accessible infographic format.

A FREE ONLINE SAFETY GUIDE ON TELEGRAM

With more than 700 million users worldwide, Telegram is a popular alternative to the likes of WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger; indeed, in some countries, it's overtaken that pair to become the most-used instant messaging app. Telegram's no stranger to controversy, however, and has occasionally been made unavailable for download in some nations (including the UK).

There are various reasons for these suspensions, but the primary trigger for the authorities' concern has been that Telegram's robust encryption, sadly, all too often encourages the app's use as a conduit for extremist political material and illegal sexual content. This guide this week brings trusted adults the lowdown on.

A COPY OF UK SAFER INTERNET CENTRE'S ARTICLE PROVIDING ADVICE FOR PARENTS ON AGE-APPROPRIATE GAMING

We often hear from parents and carers that they are worried about what their child may experience in new games. This article will show you the insights of what might be involved and offer suggestions how you can make an informed decision.

A LINK TO SWGFL'S COLLECTION OF CHECKLISTS AND BOOKLETS

Please use the link below to access a collection of checklists and booklets designed to help parent and carers ensure their children's social media platforms are kept securely. These are all freely downloadable.
https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/checklists/

Helping children and young people with
MANAGING DEVICE STRESS AND ANXIETY

The internet and advances in the capability of digital devices have afforded us arguably the fastest period of technological and social evolution in living memory: creating opportunities for us to interact with people anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day. It's also, however, blurred safety boundaries and added new stresses for young people, who are often less aware of the hidden hazards. With almost half of 10–15-year-olds experiencing bullying online and algorithms pushing content in front of our children every day, it's important to know how to address some of these challenges.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

LIVING ONLINE

The internet is awash with sophisticated algorithms that learn from our online behaviour and try to predict our wants and needs. That's very helpful in some respects, but it *can* make the online world difficult for children and young people to negotiate. Content can be brought to them at any time – it may not always be appropriate, and children may not have the ability or the support to deal with it.

PUSHY NOTIFICATIONS

Content is also directed at us through notifications from our apps: letting us know we have a new message or social post to read, for example. While that's useful in some circumstances, it conditions us to keep going back online (and is designed to do so) and can be a near-constant demand on your child's attention. As such alerts become more common, are we experiencing an 'attack of the pings'?

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

There are now so many ways we can communicate online in real time (like instant messaging apps) or with a delay (such as on social media) that it's possible to be constantly in conversation. Young people often prefer quickfire exchanges of text – but using fewer words can cause distressing miscommunications through the lack of non-verbal cues like facial expressions or tone of voice.

DIGITAL DEPENDENCY

As devices allow access to immediate external help in challenging situations, it's a concern that children may not be developing the inner confidence to work things out for themselves. Likewise, group membership is hugely important to young people – both in digital and 'real' life – and being excluded from online conversations can cause damaging feelings of loneliness and isolation.

DISGUISED DISTRESS

Children often haven't yet developed the emotional resources to deal with many of the setbacks of everyday life, so identifying when it's specifically something online that's worried them can be tricky. A certain level of stress is a normal response to a problem: it spurs us into action to keep ourselves safe. If the stress is excessive, though, it can feel overwhelming and potentially lead to anxiety or depression.

ANTI-SOCIAL SOCIALS

Social media can bring people together in hugely positive ways. Sadly, it *does* also have a darker side, including 'flame war' arguments which can escalate quickly and have hurtful consequences. With so many people looking on, 'group shaming' situations are also common – while there are continual opportunities for young people to compare themselves negatively with other social media users.

Advice for Parents & Carers

LEARN THE BASICS

It's impossible to keep up with *every* online change or *every* new app. The best option is to make yourself aware of the fundamentals of how the internet operates, so you can help your child to grasp how – and why – content reaches them. Devices and the digital world can be confusing, so learning to understand them better will give you the confidence to talk to your child about them.

PUSH DISTRACTIONS AWAY

Notifications to our phones and tablets can be helpful, but they sometimes make one wonder who's really in charge: the person or the device? Checking our phone as soon as it goes off is an easy habit to fall into – especially for young people. Try switching off non-essential alerts on your devices and encourage your child to do the same: you should both feel less triggered and more in control.

KEEP CHECKING IN

Healthy emotional regulation balances three systems: threat, drive and grounding. Down the various rabbit holes of the internet, however, that balance can easily slip away – so it's important to help your child manage their emotions when they're online. Check in with them regularly when they're on their device, and remember that 'distraction' and 'relaxation' aren't always the same thing.

TALK IT OUT

If a child mentions a comment that's been directed at them in a text chat or on social media, it may sound minor but can actually have a much bigger effect than we realise. In our evolved brains, any perceived threat can get internalised while our body reacts as if we were in physical danger – raising stress levels. It's always worth encouraging your child to get any concerns out in the open.

LOOK FOR THE SIGNS

This is tricky – and may depend on the child's age – but any sudden change in behaviour is worth looking out for. If your child seems to be checking their phone or tablet more, doesn't want to be parted from them, or appears unusually secretive, anxious or withdrawn, it could be a sign that something is amiss in relation to their device – and, possibly, that they're in need of extra support.

BE KIND: UNWIND

Be kind to yourselves as parents and carers. Remember that we're all in the same boat, trying to safely guide our children through this complex, fast-moving digital environment. Getting into the habit of having natural, relaxed conversations with your child about their online life (and yours) can level the playing field and make it far easier for them to open up to you about any concerns.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Carole Francis-Smith is an experienced counselling psychologist who specialises in promoting safe and ethical online communications. She consults with and offers bespoke training to businesses and organisations, supporting positive and effective online communications – often by considering some of the more hidden aspects of the various mediums.
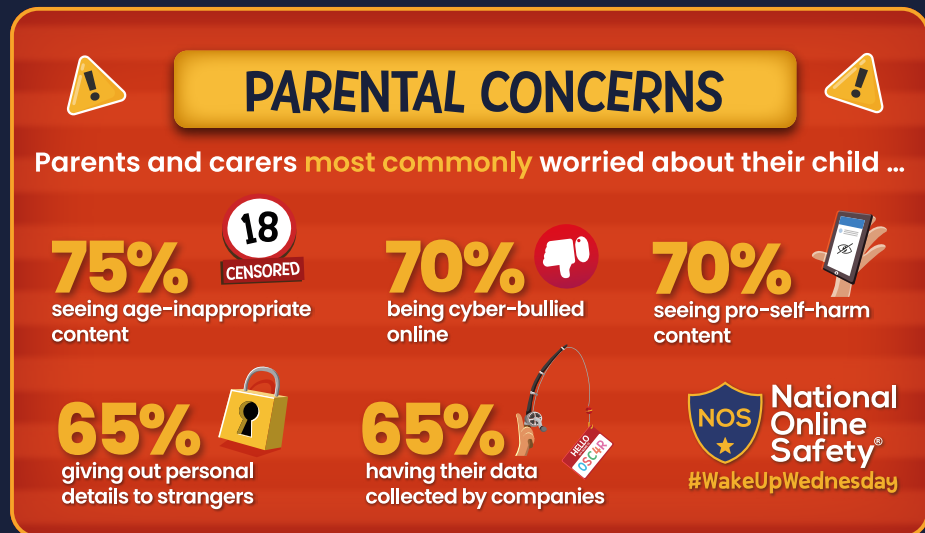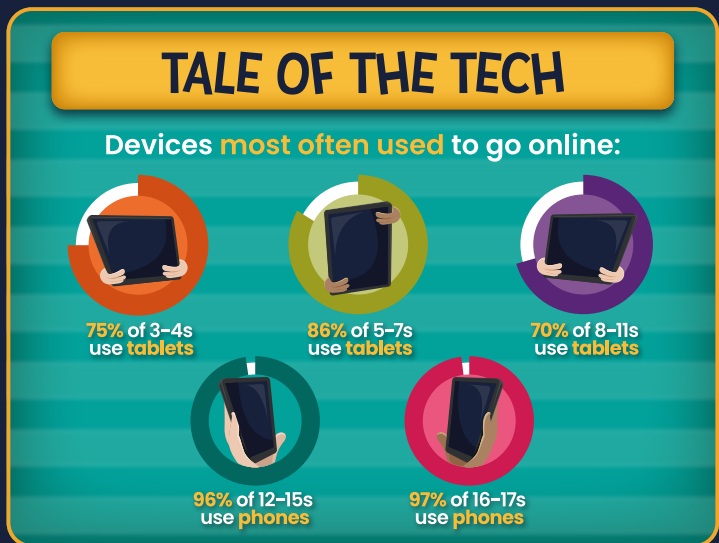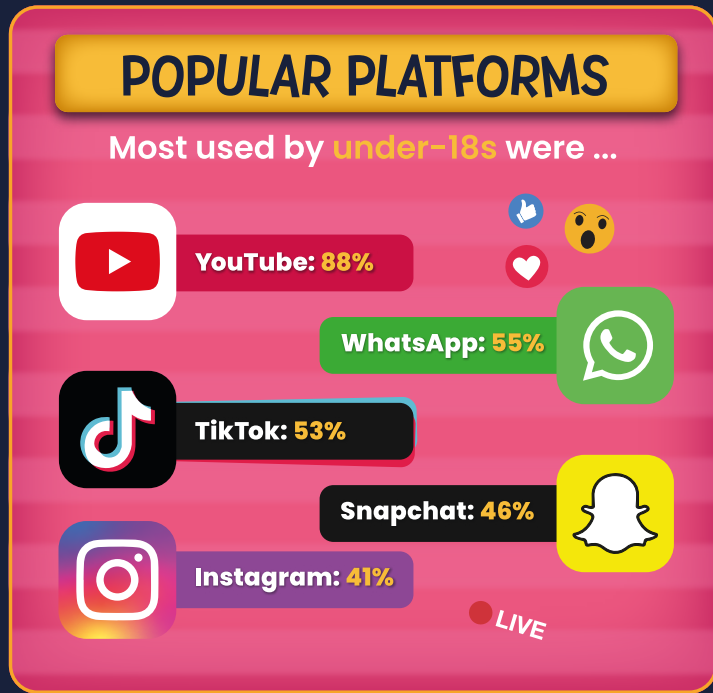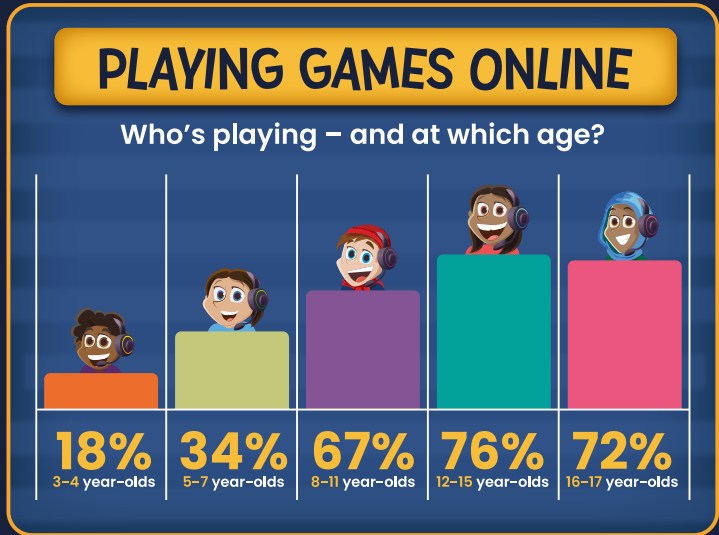
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At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many areas 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

OFCOM'S 'CHILDREN AND PARENTS: MEDIA USE AND ATTITUDES' REPORT 2023

Each year, Ofcom – Britain's regulatory body for communications – produces an overview of children and parents' media experiences across the previous year. The latest version has just been released, and we've pulled out some of the report's most thought-provoking findings which relate to online safety …

97% of children had access to the internet at home in 2022

89% of children played video games

25% played with people they didn't know

22% talked to people they didn't know

POPULAR PLATFORMS

Most used by under-18s were …

- YouTube: **88%**
- WhatsApp: **55%**
- TikTok: **53%**
- Snapchat: **46%**
- Instagram: **41%**

LIVE

PLAYING GAMES ONLINE

Who's playing – and at which age?

18%	34%	67%	76%	72%
3-4 year-olds	5-7 year-olds	8-11 year-olds	12-15 year-olds	16-17 year-olds

TALE OF THE TECH

Devices most often used to go online:

75% of 3-4s use **tablets**

86% of 5-7s use **tablets**

70% of 8-11s use **tablets**

96% of 12-15s use **phones**

97% of 16-17s use **phones**

PARENTAL CONCERNS

Parents and carers most commonly worried about their child …

75% seeing age-inappropriate content

70% being cyber-bullied online

70% seeing pro-self-harm content

65% giving out personal details to strangers

65% having their data collected by companies

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D@*#! **3 in 10** children had experienced someone being nasty or hurtful to them on apps or platforms.

70% of 12 to 17-year-olds were confident in their ability to identify a fake profiles. But **23%** were unable to do so when tested.

£38 children's average monthly spend on video games

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Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 19.04.2023

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

TELEGRAM

AGE RESTRICTION 17+

Telegram isn't new, but it's grown significantly in popularity over recent years, thanks to its secure nature and speedier performance than many of its competitors – including WhatsApp. While Telegram is an excellent app in terms of actual performance, like any messaging platform it brings its own challenges for parents when it comes to feeling confident about children being able to handle their own messaging conversations and contact with the outside world in general. Here's everything that trusted adults need to know about using Telegram safely.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

LACK OF AGE RESTRICTION

17+

Telegram has a 16+ age restriction on using the service, while someone is required to be over 17 to actually download the app. Once that's accomplished, however, there's no need to provide further identification. That means there's no guarantee that under 17s aren't using the app – and no way to confidently verify that any other user actually *is* who they say they are.

POSSIBLE CYBERBULLYING

If your child uses Telegram, they could well be in a group with friends and peers on the app. These groups are managed by admins who can remove the option to post replies – possibly leading to instances of cyberbullying in which the victim has no ability to respond. Messages can be forwarded from groups, too, which potentially opens up images and text being seen by to people they weren't intended for.

UNMODERATED CONTENT

Because Telegram relies on users' self-moderation, it can sporadically become a hotbed for illegal or inappropriate content. In the past, the circulation of this material has led to its temporary removal from the App Store. In fairness, the same can be said of several messaging platforms, but Telegram's features (Secret Chats, for instance) certainly present more issues than the likes of WhatsApp.

PREMIUM COSTS

Telegram is free to use, but it also offers a premium membership (£4.99 per month or £35.99 a year) which increases download speeds, adds translation features, and increases channel and account limits. If your child has access to your Apple ID or Google Pay details, they may be able to sign up for the premium package without your knowledge.

UNAUTHORISED ACCESS

One of Telegram's major selling points is that it's accessible across multiple platforms. Once the app's been downloaded, users can log in from a phone, tablet or computer. This multi-device availability means increased opportunities for someone else to gain unauthorised access (if your child leaves a computer or tablet at school logged into their Telegram account, for instance).

SECRET CHATS

Telegram offers a feature called Secret Chats, which allows for messages which self-delete after a specified period of time. There are instances where this can be useful (journalists often use Telegram to protect their sources, for example), but for young people it can make it extremely difficult to prove that someone has been abusive or inappropriate towards them on the app.

Advice for Parents & Carers

PRIVACY CONTROLS

If your child wants to use Telegram, we'd strongly suggest using the app's built-in privacy settings to restrict who can see when they were last online, their profile photo, and their phone number. This can be set to 'everybody', 'my contacts' or 'nobody': we'd recommend either the second or third options, depending on how locked down you want the platform to be.

DISCUSS SECURITY

It's important that your child understands the merits of strong passwords and logging out of devices when they're finished – and the benefits of protecting their personal data in general. This could range from relaxed chats and simple tips like "don't send your bank details" to how to set up passcodes for Telegram so your child's chats stay secure when they step away from their screen.

REPORT UNSAFE CONTENT

If your child receives private messages which include content that could be considered illegal, unsafe or upsetting, they can of course block the account responsible within the app itself. Be aware, however, that Telegram won't necessarily take any further action it unless this offensive content involved a user-created channel, bot or sticker.

USE THE BLOCK FUNCTION

Users can block spam, abusive, or imposter accounts within the app. Blocking stops that account from messaging your child, or viewing their profile and activity. If the user in question is one of your child's peers or friendship circle, it may be worth bringing it to the attention of their school. Also bear in mind that your child can also voluntarily leave a Telegram group at any point if they wish.

PROTECT PAYMENT METHODS

Apple and Google's storefronts offer family sharing options, but it's also worth double-checking your settings to ensure that a password or two-factor authentication option is set up to prevent any unexpected purchases. If your child *does* pay for a premium Telegram subscription without your consent, Apple and Google have been known to issue refunds in some cases.

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Editor in Chief of gaming and esports site GGRecon and has worked in the gaming media for around four years. A regular visitor to the App Store to try out new tools, he's also a parent who understands the value of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his articles have been published on influential sites including IGN and TechRadar.
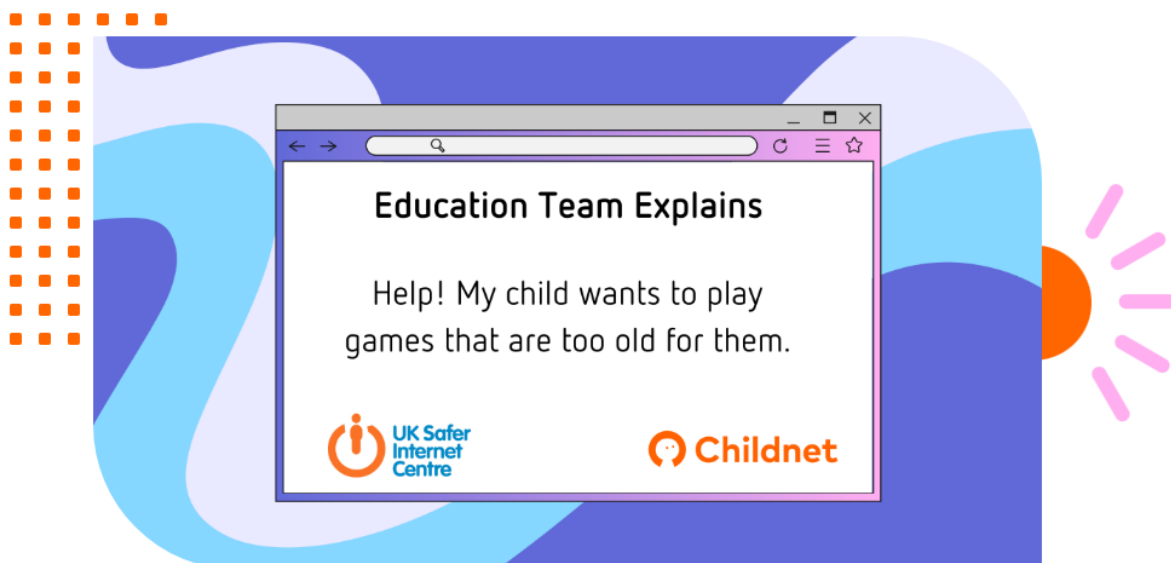
PREMIUM ACCESS

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Education Team Explains

Help! My child wants to play games that are too old for them.

UK Safer Internet Centre   Childnet

Help! My child wants to play games that are too old for them.

05 Apr 2023

Many young people begin their online interaction from a young age, and gaming can make up a large part of this.

As your child gets older, the type of games they want to play may change. We often hear from parents and carers that they are worried about what their child may see, hear or experience in new games, especially if the age rating is older than their child currently is.

Join us as we share practical tips for what to do if your child approaches you asking to play a new game.

Work out why your child is interested in this game

There are many positives to young people playing games on their devices , such as learning new skills or supporting them with their learning. Games are a fun way of interacting with friends and for many, can make them feel calmer, more in control or bring a sense of community and belonging.

Gaming can also be a very social activity and many popular games are a central feature in playground conversation. This this can make some young people feel excluded if they're not playing the same games as their friends. This fear of missing out or 'FOMO' may mean they want to try the game, whether they have a genuine interest in it or not.

Talk to your child to determine why they want to play the game. It may be they have a genuine interest, but if it is because they're worried about missing out, then you have an ideal opportunity to discuss peer pressure and how important it is to find things they enjoy for themselves.

Research the game, it's age rating users and user reviews

The next step is to find out more about the game. Search for the game online to see it's [PEGI](#) rating, to identify what age it is suitable for. You can also find out more about the game by reading reviews or even watching online videos of gameplay.

[Common Sense Media](#) provide helpful descriptions, screenshots and reviews of games from fellow parents and carers, as well as young people themselves.

[The Family Gaming Database](#) offers detailed advice on lots of games, covering age ratings, in-game purchases and more.

Make a decision and talk this through with your child

Whatever you decide, it's important to communicate this clearly and calmly with your child.

If the answer is no, have a calm and open discussion to explain why you are not comfortable with them playing the game. If the PEGI rating is over their actual age, it can be helpful to talk through the content identified by PEGI when rating the game. You can also discuss revisiting the conversation once they reach that age.

You can still decide a game isn't right for your family, even if your child is over the suggested age rating of the game. You know your child best and there may be games that do not suit your child or your family's values.

If the game is age appropriate, and you're comfortable enough to allow your child to sign up, make sure they understand rules and boundaries before they begin. This includes how they communicate with others, what they share online and to come to you if anything worries or upsets them.

The [Childnet Family Agreement](#) is a useful tool to help set expectations and decide these boundaries from the outset.

For help finding suitable games for your child:

[PEGI](#)

[PEGI](#) provides age classifications for video games in 38 European countries. The age rating confirms that the game content is appropriate for players of certain age. PEGI considers the age suitability of a game, not the level of difficulty.

[Family Video Game Database](#)

[Helping parents and guardians navigate the world of video games and board games.](#)

[Common Sense Media](#)

[Reviews for what your children are into – before they get into it!](#)

For advice around gaming

[Gaming – UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

[Helping parents and carers to support their children in staying safe when gaming online.](#)