



Internet Monitoring

A Guide for Parents

Monitoring Apps

Managing a young person's device can be tough, especially when so many children are likely to have their own phones, tablets or consoles, from a young age. It can be surprising how comfortable young people are when using devices, and just how easily they find content on the internet (sometimes even doing this better than the adults around them!) With so much content available to young people online, parents and carers may have concerns around what is appropriate for their child's age group, along with worries around screen time and privacy.

Monitoring apps have been built to try and support parents with managing children's devices on a technical level. They usually aim to set boundaries within technology and look to give more control to parents. Despite this, they are designed to complement conversations and boundaries already in the home. In this blog we look at what these apps can offer to families, along with some considerations around using apps such as these.

What Features Do Monitoring Apps Offer?

Monitoring apps usually provide a variety of features to allow parents to have more control over their children's devices. They often allow parents to keep an eye on internet activity and provide options to manage online behaviour accordingly. Some of the features may include:

- **Managing Screen Time** – Parents can see how long their children spend on specific apps. They may also be able to set daily screen time limits and set a time when apps are switched off for the night.
- **Approving Apps** – Parents can approve or disapprove of apps before they are downloaded. Apps may also be blocked or hidden from view if not appropriate.
- **Recommending Apps** – Promoting apps that may prioritise education or are designed to be used by a specific age group.
- **Locking Devices** – Parents have remote access to switch off devices as and when they deem necessary.
- **Tracking** – Parents are able to keep an eye on where their children are using tracking features. It usually pinpoints locations on a map and updates on a regular basis.

Considerations When Using Monitoring Apps

While it is encouraging to see apps working towards keeping children safe online, it is important to note that apps such as these are not a guaranteed method of keeping children away from harmful online content. Parents may want to use these types of apps if they are concerned about a young child using a device in the early stages of their development or if they have particular vulnerabilities, however it is important for parents to open a wider discussion in person if they want to address the issue better.

Communicating about online safety and the responsible use of devices openly can allow young people to navigate the internet with a respectable degree of privacy. It can also allow them to feel confident enough to come forward if an issue arises. Putting up consistent barriers and heavy restrictions through their development may lead to feeling overwhelmed and inexperienced when they reach an older age. The internet is used in so many areas of life; they need to keep up as much as we do.

Monitoring apps offer a lot of options for parents but it is important to take control of the situation offline as well. Opening a discussion around safer internet use can help with children identifying where risks are whilst encouraging understanding of appropriate behaviour when they navigate freely.

Protecting young people from inappropriate content online.

Decide what's right for your family

Creating a family agreement allows you to have conversations about setting boundaries. It's important that you involve yourself in your child's online world, so as a simple starting point you could ask them what their favourite websites or games are, and why they like them. The filtering options that you put in place may also change over time, as your children get older and more independent, and their technology use changes too.

Check your settings regularly

Children can become accomplished users of technology and may learn how to disable or bypass the parental controls in place. Therefore, it's important to talk to your children from the outset about why the settings are there, and the importance of respecting them. Regularly checking the filtering on your family's devices could also form part of your agreement.

Give children the skills they need

No parental controls or filtering options are guaranteed to be 100% effective. They are a very useful tool to improve the quality of online experiences, but they cannot offer a 'complete' solution. It is therefore essential to talk with your children about their online activities, so they know what to do if they encounter inappropriate content.

Establish some rules

If you have parental controls from your internet provider on your home WiFi, these will not cover the use of 3G, 4G or 5G at home. Similarly, if your child goes to a friend's house where there are no controls in place, they may be able to access unrestricted content. For these reasons, it's important to educate your child about the potential risks online and establish rules concerning the sites that are suitable or inappropriate to visit.

Top Tips for Parents and Carers

Have a look at the tips and links below with some suggestions on how to get you started and help you to stay safe and positive online. You and your family can **#PlayYourPart** in creating a better internet by...

Having conversations without judgement.

Whether by playing games, watching videos, or doing things your child enjoys, spending time together online is a great way to start conversations about the online world and how they're finding being a part of it.

It is important to ask questions and take an interest in what your child enjoys online.

An essential part of having this open dialogue is to not judge, even if their behaviour or life online isn't what you wanted or expected. This ensures that your child feels they can come to you if ever they make a mistake or experience a problem online.

Knowing where you can learn more about their favourite apps and games.

Websites like Common Sense Media or The Family Gaming Database can be invaluable sources of information. When your child starts talking about a new game or app, why not do some research into the reporting and blocking options available? Then you can help your child if they come to you with an issue.

Getting support if things go wrong.

There are lots of organisations who are there to support you and your family if something has gone wrong. The Report Harmful Content website can help you with issues such as cyberbullying, impersonation and threats. You can report worrying behaviour towards children to CEOP. Find out more on Childnet's Get Help page.

Reassuring your child that whatever happens online, you are there to support them.

Let your child know that the best way to address any problem they have online, is to tell a trusted adult immediately. For example, this might include someone sending them a friend request; an online message; telling them to visit a specific website, or app; or asking them for their personal information. Reassure them that if anything happens online that they are unsure about, or makes them feel worried or upset, they can come to you for help.

Useful Websites for parents to read:

- UK Safer Internet Centre <https://saferinternet.org.uk/>
- NSPCC <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls/>
- GOV.uk – Child Safety Online Document

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers-whose-children-are-using-social-media>

If you have any queries or need any help with a device as you are unsure of what to do – please contact the school. We are happy to help set controls if you need help.