Understanding and using parental controls to help protect your child online

Using parental controls can help keep children and young people safer online by preventing access to harmful content, managing screen time, and who your child communicates with.

Parental controls

- You can set parental controls on all devices, including those your child may access with others such as family and friends. They can be revised and updated regularly.
- Parental controls are most successful when combined with building children's safety skills, using technology together as a family, and providing active oversight.
- Include children in conversations and decisions about rules that affect them. It helps to build trust, and they are more likely to feel like they can come to you if something goes wrong.

Finding the right balance

- Every family is different. Your values and parenting style will help guide the rules and controls that are right for your child.
- If a device or program is shared by multiple members of your family, you may be able to change the tool settings to reflect each user's age and skills.
- If your child is living between homes, try to agree with the other parent or carer on consistent rules or settings, including with grandparents.

Active oversight may reduce the risks of harms

- Regularly look at how your child engages online. This can help you understand how they cope in various situations and their critical thinking skills.
- Troubleshoot problems together and discuss risky features to reduce their level of exposure to negative online experiences.

Children and young people can protect themselves too

- As children develop, they can learn things like keeping personal information private, checking with you before downloading anything and learning how to mute and block.
- When they are older, they can learn to use strong, unique passphrases and ensure they are updating their devices and software regularly.

Set meaningful expectations

Create a family tech agreement outlining:

- where your child can use devices, such as shared spaces in the home
- when they can use devices, such as after chores and not before bedtime
- what games, apps and websites they are allowed to use
- who they are allowed to talk to or follow online.

Ways children can bypass parental controls

- Children may try to:
  - share files directly between devices without using the internet or needing approval (AirDrop)
  - use in-app browsers – access websites through apps (like games or messaging apps)
  - remove an app with limits then reinstall it to remove restrictions
  - use the web version to bypass the age limit – access apps through a website (such as Instagram.com) to get around app age restrictions
  - use updates that can reset settings or reset a device to factory settings which may undo restrictions or parental controls.

Wi-Fi network

- Many routers allow parental controls to be set up across your whole family wi-fi network, however children can use phone data to avoid restrictions.
- Check out the products accredited on the Family Friendly Filter Scheme.

Managing computers

- Parental controls on computers can be used to limit your child's access to the web and set screentime limits.
- PC Windows has Microsoft Family and the Mac Operating System (OS) has OSX Parental Controls.

Mobile phones - Android

- Turn on 'Digital Wellbeing' and parental controls.
- You can also try apps like Google Family Link.

Mobile phones - Apple

- Access 'Screen Time' in settings to set parental controls.
- Turn on 'Communication Safety' to help detect nude photos and videos before they are sent or viewed.
- Turn on Content and Privacy Restrictions to manage content, apps and interactions with Siri.
- Use Family Sharing to monitor the parental controls across your child's devices.

Other devices

- Parental controls are also available on devices like smart TVs, smart watches, and fitness trackers. To find specific advice, google the name of the device with 'parental controls'.
- Some smart TVs allow you to block tv shows by rating, for example, only displaying **G** or **PG**. You can also impose rating restrictions within some streaming services such as Netflix.

Social media services

- Go to The eSafety Guide for more info on parental controls for specific social media apps.

Gaming controls

- Some game consoles and platforms have parental control settings. You can use them to block certain games, limit time spent playing, turn off in-game purchases, and control who your child can talk to.
- Be aware that mobile and web games rarely have parental controls.
- If you want to change your child's gaming habits, make changes gradually and avoid restricting your child's devices. You can reach out to services like headspace for support and explore their resources, such as Headspace Understanding Gaming.

Gaming communities

- Online gaming communities are likely to be shared spaces with adults. They may expose a young person to inappropriate content and language. Having open conversations with your child is one of the best ways to ensure they seek help if required.
- Some games allow you to filter or hide certain types of content, block or limit friend requests, manage how much personal information is shared, and turn off chat or communication features. For more information on specific games, access The eSafety Guide or Common Sense Media or Australian Classification.

Tips for transitioning from gaming to other activities

- Negotiate online games and offline games using the same strategies, such as how many games or levels are played, rather than just time.
- Select games that match the amount of time they are allowed to play.
- It's best to avoid having your child do something unpleasant right after gaming, like cleaning their room or doing housework.
- End gaming time in a positive way, such as joining in or asking your child to show you what they have been doing.

eSafety resources

- For more information, such as managing streaming, smart TVs and search engines, visit parental controls.
- For more, visit eSafety Parents or parent resources.