



# Staying safe on mobiles, smartphones and tablets

*Guidance for Parents / Guardians*

KEEP YOUR **KIDS**  
**SAFE** Online



# Staying safe on mobiles, smartphones and tablets

## *Information based on guidelines from the NSPCC*

Children can use mobiles or tablets anywhere – from their bedrooms to when they're out and about - so it can be tricky to keep track of what they're doing online. You may want to think about:

### **Location tracking**

Smartphones and tablets have a GPS (Global Positioning System) facility that shows their location. Some websites and apps like [Facebook](#) or [Yik Yak](#), can use this to publish the user's location. So when a young person posts a message or photo on a social network, their location may also be added. Location settings can also be used to find others close by - for example on dating or social networking apps.

Talk to your child about why they might want to use location settings and what the risks might be. You can also help them switch them off if necessary.

### **Taking and sending pictures**

Cameras on smartphones and tablets let children take and send photos instantly. Sometimes this means they don't take a moment to think before they share images.

Sometimes children and young people use their smartphones and tablets for sexting – taking and sending explicit pictures of themselves. But as soon as they send the image to another person, they lose control over where and how that image is shared. Teach your child to be Share Aware and help keep them safe online.

### **Using the device too much**

You might worry that your child uses mobile devices too much. Although they can be good for children's social lives, they can also stop them from talking to people face to face. There are also concerns about how they affect concentration, sleep patterns and eyesight for very young children.

The important thing is to get the balance of activities right. Agree the times that your child can go online, and avoid just before bedtime. Don't forget to think about your own online behaviour to help set a good example!

## Setting up parental controls

Just like on a computer, you can use parental controls to restrict what your child can access when they're using a mobile or tablet to go online. Some providers offer different levels of control, that you can change based on your child's age. Vodafone, O2, three and EE all provide free parental control services.

Talk to your child about the sort of things you think are suitable for them to see. And explain to younger children that you've put controls on their devices to help to keep them safe.

### Public WiFi

Public WiFi hotspots let users connect to the internet via a wireless network. You can find WiFi hotspots in places like coffee shops, libraries, and airports. But they're not always secure and they can allow children to search the internet free from controls.



Children could view adult content such as pornography and violence either by mistake or on purpose when using public WiFi. But family-friendly public WiFi schemes are becoming more common and some providers have signed up to providing family-friendly WiFi. Look out for the symbol when you're out and about.

### Parent protection apps

Installing parent protection apps on your child's smartphone or tablet can help you keep track of what they're getting up to. Features vary from app to app, but they include things like:

- alerting you if your child tries to access a blocked site
- keeping a record of text messages they send and receive.

You can also set times when the device can and can't be used – for example, you could block your child's smartphone or tablet during school hours and overnight.

## Using apps to stay anonymous or keep secrets

Anonymity apps and websites help users to keep their information secret, or share information anonymously. New apps and websites like this are being created all the time.

Some websites and apps are designed specifically to let users act anonymously or keep secrets. Although they can be used simply for privacy or to protect personal information, there are some risks involved.

They can also be used to hide content that a child may be worried about – so it's useful for you to know that they exist. For younger children it's a good idea to keep an eye on their phone for any new apps and to agree what they can and can't download.

### What are the risks?

Although young people may use anonymity websites and apps for harmless reasons – to flirt with one another, or express themselves without fear of embarrassment – they can also pose risks, including:

- **Cyberbullying**

Users can post anonymously using these apps. And children may feel particularly scared if they don't know who is bullying them.

- **Inappropriate content**

Because they're anonymous, it's very difficult to hold users to account. So it can be easier for children to access content that may be upsetting or unsuitable for their age – such as content that promotes self-harm.

- **Inappropriate behaviour**

Children may be drawn into saying and doing things they would never do offline, because the behaviour of other users and the anonymity makes it seem OK. For example, things can get out of hand when children are using the site in groups and giving each other dares.

### What are privacy apps?

Mobile devices can store lots of personal information, and it's understandable that your child might want to keep this information private – just like you would.

There are apps available that hide content stored on mobiles, including photos and messages. These apps can be disguised as other things on the phone, so they're really hard to spot. They're known as secret apps, decoy apps, vault apps or safe apps.

## **What are protected messaging apps?**

Protected messaging apps are designed so that users can send messages that will only be seen by the intended recipient. Messages can be encrypted, password protected, or might even self-destruct after they have been read.

For older children, remember that you could see this as a modern day equivalent of a child locking their diary – it's important to respect their privacy. For younger children, apps like these present a possible risk and it's worth thinking about why they would want to hide their messages or photos.

Try to strike the right balance between keeping an eye on your child and giving them the independence and freedom to explore. Simply sheltering them from the online world might not help them in the long run. They need a chance to learn how to behave online, and find out what's out there.

**For more information visit:**

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

[www.thinkyouknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkyouknow.co.uk)

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)