

A parent and carer's guide to new apps, connected toys and platforms



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Children and young people today have a range of apps, connected toys and platforms available to them via the internet and technology.

Apps are software applications that must be installed on a tablet, smartphone, gaming console or computer.

Connected toys are toys that allow children to connect to the internet via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. [These toys](#) may come in the form of dolls or stuffed animals with voice and/or image recognition or app-enabled robots, drones and other electric toys.

Platforms are websites with additional functionalities. Some platforms may be used for social media, others for gaming, chatting, online tutorials and more.

New apps, connected toys and platforms are being developed all the time. They can entertain and educate users, and cover everything from gaming and music, to make-up and more. However, apps and platforms may not always be age-appropriate or content-appropriate.

This article explains how to ensure that children and young people get the benefits of apps, connected toys and platforms while reducing any potentially harmful risks.



Do your research

Before you download a new app, buy a connected toy or create an account on a new platform, you can carry out research to make sure that the technology is appropriate for your child. You can:

- check the ratings for age-appropriateness, content type and levels of violence and language. You can use [PEGI](#) (Pan European Game Information) or [ESBR](#) (Entertainment Software Rating Board) ratings as guidance
- find parent and carers, children and young people's reviews for many apps and platforms on [Common Sense Media](#)
- use a search engine for example Google, Safari or Bing to locate reviews on the app, toy or platform.

Be present for all set-up and installation

Once you have decided that the app, toy or platform is suitable, ensure that you are present for the purchase, download, set-up and installation. To help protect your child when they use the app, toy or platform, you can:

- turn off notifications and advertising
- turn off access to microphones, cameras, location, or any other additional functionalities, if not absolutely necessary
- read any disclaimers and make sure that you are in agreement
- after installation, ask your child for a quick demonstration to help you understand their online activity
- turn on privacy settings and decide what privacy level you require
- understand how to report and block other users.

How much data does the app, toy or platform collect?

Read the terms and conditions of use to understand how much information you are providing. If you do not understand the terms and conditions, the user guide may help. If it is still not clear, then you can do some more research on your preferred search engine.

- The [General Data Protection Regulation](#) is designed to enhance the protection of children and young people's personal data – in particular, privacy notices and parental consent for online services offered to children and young people.
- You can opt out of all unnecessary functionalities. If you prefer that your child does not use functionalities such as a microphone, camera or localisation software, you can turn that functionality off.



How do I talk to my child about using new apps, connected toys and platforms responsibly and safely?

Using apps, connected toys and platforms can be beneficial. Here are some tips on how you can talk to your child about responsible and safe use.

- Begin a discussion using these [conversation starters from Childnet](#).
- Discuss the importance of [app ratings](#).
- Share your expectations for their online behaviour.
- Discuss ways to [stay safe online](#).

