Marcham CE Primary School

Knowsley City Learning Centres

Online Safety Newsletter December 2025

AI Chatbots and companions

A simple search of "AI Chat" within the App store highlights the number of AI apps already available, many are rated as 18+ so it is important to speak to our children about them and the risks associated with them. Examples of AI chatbots that your child may have heard of are Character.AI (18+) and My AI from Snapchat (13+).

What are the risks?

- Over reliance on AI companions, for example they may replace 'real life' friendships or over reliance on using them for homework or problem solving.
- Exposure to inappropriate content.
- Privacy/data risks.
- Misinformation as not all information shared is correct and can be biased.

How can I protect my child?

- Check age ratings of any apps or websites that your child accesses.
- Discuss the risks of AI chatbots with them and have open conversations about why they may be using them.
- Set up appropriate parental controls on their devices/ broadband.
- Chat to your child regularly and ensure your child knows that they should talk to you or another trusted adult if anything concerns them.

Further information

https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/blogs/ai-chatbots-and-companions-risks-to-children-and-young-people

New Technology

As some children may be receiving new technology or related games at Christmas, here is a quick reminder of the importance of setting up appropriate parental controls.

Games/Consoles

- Check age ratings: look at the PEGI rating of any new games. *Remember, PEGI rates the gameplay so whilst it is important to review age ratings, you must also check to see if it has any communication elements.*
- If a game does allow your child to communicate with others, then adjust or disable the settings as appropriate to your child.
- On the device itself, set up applicable controls such as restricting spending limits. Follow the links below to find out how to set up Parental Controls for popular devices here:

Xbox: https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/family-hub
PS5: https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/support/account/ps5-parental-controls-spending-limits/
Nintendo Switch: https://www.nintendo.com/en-gb/Hardware/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls/Nintendo-Switch-2-Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls-2873385.html

Tablets/Smart phones

Set up parental controls on the device to prevent purchases, restrict content viewed and adjust privacy settings. Furthermore, remember to check any apps your child requests to check that they are suitable for their age. Follow the links below to find out more:
iPhones/iPad: https://support.apple.com/en-gb/105121
Android Device: https://support.google.com/googleplay/answer/1075738

Further information

https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/

The Safety-First Smartphone

The Other phone is a new smartphone, which includes "SafetyMode" software. The software automatically blocks nudity, profanity, and bullying language in real time. You can find out more here: https://otherphone.co.uk/.

Smart Phone Free Childhood also list some alternatives that you could consider here: https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/alternatives.

Please note, that the inclusion of these models does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation. While these devices may provide a 'safer' alternative to traditional smartphones, there are still potential risks associated with children using any type of phone.

Roblox

Following a recent ITV investigation*, which found extremist content on Roblox, we thought we would provide a reminder of what you need to be aware of. Roblox is a platform consisting of a collection of games. Players can either create games or play games that other users have created. It is free to download (however subscription options and in game/app purchases are available) and can be played across numerous devices. **A lot of the content is user generated, which means not all games will be suitable for your child to view/play.** If your child is playing Roblox, it is important to monitor what your child is accessing and set up appropriate parental controls. **PEGI rate Roblox with a Parental Guidance label, this is because it is considered a platform with a huge level of user generated content.**

What should I be aware of?

Game content – as mentioned, users create games so the content/themes may not be appropriate for your child. Roblox label content based on the type of content rather than by age. The labels are Minimal, Mild, Moderate and Restricted.

Chat Facility - Players can chat with each other (users under the age of 13 need parent permission to access certain chat features though). You can turn communication off completely or add restrictions, such as only able to communicate with friends.

Virtual Currency - Players can buy Robux (their virtual currency) to buy in-game upgrades or accessories.

How do I report abuse and block users?

This article outlines the different reporting facilities: https://en.help.roblox.com/hc/en-us/articles/203312410-How-to-Report-Rule-Violations

What else can I do?

Chat to your child regularly about what they are doing online and remind your child that if anything is worrying them, then they should talk to you or another trusted adult.

Further information

https://parentzone.org.uk/article/roblox

[*Source: https://www.itv.com/news/2025-11-14/mosque-attacks-and-far-right-skins-roblox-teens-exposed-to-extremist-content]

Signal Private Messenger

Signal is rated as 13+ on the App store. It is a messaging app, where users can text, send voice messages and photos plus participate in group chats and calls. There are no parental controls currently available. As with all messaging apps, the risks can include bullying and viewing inappropriate content. Find out more here: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/chat-apps/

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Discord

Discord is a social networking app originally designed for gamers but is now used by lots of different people to **chat to each other online**. The minimum age to access Discord is 13. The App store rates it as 17+.

Discord is made up of servers, which are spaces for groups to chat, upload files and share images etc. Anybody can set up a server, and they can either be public or private. Users can video call and send direct messages to other individuals or groups. Children who play online games such as Fortnite may use Discord to chat whilst playing the game (**rather than using the game's own chat facility**). In-app purchases are available through Discord's subscription service called Nitro.

How can I make it safer?

Discord have created a Family Centre, which provides further information about what Discord is, as well as information about different safety settings available: https://discord.com/safety-family-center

As always, we would encourage you to chat to your child to see why they use Discord and ensure that they know how to block users and what to do if they see any inappropriate content. It is important to be aware that Discord does include video/voice calling which cannot be filtered. **Discord is used by an array of users and therefore adult content can be found on Discord as well as inappropriate language.** Discord have produced this article, which answers frequent questions: https://discord.com/safety/360044149591-answering-parents-and-educators-top-questions

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