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27.03.2025

Dear Parents/Carers,

You will find lots of information attached about keeping your child safe online.

Cyber bullying is increasing across the country and uses social media like Whatsapp, Instagram or Tiktok.

Please monitor your child's phone and what they are posting to make sure they are safe. They have access to all kinds of unsuitable topics and images and in some cases can put them at risk of being groomed.

We talk to the children often as they bring the issues that they face on Whatsapp into school. We take the line with the children that if you wouldn't say it to their face, in front of your teacher you shouldn't be saying that at all.

Please try to model this behaviour for your children, they will benefit from it in later life.

Remember it doesn't cost anything to be kind!

We will be having a parent workshop in the near future, look out for the date coming soon. We will be covering topics like how to put in parental locks, current things affecting children and how to help your child stay safe online.

Social media is not having a great impact on young people at the moment. Please think whether your child is mature enough to cope with it, to have a phone, to have access to anyone through gaming and on the internet. If the answer to this is no- then you are the parent, you make the rules. It doesn't matter what other children are allowed to do- you decide what is best for your child. And as ever, if you need any support please contact school.



KITEMARK

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about WHATSAPP

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

WhatsApp is a free messaging service owned by Meta which allows users to send text and voice messages, make video calls, share multimedia – such as images, videos, documents and polls – and have group chats. WhatsApp messages are encrypted, meaning only you and the recipient can view what is sent. While this privacy may sound attractive on paper, this app unfortunately comes with several risks that must be considered – especially for younger users.

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

EVOLVING SCAMS

WhatsApp's popularity makes it a lucrative hunting ground for scammers. Recent examples include posing as the target's child, requesting a money transfer because of a spurious 'emergency' and even cons where fraudsters trigger a verification message by attempting to log in to your account, then, posing as WhatsApp, call or text to ask you to repeat the code back to them, giving them access to your private messages and personal information.

CHANNELS

Channels let users follow interests without sharing their phone numbers or sending direct messages, allowing only votes on polls and reacting to posts with emojis. However, fraudulent channels can impersonate legitimate organizations, tricking people into sharing personal data and even spreading misinformation or hate speech. Additionally, WhatsApp may collect details about followed channels and sell this information to third parties, raising data privacy concerns.

FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp's connectivity and ease of use allows news to be shared rapidly – whether it's true or not. To combat the spread of misinformation, messages forwarded more than five times on the app now display a "Forwarded many times" label and a double arrow icon. This makes users aware that the message they've just received is far from an original – and might not be entirely factual, either.

CHAT LOCK

Another new feature named 'Chat Lock' allows users to store certain messages or chats in a separate 'locked chats' folder, saved behind a passcode, fingerprint or face ID authentication. While this usually functions as intended, it can potentially be exploited by younger users to hide conversations and content that they suspect their parents wouldn't approve of – such as the sharing of age-inappropriate material.

DISAPPEARING MESSAGES

Disappearing messages are useful for sharing personal or sensitive information, but young people may have a false sense of privacy regarding the content they share. These messages disappear after anywhere from 24 hours to 90 days – depending on the user's preference – or can even be set to be viewed one time only. However, the recipient can 'keep' the message by bookmarking or screenshotting it, making them not as private as they may first appear.

VISIBLE LOCATION

WhatsApp's 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, which can be helpful for friends meeting up or parents checking that their child's safely on the way home, for example. However, children are able to share their location with anyone in their contacts list or a mutual group – potentially letting strangers identify their live location.

Advice for Parents & Educators

EMPHASISE CAUTION

Encourage children to treat unexpected messages with caution. Get them to consider, for example, whether it sounds like something a friend or relative would really send them. Make sure they know never to share personal details over WhatsApp, and to be wary of clicking on any links in messages. Setting up two-step verification adds a further layer of protection to their WhatsApp account.

THINK BEFORE SHARING

Help children understand why it's important to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. It's easy – and all too common – for content sent to one user to then be shared more widely, and even publicly on social media. Encourage them to consider how an ill-judged message might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent something to them in confidence. Real-life friendships are far more important than likes, after all.

ADJUST THE SETTINGS

It's wise to change a child's WhatsApp settings to specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval. To do this, go to Privacy, then Groups. You can give permission to My Contacts or My Contacts Except... Additionally, if the child needs to use Live Location, emphasise that they should enable this function for only as long as they need – and then turn it off.

CHAT ABOUT PRIVACY

Have a conversation with youngsters about how they're using WhatsApp, emphasising that it's for their own safety. If you spot a 'Locked Chats' folder, you might want to talk about the sort of messages that are in there, who they're with and why a child might want to hide them. Also, if a young user has sent any 'view once' content, discuss their reasons for using this feature.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian Government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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Source: See full reference list on guide page at <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/whatsapp-2025>

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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

FORTNITE

AGE RESTRICTION
PEGI
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WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Fortnite was launched back in 2017, but it remains massively popular – with more than 650 million active players. That's partially due to the competitive nature of its player-vs-player combat, its pop culture crossovers and its constantly shifting map. Significant updates are rolled out with each new version of the game – known as 'chapters' – and within these sit shorter 'seasons'.

ALWAYS ONLINE

There's no single-player offline mode in Fortnite: it can only be played online. Internet access can sometimes be an issue when you're out and about (both in terms of connectivity and using up data), so you may find that dedicated young Fortnite players are often less enthusiastic about trips away – such as days out and holidays – than you might expect.

IN-GAME COSTS

Fortnite is free to download and play, but it does offer various additional purchases – cosmetic 'skins', music tracks and LEGO items – which don't really impact on gameplay but can cost a significant amount. These items are bought with in-game currency, V-Bucks – earned through completing the Battle Pass (which also costs V-Bucks) and can also be purchased from the game's store for real money.

POP CULTURE REFERENCES

Part of Fortnite's appeal is its ongoing crossovers with other popular franchises, ranging from movies and TV shows like Family Guy and Avatar: The Last Airbender to comic book characters including Batman to other games such as Street Fighter. This means you could have children asking questions about the monster from Alien or Geralt from The Witcher a little sooner than you otherwise might have.

CROSSPLAY AND PARTY CHAT

Fortnite is popular with many gamers of various ages. 'Crossplay' lets friends play with each other, regardless of whether they're on an Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch or PC – while the 'party chat' feature allows them to talk to each other during the game. This can, however, put youngsters at risk of hearing inappropriate language from older players in the heat of virtual combat.

VIRTUAL VIOLENCE

At its core, there's no avoiding that Fortnite is about shooting other players to eliminate them from the contest. That said, there's no blood or gore. The violence is rendered in a cartoonish style, and there are frequent comical touches to lighten the mood, such as fishing mini-games and dancing emotes. Machine guns, shotguns and other weapons often look and behave realistically, however, so discretion is advised.

FREQUENT UPDATES

The game's developers release content in 'seasons' that usually run for around ten weeks. Each fresh update sees items added to the in-game store, changes to the environment's map and a different over-arching theme (such as 'medieval', 'pirates' or 'party'). These regular renewals help to hold players' interest – but also give young gamers plenty of reasons to keep coming back.

Advice for Parents & Educators

MATCH GAMING TIMES

Younger players tend to play Fortnite with their friends. With that in mind, it could be worth speaking to the parents and carers of a child's social group and coordinating their gaming around certain times of day. Safety in numbers is obviously a factor here, but it will also help children feel that they're getting adequate opportunities to socialise with their friends online.

SET SPENDING LIMITS

Fortnite's rotating store is a not-so-subtle mechanism for coaxing players into buying sought-after items before they disappear for weeks or months. This could lead to surprise transactions on bank cards if children are tempted into an impulse purchase. Parents could consider getting a prepaid card for the child or ensuring that purchases require adult authorisation. This can be done through parental settings on a console or account settings in the Epic Games app on PC.

USE UPDATES AS REWARDS

Fortnite's seasonal updates are free, but each also brings the option of a 'battle pass', unlocking exclusive rewards for playing the game and completing set challenges. The passes cost around £8 and are also available as part of larger bundles. The purchase of passes can be an effective reward to young Fortnite fans for good behaviour or academic performance, or as an incentive for completing chores like tidying their room.

BE WARY OF SCAMS

The immense popularity of Fortnite with younger audiences – that are generally more trusting – means there's no shortage of scammers looking to fraudulently obtain passwords and other personal data through techniques like phishing. As the developers point out on many of Fortnite's loading screens, they never ask for a player's account password outside of the game: make sure any young player knows this.

ENJOY FORTNITE TOGETHER

Fortnite also offers split-screen gameplay, meaning that two people can play simultaneously on the same console or computer. This can be a good option for siblings or for when a child's friends visit, but it also offers an opportunity for parents and carers to do something fun with their child, while also making sure they're playing the game safely. Who knows? You might even teach them a thing or two!

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Editor in Chief of gaming and esports site GGRcon and has worked in the gaming media for around four years. A long-time gamer, he is also a parent and therefore a keen advocate of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his articles have been published on influential sites including IGN and TechRadar.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

ROBLOX

AGE RESTRICTION
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Roblox is one of the most popular video games among children. In 2020, the game's developers claimed that more than half of the USA's children had played it. As a 'sandbox' title, the game lets players create their own gaming experiences with Roblox Studio to build custom levels, which can then be shared online.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

ONLINE PLAY RISKS

Because Roblox connects random players across the world, it can put younger players into an environment with anonymous users who could use the platform for nefarious reasons. For example, some role-play games are used for online dates and mature role play, which could expose youngsters to inappropriate messages in the public chat box.

MATURE CONTENT

Content is difficult to moderate throughout Roblox, due to the number of games available. This is particularly notable on smaller games and experiences, but in summary, some of the games and experiences offered on the platform contain age-inappropriate content that could easily be seen by young players.

IN-GAME SPENDING

The majority of games within Roblox have extensive monetisation options, usually through season passes or microtransactions. Purchases can range in value from a few pennies up to much larger sums of money. While some games offer a lot of content via purchases, others can offer very little for real world money, causing younger players to end up out of pocket.

ANONYMOUS PLAYERS

The anonymity of users can leave players vulnerable to bullying, harassment, and predatory behaviour. Without the right parental controls or monitoring, users can connect with each other via personal messages or friend requests, and it is very difficult to know who's behind a username in this vast online world.

RISK OF ADDICTION

Roblox games can feature rewarding or satisfying mechanics that keep players coming back – or persuade them to stay logged-in for much longer. Like most games, they focus on interactivity, with constant rewards via in-game unlocks and currencies, which can sometimes lead to an addictive need to remain online for long periods of time.

SCAMS

Many of the games on Roblox feature collectible items, pets, or characters. These objects, while digital, are worth a lot of real money on certain online markets. Scammers will attempt to trade with younger users in the hopes of getting rare items that can be sold for real money, manipulating the child into handing them over, usually via misleading information.

Advice for Parents & Educators

MONITOR THE CONTENT

While Roblox does implement plenty of moderation tools and parental controls, it's up to parents and guardians to monitor the types of games a child or impressionable player is experiencing. If a youngster wants to play Roblox, be sure to check out which specific games they want to play within it, and get a good idea of their content.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TOOLS

Use the parental controls within the game itself and teach youngsters how to report and block other players. Knowing the powers within their reach will make Roblox a safer, happier experience. You can set age ranges for who's allowed to contact you, close public chat boxes, block spending, and even make your Roblox profile completely private. All these options are helpful in cutting off bad actors from engaging with children.

PLAY TOGETHER

Consider playing Roblox with the children in your care. There are few more effective ways to see how monetisation works, gauge whether the game could lead to addictive behaviours, or even witness how interaction between players works, than sitting down and trying the game for yourself. This should help you figure out whether it's suitable for particular children.

TEACH ONLINE BEHAVIOURS

Have an open conversation about the risks of online play and how to spend money wisely. By being honest and giving tips on how a younger user can protect themselves, you can empower them to not only take care of themselves, but others too. Any user can be reported to Roblox moderators by other players for behaving inappropriately. With this knowledge, younger players can be aware of what to look for and help prevent it.

Meet Our Expert

Dan Lipscombe is a videogame journalist and author of over 20 books on gaming, including books on Minecraft, Fortnite, Roblox, and more. For 15 years he has been writing about his passion for gaming. When he's not playing games, he's talking about them at GAMINGbible.



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