

Does your preschool child have access to connected devices?

81% of parents say their preschool child uses the internet.

37% think their child spends too much time online.¹

Being online at this age can offer your child opportunities to learn through exploration, play and social interaction. But there may also be some risks if your child uses connected devices without supervision or for extended periods of time.



This might include coming across harmful content, contact with strangers or missing out on physical activity.

Here are our tips for a safe and balanced online experience for your preschool child:

Set ground rules



Establish clear rules and be consistent

Be clear on things like when and where devices can be used and when they need to be switched off. A good time to switch off is during family dinner time and when your child is alone in a room.



Use a timer

Limit the amount of time your child spends online to ensure a good balance with physical activity. It can be easy to lose track of time, so setting a timer can help.



Resist any push back

Getting your child off a device can be hard and it can be tempting to give in to their demands. Sticking to the rules at this age will help instil good online habits for your child now and in the future.

¹Survey of 3,520 Australian parents of children aged 2-17

Be involved



Get to know your child's toys and devices

Be aware of the capabilities that come with a device, app or internet connected toy. Check the device guide and look out for any built-in cameras, microphones, chat functions and location settings that are not needed and can be deactivated.



Supervise and explore together

It's easy for your child to explore through a touchscreen and accidentally access inappropriate content. Explore together and keep an eye on your child in case they come across something that might upset or confuse them.



Know what's good and what's not

There's a lot of content on offer for your child. Common Sense Media can help with independent, age-based and educational ratings and reviews for a range of content, including online games, apps and websites. (commonsensemedia.org/reviews)

Manage access



Bookmark the good stuff

Make a list of favourite sites and apps that are safe and that your child enjoys. Show them how to access these.



Block the nasty stuff

Use parental controls and safety features that are available on the device or through apps, web browsers and service providers. These can help block inappropriate content. However, keep in mind that tech tools can't block all the bad stuff—you still need to back it up with supervision. (esafety.gov.au/parental-controls)



Disable in-app purchases

Lots of apps feature additional payments for extra content. It can be easy for your child to accidentally rack up a big bill on your account. Restrict in-app purchases through settings in Google Play (Google Play > Settings > Require authentication for purchases) and on iPhones, iPads and iPod touch (Settings > General > Restrictions).

Support positively



Start the conversation

It's never too early to start talking about safe and respectful behaviour online. Help your child understand that what they say or do online is important.



Get other trusted adults on board

Teach your child that it's important they come to you or another trusted adult (such as an aunt, uncle, grandparent) if they are upset because of anything they see or experience online.



Know where to go for extra support

If your child is distressed because of anything they have seen online, then seek professional advice from your GP or Parentline (parentline.com.au) on 1300 30 1300. Raising Children Network (raisingchildren.net.au) can also help with a range of resources and information on development, learning and health at this age.



Screen time for your child – 7 tips

There is a lot of conflicting advice and emerging research around screen time. But, the right amount of screen time can depend on a range of factors like your child's age and maturity, the kind of content they are consuming, their learning needs and your family routine. It can be easy to focus only on the clock and how long your child is spending in front of the screen, but the quality and nature of what they are doing online, and your involvement are just as important.

Consider your child's screen use in the context of their overall health and wellbeing – for example, is online time getting in the way of their sleep and exercise? Is it impacting on their face-to-face connections with family and friends? The answers to these questions will guide you and help strike the right balance of online and offline activities for your child.



1. Be involved

Sharing screen time and online activities like gaming with your child helps you gauge the appropriateness of what they are doing and manage potential risks. It's also a great way to start conversations with your child about their online experiences.



2. Work with your child to set boundaries for screen use

If you decide that setting screen time limits is right for you and your child, discuss these new rules with your child. Older children are more likely to cooperate if they have been part of the decision-making process. Colourful pictures or charts of daily limits and other important activities is a fun way to get younger children on board.



3. Be clear about the consequences of not switching off

Part of our role as parents is to set clear limitations and boundaries. The same applies to technology limitations so, being clear and consistent about the consequences for your child if they do not stick to these rules is paramount. The [Raising Children Network](#) provides some useful tools and advice.



4. Set device-free zones and times at home

Device-free zones can help you manage your family's digital use. Here are some ideas for setting digital boundaries within your home:

- no devices in the bedroom for younger children
- all screens off in bedrooms after a certain time for older children
- all screens off at least one hour before planned bedtime
- all family members switch off at dinner time
- charge devices overnight in a place your child cannot access



5. Ask your child to explain their screen use

Get your child in the habit of explaining why they want to be in front of a screen or online. It's a great way to get them thinking about their own digital habits and balancing screen time with other activities.



6. Use tech tools to help manage access

There are robust products and device functions which allow you to see which apps are being used in your home and for how long. But try not to use these tools to secretly monitor your child. Instead, be open about the process and check the whole family's usage, including your own. Start with [Google Family Link](#) for Android devices or [parental controls](#) and [Screen Time](#) for iPhone/iPad.



7. Lead by example

Your behaviour is one of the most effective ways to help your child develop a positive digital mindset. Show your child you can put down your device too.



Your child's first smartphone – are they old enough?

Children often have access to devices, including smartphones, from a very young age. Whether it's watching their favourite program through streaming services on your phone, using educational apps or simply viewing photos with you and the family, they are engaging with devices in one form or another.

But when is my child old enough to be given their own mobile phone?

In 2012, the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed children as young as five years old owned a mobile phone – two percent of children aged between five and eight years old, and 29 percent for children aged five to 14 years. This figure is likely to be higher now!

For many parents and carers, five years old would seem too young. For others, it might offer them peace of mind and security to know they can keep in touch with their child—especially in an emergency.

The right age for your child will depend on their level of maturity. It's worth asking yourself the following questions before handing over a digital device.

- Does my child have a good sense of responsibility?
- Are they able to stick to the rules?
- Do they show a good understanding of actions and consequences?
- Do they come to me or another trusted adult when they are distressed or encounter problems?



For younger children it's best to start with a mobile phone without internet access, and introduce a smartphone when they demonstrate an appropriate level of maturity. Some younger children might argue that they are ready for a smartphone, especially if their friends already have one. But it's worth holding out until you feel confident that your child is mature enough.

My child has their first smartphone – now what?

When your child receives their first smartphone it's a great opportunity to instil safe online behaviours early on, so they can carry these skills through to their teens and beyond.

Here are some tips for getting them on board with good online habits.

Establish rules at the outset with clear boundaries

Talk about expectations and the consequences for not meeting these rules. Depending on the age of your child, you might want to set up a written signed agreement which lists the rules.

Here are some you may want to agree on:

- No phones after a certain time (i.e. 8.00 pm) – unless in an emergency.
- Keep to daily screen time limits (i.e. 1 hour per school night).
- Family time is a no-phone zone (i.e. dinner).

- Do not share your passwords with others – apart from parents.
- Do not share your real name (or full name), age and address when posting, talking to strangers or on sites where anyone can see it.
- Be kind to people – treat people on the phone as you would face-to-face.
- Do not take or share photos of others (including friends) without their permission.
- Tell a parent or another trusted adult if anything makes you feel uncomfortable, or if a stranger contacts you online.
- Do not purchase or download an app or game without talking to a parent first—especially as these often have minimum age requirements.



Use technology tools to help set the boundaries to keep your child safe

Use parental controls to help manage your child's device and the types of content they can access. Most devices come with parental controls and offer a range of features:

- iPhone: Go to Settings > General > Restrictions. Here you can disable apps or features, prevent access to explicit content and specific webpages.
- Android (Google Play): Go to Play Store > Settings > Parental controls. Most Android phones use Google Play as the digital marketplace for purchasing apps and accessing content. Through Google Play you can restrict the content your child can download or purchase from Google Play.
- Google's Family Link is an app for parents to help manage their child's device and account and offers additional layers of protection. It enables parents to set screen time limits, review app permissions (such as their camera, location, contacts), block apps and approve downloads, block sites and filter content.
- You can also check with your mobile service provider if they offer any parental control tools.

Activate any privacy settings and safety features available on the device, in web browsers and apps. In some cases you can do this through parental controls or when installing apps on their phone. Carefully consider permissions and whether apps really need to access your child's location, contact list, messages and other features.

Help your child set up a pin or password to lock their phone. In addition to protecting their personal information, this will ensure that no one else can use their phone.

Help your child set up strong and unique passwords for their apps and websites. Even if the phone is locked, apps and websites can be accessed from other devices.



Communicate openly with your child, establish and maintain trust

Most importantly, communicate openly with your child about their phone and online use. It's not possible to supervise your child 24/7 and no technology tool is 100 percent effective in protecting them from online risks. So it's really important to establish and maintain trust.

- Talk openly and regularly with your child about their online activities. Show them that you are interested in how they connect with friends, who they talk with and the type of sites they visit.
- If you are using parental controls, be upfront about this and get them on board. Let them know that these can be reviewed and changed as they get older and they continue to demonstrate responsible behaviour.
- Talk about positive online behaviour and about respecting others online. Encourage your child to think carefully before they post, text or share comments or photos so they don't hurt or upset others. Remind them there is a real person at the end of the screen.
- Encourage your child to come to you (or another trusted adult) if they are upset because of an online experience, even if they think they are to blame.