Online Safety Newsletter December 2025

AI Chatbots and companions

A simple search of "AI Chat" within the App store highlights the number of AI apps already available, many are rated as 18+ so it is important to speak to our children about them and the risks associated with them. Examples of AI chatbots that your child may have heard of are Character.AI (18+) and My AI from Snapchat (13+).

What are the risks?

- Over reliance on AI companions, for example they may replace 'real life' friendships or over reliance on using them for homework or problem solving.
- Exposure to inappropriate content.
- Privacy/data risks.
- Misinformation as not all information shared is correct and can be biased.

How can I protect my child?

- Check age ratings of any apps or websites that your child accesses.
- Discuss the risks of AI chatbots with them and have open conversations about why they may be using them.
- Set up appropriate parental controls on their devices/ broadband.
- Chat to your child regularly and ensure your child knows that they should talk to you or another trusted adult if anything concerns them.

Further information

https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/blogs/ai-chatbots-and-companions-risks-to-children-and-young-people

New Technology

As some children may be receiving new technology or related games at Christmas, here is a quick reminder of the importance of setting up appropriate parental controls.

Games/Consoles

- Check age ratings: look at the PEGI rating of any new games. *Remember, PEGI rates the gameplay so whilst it is important to review age ratings, you must also check to see if it has any communication elements.*
- If a game does allow your child to communicate with others, then adjust or disable the settings as appropriate to your child.
- On the device itself, set up applicable controls such as restricting spending limits. Follow the links below to find out how to set up Parental Controls for popular devices here:

Xbox: https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/family-hub
PS5: https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/support/account/ps5-parental-controls-spending-limits/
Nintendo Switch: https://www.nintendo.com/en-gb/Hardware/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls/Nintendo-Switch-2-Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls-2873385.html

Tablets/Smart phones

Set up parental controls on the device to prevent purchases, restrict content viewed and adjust privacy settings. Furthermore, remember to check any apps your child requests to check that they are suitable for their age. Follow the links below to find out more:
iPhones/iPad: https://support.apple.com/en-gb/105121
Android Device: https://support.google.com/googleplay/answer/1075738

Further information

https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/

The Safety-First Smartphone

The Other phone is a new smartphone, which includes "SafetyMode" software. The software automatically blocks nudity, profanity, and bullying language in real time. You can find out more here: https://otherphone.co.uk/.

Smart Phone Free Childhood also list some alternatives that you could consider here: https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/alternatives.

Please note, that the inclusion of these models does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation. While these devices may provide a 'safer' alternative to traditional smartphones, there are still potential risks associated with children using any type of phone.

Online Grooming

What is Online Grooming?

Online Grooming is when an adult builds a relationship online to manipulate or exploit a child.

How does Grooming take place

Groomers may use fake profiles to pretend they are someone they are not, for example younger than they really are or pretend to be a person of influence. They will use flattery to bond and build a friendship with your child. They may use online games or social media to initiate contact but then encourage your child to switch to a different app to chat privately, usually on an app that doesn't offer parental controls.

What should I do?

- Use appropriate parental controls.
- Set privacy settings.
- Chat to your child regularly about what they do online and who they speak to. Talk to them about how people may not be who they say they are and show them how to use any blocking or reporting tools on the apps/websites that they use.

What should I do if my child is being groomed?

- If you think your child is in danger, then contact the police immediately.
- Save any evidence that you may have.
- If you are worried about online abuse or the way somebody has been communicating with your child online, then you can contact CEOP (https://www.ceop.police.uk). Once a report has been placed, a Child Protection Advisor will get in touch to help you.

Further information

There is a lot of information available online. The following links provide a comprehensive overview of this subject, as well as the details of who you can contact for further advice and support:

- https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/types-of-abuse/grooming/
- https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/online-grooming/

Signal Private Messenger

Signal is rated as 13+ on the App store. It is a messaging app, where users can text, send voice messages and photos plus participate in group chats and calls. There are no parental controls currently available. As with all messaging apps, the risks can include bullying and viewing inappropriate content. Find out more here: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/chat-apps/

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Nudify Apps

Have you heard of Nudify apps? Users upload a picture or video to a Nudify app and AI creates the nude image. This is obviously horrifying. Bark provides further information as well as what to do if this should happen to your child.

Find out more here: https://www.bark.us/blog/nudify-ai-apps/

How to deal with online scams

Parent Zone have published an article on how to deal with online scams as well as how to prevent them from happening. You can read the article here:

https://parentzone.org.uk/article/how-deal-online-scams-parent-guide

Calm Zone

Childline have an area on their website full of activities, tools and videos to help you let go of stress. It includes yoga videos, breathing exercises, calming videos and games. It also includes information on how to get further support should you need it. Find out more here:

https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/

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