Parental Online Safety Control Guide

Protect Children

Children and teenagers spend a growing part of their daily lives online as they learn, play, socialise, and explore. Parental controls can help families create safer and healthier digital experiences. This guide introduces some of the most common parental tools, what they can help with, and their important limitations.



Example of Tools

Google Family Link allows to set parental controls across multiple different devices:

- Lets parents create and manage a child's Google account
- Allows supervision of app downloads and usage
- Provides controls for device usage
- Offers family location tracking through a shared map
- Get started with Family Link: https://familylink.google.com

Find step-by-step instructions on setting up parental controls on other platforms here: https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/smartphones-and-other-devices/



Screen Time

Screen time tools help parents manage children's device use.

- Set daily time limits for devices or specific apps
- Schedule "downtime" during homework or bedtime
- Lock devices automatically once limits are reached



Location

Location sharing tools improve safety during school trips, commutes, and emergencies.

- Real-time location tracking of a child's device
- Multiple family members can view shared locations
- Location history showing visited places over time



Content Filtering

Content filtering tools help parents control the type of material children can access online.

- Filter explicit content from search results using SafeSearch
- Restrict browsing to child-appropriate websites
- Reduce exposure to violent or adult content in search results



Messaging Controls

Messaging controls help parents manage who their child can contact across texts, calls, and social media.

- Allow or block specific contacts or unknown numbers
- Restrict messaging and calling to approved contacts only
- Receive alerts or reports about new contacts

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Reporting & Blocking

Reporting and blocking tools help children deal with harmful online content and interactions.

- Block users who are sending unwanted or harmful messages
- Report inappropriate or abusive content
- Remove or hide content without having to engage with it



Privacy Settings

Privacy settings help parents control what's shared and who can see it.

- Manage app permissions for location, camera, microphone, photos, and contacts
- Choose when apps can access location data
- Control whether apps can access personal information



Apps & Platforms

Apps, games, and platforms have their own sets of safety settings, which may differ widely across services.

These settings can help you to:

- Restrict the content children can access within app-specific features
- Control messaging options and manage who can communicate with your child
- Set limits on interactions such as comments, followers, and friends requests
- Find step-by-step guides for setting up these controls here: https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/



Limitations

Parental controls are helpful tools, but they are not perfect and should be seen as one part of a broader approach to online safety.

Remember:

- It is not possible to block every risky or inappropriate piece of content
- Parents and caregivers often have limited visibility into private or encrypted conversations
- Children may sometimes learn how to bypass safety settings
- Children can still be exposed to harmful content or interactions on peers' devices



Final Tips for Parents

Parental controls can support children's online safety, but they work best alongside trust and open communication.

What helps:

- Show genuine interest in your child's online space, including the apps, games, and platforms they use
- Keep regular, open conversations about online experiences
- Balance supervision with trust as overly strict control can reduce openness and encourage secrecy or workarounds