

Internet-connected toys and devices can already be found in many homes. Chances are their numbers will increase this Christmas. In a world where even toothbrushes are Bluetooth enabled, it is more important than ever to know the risks and strategies to minimize them.

What is the Internet of Things?

This is the reality of everyday devices being connected to the Internet, and/or to each other (via data exchange protocols such as Bluetooth). These devices are often controlled via mobile phones or activated using voice controls. Currently, the internet of things includes smart speakers, TVs and wearable devices such as fitness trackers. Soon, however, this is expected to extend to items such as coffee makers, washing machines, fridges, lamps and almost anything that has an on and off switch.

Industry experts believe there will be over 20 billion connected devices in our homes by 2020.

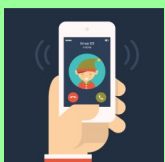
Whether you like it or not, this includes children's toys. Available for purchase this Christmas are Bluetooth connected action figures, robots and drones, and voice-activated educational toys. This subset of devices is known as the Internet of Toys.

Potential risks

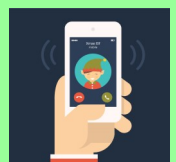
While connected devices and toys provide children with opportunities for learning and interactive play, concerns have been raised about whether these devices are collecting **too much personal information** from children. It is possible for children (either accidentally or on purpose) to search for and access **age-inappropriate material** via a connected device such as a smart speaker. Children may also make **'in-app purchases'** and spend money, which is often taken from their parents' bank account without their knowledge or consent.

There things you can do to help make your connected home safer for your child:

- 1. Do your research:** Research different products online and read reviews. This is a great way to find out more about a product including age restrictions and credibility, as well as hearing directly from other parents.
- 2. Read the manual:** Read the manual provided by the manufacturers. Information should be given about the privacy of the device, how it connects to the internet, and information about any app which may need to be downloaded in order to use the device.
- 3. Set up parental controls:** Make use of the parental controls available on your home broadband and any internet enabled device in your home. You can find out more about how to use parental controls by visiting your broadband provider's website.



Gifting a Phone this Christmas?
Read [this](#) before handing it over.



5. Change the default password: When you buy a connected device or toy, change the default password. Use a strong password that cannot easily be guessed and do not share this with others.

7. Review and/or delete audio files: Some connected devices or toys work by listening to your child's voice commands, so these devices usually record and keep these audio files to work properly. Refer to the manual and find out how to review and/or delete audio files. If there's a microphone on your child's connected device, you can turn on the 'mute' button. This will stop the device from recording and storing audio files.

8. Talk to your child: Include connected devices in your online safety conversations, reinforcing the message that if your child sees or hears anything that makes them feel worried, they can speak to you or another adult they trust.

9. Supervise your child: If your child is primary school aged children should be supervised when they are online or using a connected device. Devices should be kept in communal areas of the home such as in the kitchen or living room.

Have a safe and Merry Christmas!

Tom Burke

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