

Christmas is such a wonderful time of year, excitable children and time to relax with family and friends. And of course, there are new toys to play with.

With a huge increase in sales of devices (around 13 million people receive smartphones for Christmas each year) it is important to ensure that you and your children are safe when playing with new kit. To help, the UK Safer Internet Centre has set out the following tips to help keep your household safe online over the holidays.

The Tech: Learn your way around

Most devices have controls to ensure that kids can't access content you don't want them to. [Make sure your "in-app" purchases are disabled](#) to avoid a nightmare surprise in the new year.

Tablets

Tablets are really popular with younger children, and the market has several which are geared towards child friendly content. When it comes to using them, start slowly; only download games and apps you have checked out carefully (sites such as www.net-aware.org.uk, or www.common sense media.org provide useful advice!) and steer them towards age targeted content such as www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/cbeebies/features/iplayer-kids or YouTube Kids.

Mobile devices

If you have older children, and are thinking about getting them a new phone for Christmas, this can pose its own challenges:

The old online safety message about having your home computer in a communal place becomes defunct, because phones are literally mobile computers and have the power of most traditional desktop PCs.

Set boundaries

Set some ground rules, and ensure children understand them. For example:

Screen Time

Agree a time limit or number of games beforehand, to avoid repeated disagreements around how long they can spend online.

Sleep comes first

It is advisable that the phone stays out of the bedroom to avoid those night time interruptions.

Ask for access

If you're genuinely concerned about them, ask them to allow you access to the phone.

Monitoring vs having a conversation

It is possible to install software onto devices that monitors online activity, alerts you to inappropriate behaviour, and can block access to certain content. This type of software is becoming increasingly popular, but while this might sound tempting, it does pose a number of issues around your child's right to privacy & could have an impact upon your relationship with them. [SWGfL published this blog](#) earlier this year, which covers the subject in some detail and raises some interesting points.

The best advice we can give is to talk to your child regularly and openly about behaviour and risk, so that they know they can come to you if something goes wrong.

SWGfL also covered this in its Parenting in a Digital Age series earlier this year, in the blog: [‘It’s good to talk’](#).

Whole home approach

Consider setting parental controls on your Wi-Fi – you can block access to inappropriate or adult content, and set time limits which may help rein in those excessive Minecraft sessions. The UK Safer Internet Centre has advice on this [here](#).

Gaming

Finally a word about games. This year there are so many exciting games and consoles around, there is a good chance you might have one in your house. Whether a DS, Nintendo Switch or PS4, there is something for everyone, and every age.

Consider whether your child is mature enough to join an online community, and whether the games they are playing are appropriate. For more advice on this visit www.pegi.info or www.askaboutgames.com. Our blog from earlier this year, [‘The real cost of online gaming’](#) also gives an insight into the type of things to be aware of when it comes to gaming.

Finally, make sure you enjoy your tech together, it’s the perfect time of year!

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