SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Working together to keep our young people safe

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As Christmas approaches, many families are planning to surprise their children with a new phone, tablet, or gaming device under the tree. It's an exciting time - new technology opens doors to creativity, learning and connection. But it also brings a fresh set of questions about what apps and online spaces children might explore.

With so many options available, it's natural to wonder which apps are suitable for children and how to ensure they have positive experiences online. To help families navigate these decisions, here is a closer look at some of the most concerning apps and platforms.

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Reddit

What is it?
Reddit is an extensive online discussion platform with 'Subreddits' on various topics.
What are the risks?
It features unmoderated or explicit content, including adult themes and misinformation. Users can privately chat with others through comments or direct messages.

Kik

What it is?
A messaging app that allows users to send texts, photos and videos without linking to a phone number - only a username is needed.
What are the risks?
Kik has minimal age verification and a reputation for anonymous interactions. Children can be contacted by strangers and messages can't easily be monitored.

Telegram

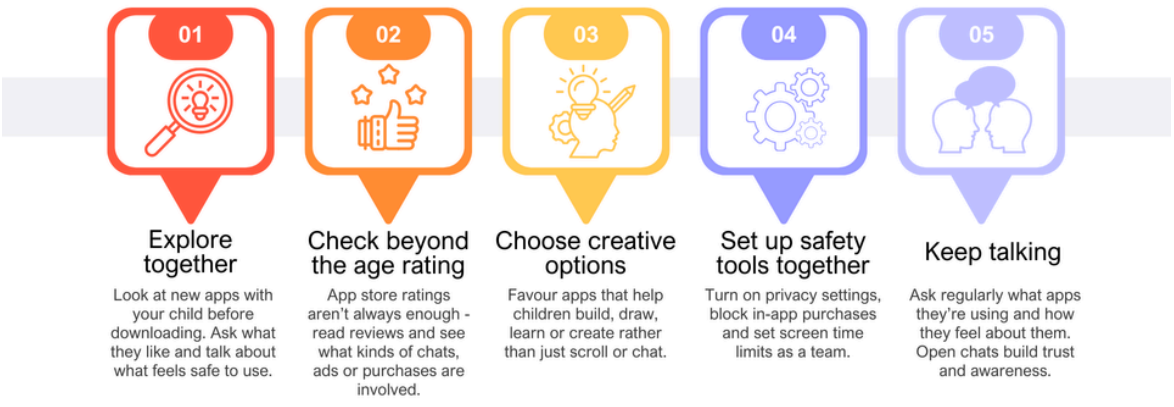
What it is?
A messaging service known for encrypted chats and large group channels, often used for community discussions or file sharing.
What are the risks?
Telegram's 'secret chats' and disappearing messages make it difficult for parents to supervise activity. Some public groups share mature or illegal content.

Vault apps

What they are?
Apps designed to hide photos, videos or other apps behind a disguised icon or password. Some look like calculators or utilities.
What are the risks?
Used to conceal messages or content. If you notice one installed, it's worth having an open conversation rather than assuming wrongdoing - curiosity often drives their use.

Before your child dives into their new device, it's worth taking a moment to explore which apps are right for them. Here are a few simple ways to make sure the apps they use are age-appropriate and child-friendly.

How to choose child friendly apps:



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Giving devices safely this Christmas.

Getting a new device for Christmas is exciting - it can open a world of learning, creativity and connection. But it also introduces children to a digital world that isn't always designed with their safety in mind. Setting clear boundaries and protective measures early on helps children learn to use technology in healthy, balanced and age-appropriate ways.

Without guidance, young users can stumble into areas of concern: social media platforms that encourage comparison and oversharing gaming chats that expose them to strangers or apps that collect more personal data than you might expect. These risks don't mean children shouldn't enjoy their new devices - they simply mean they need structure and support to navigate them confidently.

Here are some ways to make sure your child's first steps with a new device are positive ones:



1.Set it up before it gets wrapped.
Before gifting the device, take time to install updates, set parental controls and review privacy settings. This includes switching on filters, limiting app store access and setting up family accounts. Doing this ahead of time keeps Christmas morning focused on joy rather than set up stress - and gives you peace of mind from the start.



2.Agree on clear expectations.
Talk as a family about when and where the device can be used. For example, no phones at the dinner table or gaming at bedtime. These routines help children learn balance and prevent screen time from creeping into every moment of the day.



3.Talk about social media early.
Many social platforms have age limits (typically 13+), but children often feel pressure to join sooner. Keep the conversation open about why these limits exist, what 'friends' really means online and how to handle content that feels uncomfortable or unkind.



4.Guide them through gaming safely.
Games are fun and social, but online play can include chats with strangers or in-game purchases. Encourage your child to only play with people they know, keep personal details private and tell you if something doesn't feel right. Use built-in parental settings on consoles and gaming apps to manage time and communication.



5.Keep passwords and downloads shared.
Agree that you'll know passwords and approve new apps or purchases, at least while your child is learning to manage their own digital choices. This helps you stay involved without needing to hover.



6.Encourage balance.
Screens are just one part of a child's world. Make sure there's time for outdoor play, reading and family time too. Children learn from what they see, so model healthy habits by unplugging together.

As technology becomes a bigger part of childhood, staying informed and involved makes all the difference. With a few clear boundaries and open conversations, you can help your child enjoy the best of their new device - safely, confidently and with balance. Small steps now set the foundation for healthy digital habits that will last well beyond the Christmas holiday.

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