

Online Safety and Parental Controls



Inevitably children are spending a lot of time on screens at the moment and although children have e-safety lessons, we thought it might be useful for parents to know some ways they can support their children in keeping safe online. Even if you talk to your children about screen-time limits and responsible online behaviour, it can still be really tough to manage and young children can inadvertently stumble onto a website or advert and see content which is inappropriate. Parental controls can support you in your efforts to keep their internet experiences safe, fun, and productive. They work best when used openly and honestly in partnership with your children.

Figuring out what kind of parental control is best is entirely based on your own family's needs. Some families can get by with simple, free browser settings to filter inappropriate content. Some families need help clamping down on screen time. Some families are ok with spot-checks on their children's devices. Hopefully, this guide can help you make sense of the wide array of options for managing your family's devices.

How can I block websites?

If you just want to limit what your children can search for, you can enable **Google SafeSearch** in whichever browser or browsers you use. First, you need to make sure your browsers use Google as their default search engine, and then you need to turn on **SafeSearch**. This is a good precaution to take as soon as your children start going online and you want to make sure they don't accidentally stumble across something yucky.



How can I block websites and filter content?

If you want to prevent access to specific websites and limit your children's exposure to inappropriate content such as mature games or adult websites, you can use the parental controls that are built into your device's operating system. Every major operating system -- Microsoft's Windows, Apple's Mac OS, and even Amazon's Fire -- offers settings to keep children from accessing content you don't want them to see. To get the benefits, you need to use the most updated version of the operating system, and each user has to log in under his or her profile. The settings apply globally to everything the computer accesses. Each works differently and has its own pros and cons. This is the best solution if your children are younger and are primarily using a home device.

How can I block websites and filter content, impose time limits or see what my children are doing?

A full-featured, third-party parental control service such Qustodio or NetNanny will give you a lot of control over all of your children's devices (the ones they use at home as well as their phones). These can be pricey, but the cost includes constant device monitoring, offering you visibility into how children are using their devices. These parental controls can only keep track of accounts that they know your children is using, and for some apps, you'll need your children's password in order to monitor activity. If your children create a brand-new profile on Instagram using a friend's computer without telling you, for example, the parental controls won't cover that account.

There isn't a particular service I would recommend but I have snipped the Top Picks from UK PC Magazine to give you an idea of some of the options there are available:

TOP PICKS

BEST FOR BEST FOR
EXCELLENT
CAPABILITIES



CHOICE

Qustodio Parental Control

SEE IT

Parental control app Qustodio is a highly configurable, easy-to-manage tool for keeping track of your child's activity on Windows, Mac, iOS, and Android devices, though it comes at a premium price.

[Read Qustodio Review](#)

BEST FOR BEST FOR
LARGE FAMILIES



Kaspersky Safe Kids

SEE IT

Kaspersky Safe Kids is a full-featured, affordable parental monitoring system for desktop and mobile platforms that doesn't impose limits on the number of devices you can monitor.

[Read Kaspersky Safe Kids Review](#)



Symantec Norton Family Premier

SEE IT

Norton Family's wealth of features and easy setup make it easy for parents to track and manage their children's activity across many devices, though it doesn't work on Macs.

[Read Norton Family Premier Review](#)



Circle Home Plus

SEE IT

Parental control device Circle Home Plus delivers good tools for keeping an eye on your home network and protecting your children's phones and tablets, but it is susceptible to workarounds and its reporting features aren't as robust as competitors'.

[Read Circle Home Plus Review](#)



Clean Router

Have kids on the Web? Clean Router replaces your home router to apply parental control and monitoring to every device on your network.

[Read Clean Router Review](#)

How can I monitor my children's phone usage?

To keep tabs on their phone, you can download an app such as Bark, ChildrenBridge (formerly TeenSafe), or WebWatcher, which monitor text messages, social networks, emails, and other mobile functions. These are especially helpful if you're concerned about potentially risky conversations or iffy topics your children might be engaging in. Bark, for example, notifies you when it detects "alert" words. To monitor social media, you'll need their account information, including passwords.



How can I track my child's location?

You can use GPS trackers such as [Find My Friends](#) and FamiSafe to stay abreast of your children's whereabouts. Your children's phone needs to be on for these to work, though.

How can I manage all devices on the network, limit screen time, filter content, turn off Wi-Fi?

There are both hardware and software solutions to control your home network and your home Wi-Fi. To name a few popular ones: OpenDNS is a download that works with your existing router (the device that brings the internet into your home) to filter internet content. Circle Home Plus is a device and subscription service that pairs with your existing router and lets you pause access to the internet, create time limits, and add content filters to all devices on your home network (including Wi-Fi devices), plus manage phones and tablets outside the home. Some internet service providers such as Comcast and Verizon offer parental control features that apply to all devices on the network, too. Network solutions can work for families with children of different ages; however, mucking around in your network and Wi-Fi settings can be challenging, and the controls may not apply when children are on a different network.

What are the best parental control options for iOS phones and tablets?

If you have an iPhone or iPad, Apple's Screen Time settings let you manage nearly every aspect of your children's iOS device, including how much time children spend in individual apps and games and what they download. You can even turn the phone off for specified periods, such as bedtime. There are two ways to enable Screen Time, either by setting it up on your children's device and password-protecting the settings or by setting up Family Sharing and managing the features from your phone.

What are the best parental control options for Android devices?

Android devices can vary a lot in what they offer, so check your device's settings to see what options you have. If your children is under 13, you can download Google's Family Link to track and control online activity, including text messaging and social media, using your own phone. You can also use Android's Digital Wellbeing settings, which are built into the latest version of the OS. These can help children become more mindful of the time they're spending online -- and hopefully help them cut down. You'll want to help your children enable the settings that will be most useful on the road to self-regulation.

Can I set parental controls in specific apps, such as Snapchat and TikTok?

In addition to blocking specific people, most apps let you disable features that could pose some risks for children. For example, you may be able to turn off chatting, restrict conversation to friends only, and hide your profile so that it won't show up in search results. Some apps go a step further by letting users control their own use of the app.

TikTok's Digital Wellbeing features allow you to remotely manage your children's TikTok from your phone.

YouTube lets you set a reminder to take a break. To find out if your children's favourite apps offer any types of restrictions, go to the app's settings section (usually represented by the gear icon). Unless an app offers passcode-protection for its settings (and most don't), your children can easily reverse them.

Do I need to worry about my children disabling parental controls?



Yes, children can undo parental controls. In fact, the directions on how to get around them are easily available on the internet. Depending on your software, you may get a notification that the parental control was breached -- or not. Children can figure out all sorts of ingenious methods to keep doing what they want to be doing -- talking to friends, staying up late playing Fortnite, and watching videos you don't want them to see. If you notice something fishy such as a steep drop-off in your parental control notifications, Wi-Fi or data activity after you've turned off the network, or anything else that indicates the parental control isn't working the way it's supposed to, your children may have figured out how to get around it. It could be for another reason, though, since parental controls can be affected by system updates, power outages, and other technical issues.

Will my children know that I'm using parental controls?

It really depends on the type of controls you install and the devices you have. Some parental controls can be installed without your children knowing, but I certainly don't recommend it. Parental control companies that encourage open dialogue will most likely be more helpful anyway, because at some point you'll need to discuss what you find. And that's a lot easier to do if your children already know you're monitoring them. If you decide to use parental controls, talk to your children about why you're using them (to help keep them safe) and how your ultimate goal is for them to learn how to interact online responsibly and regulate their own usage independently.