CYBERSAFE KIDS

Parental controls are part of the solution, but *only* part. It's unwise to rely solely upon them – nothing is foolproof and kids can be clever! It's also worth noting that they do change regularly so the guide below is merely that, a guide. The most up-to-date and accurate information should always be found at each of the manufacturer's websites.

IOS/ANDROID PARENTAL CONTROLS

Set up and monitor screen time limits, bedtime, in-app purchases, download approvals, restricted modes, safe search options and more via free parental controls for iOS or Android.

Apple Screen Time for iPad/iPhone   https://support.apple.com/en-ie/105121

Google Family link for Android   https://families.google/familylink

MODEM PARENTAL CONTROLS

You can use your modem's configuration settings to, amongst other things, limit access to certain sites or set shut down periods. Your supplier's website is the place to go for a step by step guide to setting up controls for each modem, sometimes via a companion app or you can access from a web browser by inputting your network IP address.

e.g. Eir fibre box F3000   [link]

e.g. Vodafone HG659   [link]

Technical restrictions can be very effective but make sure that you still make time to check in and talk because you can't cover for every eventuality, e.g.

- Could your child access content via their data plan while out and about?
- Could your child set up a VPN to bypass content restrictions?
- Could your child be viewing content at a friends house or be shown content by a friend?

PARENTAL CONTROLS

GAMING CONSOLES AND DEVICES

Always control and monitor time, spending, privacy and communications and/or content from settings on the console or via the manufacturer's companion apps.

Playstation Family management (including PS VR)
https://www.playstation.com/en-ie/parental-controls/

XBox Family hub
https://www.xbox.com/en-IE/family-hub

Switch Parental controls
https://www.nintendo.com/us/switch/parental-controls/

Steam Family view [PC, VR]
https://help.steampowered.com/en/faqs/view/6B1A-66BE-E911-3D98#setitup

Quest VR (Meta accounts10-12 years and Teen 13-17 years)
https://familycenter.meta.com/our-products/horizon-and-quest/

SNAPCHAT (13+)   https://parents.snapchat.com/parental-controls

Be aware that short form video content on Spotlight frequently contains content of a mature or disturbing nature that is not suitable for young people to view. Our research shows that Snapchat is the most popular app amongst young people for group messaging, e.g. class or team or friendship groups.

Disappearing messages have always been a key feature of Snapchat and make it hard to monitor communications or provide evidence of harassment or cyberbullying. This feature has also been known to facilitate illegal activity, e.g. sale of drugs, on this platform. Emoji codes are used to obfuscate and avoid detection by technical filters and policing authorities.

They were referenced in the Netflix drama *Adolescence*, where codes used by manosphere communities (including 'INCEL' terminology) are described. Emojis are also commonly used when sexting.

Some features, e.g. 'Streaks', are designed to encourage more frequent and regular usage. The 'Snapmap' is a unique selling point for Snapchat but we recommend that young people use 'Ghost Mode' rather than exposing their location publicly.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

More and more, popular social apps have added their own parental controls. Please note that while most social networking and instant messaging apps indicate that the age limit is 13+, Ireland has set the legal digital age of consent at 16.

Organisations including Common Sense Media, PEGI, Webwise and others provide valuable reviews and guidance on the suitability and risks of the most popular apps. In addition to availing of this online guidance, we recommend that parents install and check out these apps themselves before allowing their children to download and use them.

ROBLOX

Roblox is the most popular social online environment with primary school aged children in Ireland currently. At first glance the blocky style of the avatars and landscapes of many games, combined with the fact that children as young as 5 can create accounts on Roblox can give the impression that this is a safe environment for young users. In reality parents should exercise a lot of caution when letting their children spend time in the Roblox environment and ensure they are adequately prepared and supervised at all times.

Be aware that there is a steep learning curve for younger users on this platform as it is frequently the first environment through which they engage with others online. Many 8–12 year olds that we survey report having negative experiences while gaming on Roblox, including exposure to scams and both upsetting content and contact.

Parents can access more details from:
en.help.roblox.com/hc/en-us/articles/30428248050068-Parental-Controls-FAQ

Roblox has recently changed the way in which parental controls are set up, moving away from the settings and parental pin previously used. By setting up a parent account and linking it to the account of your child you can control the games your child can play based on content maturity ratings and their interactions via 'Experience chat', '1:1', 'Direct chat', and 'Party' (up to 6 in the group).

PARENTAL CONTROLS

ROBLOX

Note: Voice chat is only available to users over 13 who age verify using a Government ID and selfie. There is also a requirement to age verify as over 17 in order to access the most mature content.

For younger users we recommend they interact with no-one (including in the 'Experience' chat), content maturity be set to 'minimal' and trading should be limited. A word of caution though – even with content set to minimal there can be bad actors on the platform who engage in inappropriate behaviour in some games, e.g. role play games. Roblox does attempt to moderate the 'Experience' chat and questions and terms that breach its code of conduct will not be made visible in the chat. But some bad actors can learn to navigate around these restrictions. Monitor and check in with your child regularly to understand the experiences they're having.

YOUTUBE

CyberSafeKids research found YouTube to be the most likely app where children of 8-12 years have experiences that 'bothered or upset' them or where they 'saw something they wish they hadn't seen'. Younger users should use YouTube Kids only. Older children should always use YouTube in Restricted Mode on personal and shared family devices. Restricted Mode can be set at an account level regardless of device used. Be aware that tracking and ad personalisation are switched on by default and the content presented to the young person watching will be based on interests shown. Multiple research studies have highlighted that both girls and boys are presented with quite different content that may adversely affect their wellbeing, e.g. self-harm, eating disorders, misogyny.

If your child wants to publish content, we recommend that their channel be set to private, or at least limited to those who receive a private link. Videos should not include their face or show anything that could be used to identify their location. And notifications and comments should be switched off by indicating that content published is made for kids.

PINTEREST

Pinterest is popular among young girls in particular in Ireland. Parents can avail of parental controls for their children on this app and a 4 digit passcode is needed in order to change the settings. As with all apps of this nature we recommend private accounts, limiting friends and followers, knowing how to report and block and checking in regularly to understand how they are being affected by the content and contact experienced.

More information on the parental controls on Pinterest can be found at: help.pinterest.com/en/article/resources-for-parents-and-caregivers-of-teens

WHATSAPP

WhatsApp is very popular among 8-12 year olds in Ireland, as well as those of 13+. It is often used for group chats amongst friends and classmates, as well as family members. Helping your child find and manage the privacy settings and other safety features is advised, for example, turning off automatic downloads. Internet Matters provides some advice on the controls and settings that you could enable with your child for their WhatsApp account.

https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/social-media/whatsapp/

There are features of WhatsApp that make it difficult for parents to monitor their child's messages. Disappearing messages can be enabled, for example, and WhatsApp also supports locked chats that are only viewable if you know the passcode to unlock them. Locked chats can be used to hide problematic interactions and the sharing of harmful content. They are visible in the list of chats by default but Meta have made it possible to have secret locked chats that do not appear in the list of chats, unless a passcode is entered first. As a consequence of this privacy features monitoring is more difficult than ever on the app for a concerned parent.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

DISCORD

Parental controls are relatively new on Discord and the child must agree to accept the settings. To protect the child's privacy parents are not able to view message exchanges but can be made aware of the communities they join and who they are messaging with. You can learn more about safety features on Discord, such as blocking message requests and "safe direct messaging", from https://discord.com/safety

Discord is particularly popular among gamers as a way to communicate with a private group/community. Sometimes children will communicate over Discord – while gaming in Roblox for example – without sufficient safeguards in place. We advise that you make sure you know which communities your child is joining and who they are interacting with on this app.

TWITCH

This platform does not have parental controls available and there is a lot of mature content and interaction on different streams. There are content classification and chat filters and other safety features.

More details for parents can be found at:
https://safety.twitch.tv/s/article/Guide-Parents-Educators?language=en_US

Before allowing a child to access this streaming service it is worth checking it out via a browser or by downloading the app. The 'Just Chatting' category is very popular as it features live or recorded gaming and music.

PARENTAL CONTROLS ON SKY, NETFLIX, DISNEY+

It is possible to access controls on your Sky box or to create child accounts on streaming services like Netflix and Disney. Avoid letting them use your accounts, instead setting them up with their own.

For more information see the manufacturers guidelines:

Sky Family settings and parental controls
https://www.sky.com/help/articles/set-up-parental-controls-on-your-tv

Netflix parental controls
https://help.netflix.com/en/node/264

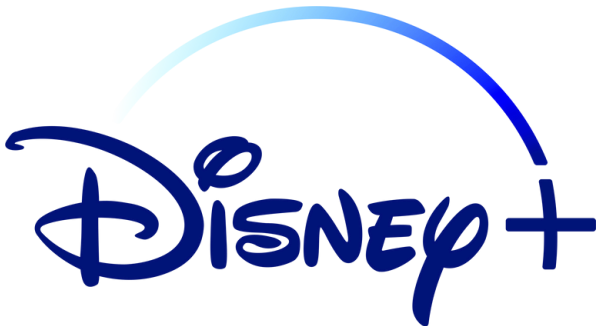**Disney+** parental controls
https://help.disneyplus.com/en-GB/article/disneyplus-parental-controls

Parental controls for your Smart TV
The manufacturer of your Smart TV may provide guidelines on how to restrict certain apps behind a PIN, e.g. YouTube. Usually you can find this under 'Apps and Settings' but if you search for information on your particular model of Smart TV online you should come across instructions on parental controls.