

# Social Media, Television And Children

— Guidance for Parents and Carers





## Guidance for Parents and Carers



---

A team of academics from the University of Sheffield, School of Education worked with BBC Children's and Dubit to examine children's (aged 0-16) use of social media and television.

In this booklet, we outline how we carried out the research, share some findings and offer some guidance for parents and carers on managing your child's use of screens and social media.

# How we carried out the study

Research Design

3154

## Families

We undertook an online survey with 3154 families in the UK who had children aged 0-16.

6

We undertook case studies with six families over a period of three months.

110

## Children aged 5-11

One hundred and ten children and young people aged 5-11 took part in telephone interviews.

33

## Children aged 12-16

Thirty children and young people aged 12-16 took part in telephone interviews.

# Research Questions



## Q1

How do children aged 0-16 use television and social media in their daily lives?

## Q2

What views and practices do parents have in relation to children's use of television and social media?

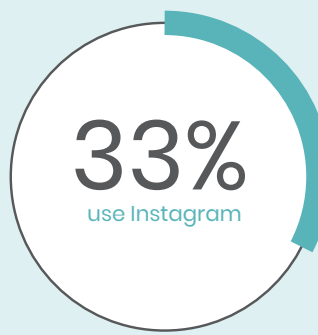
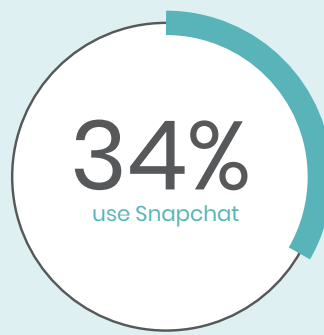
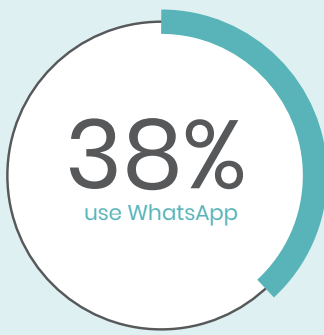
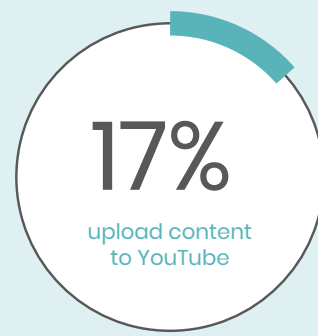
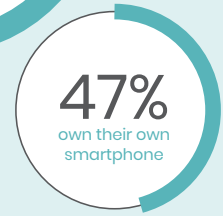
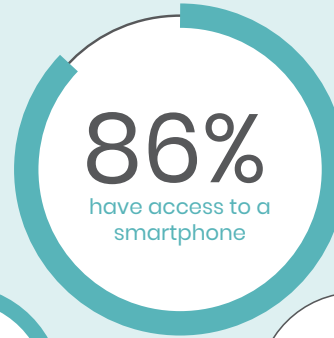
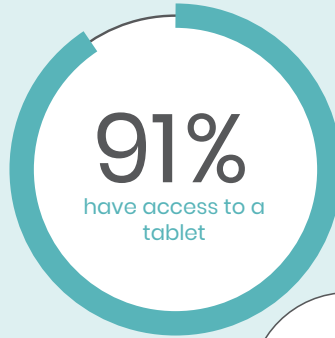
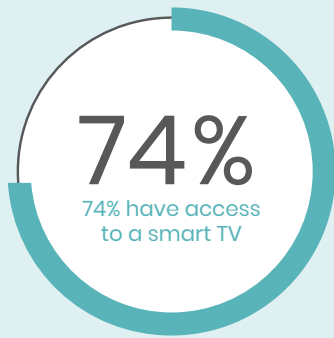


## Q3

What are the implications of this analysis for the children's media industry, schools and parents?



# How do children aged 0-16 use social media and television?





WhatsApp used most often to communicate with family

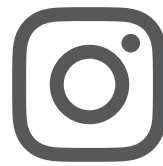
# NETFLIX



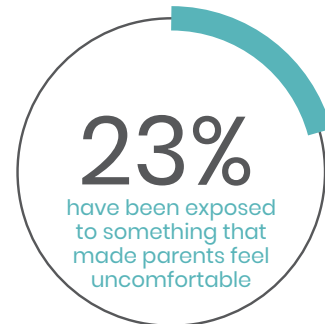
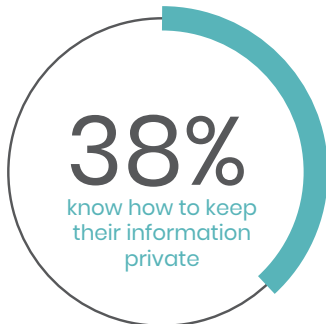
Most frequently viewed content: YouTube and Netflix



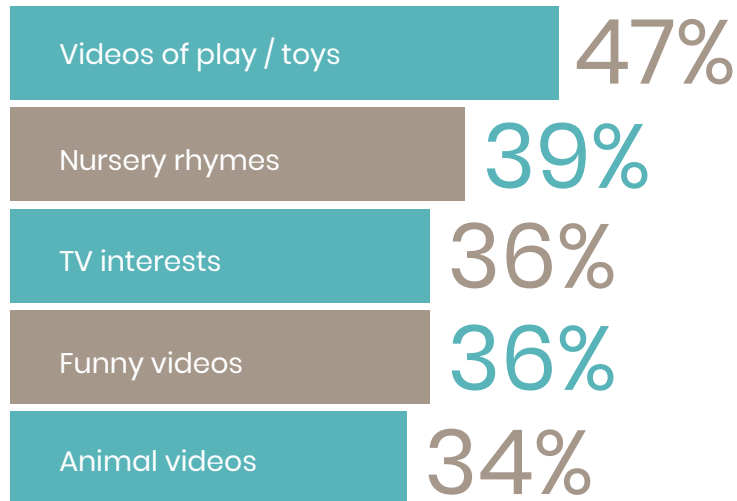
Snapchat used most often to communicate with family



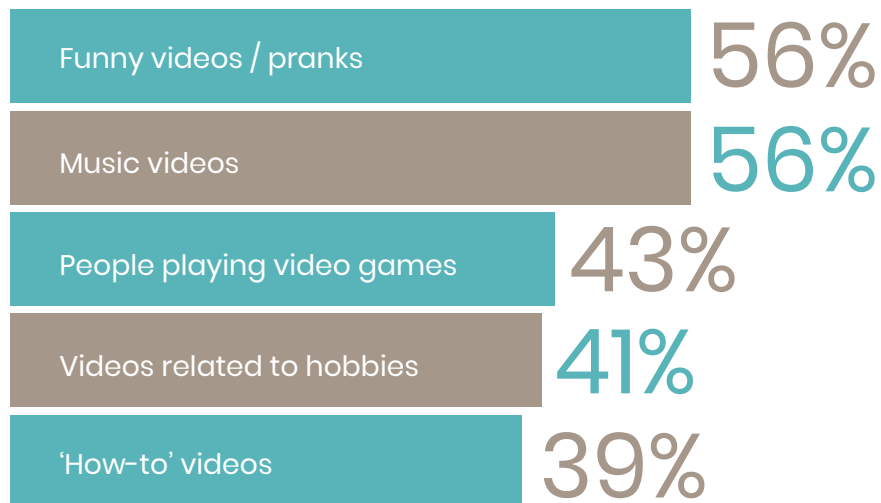
Instagram used most often to post photographs



## Favourite YouTube content of 0-7 year-olds



## Favourite YouTube content of 8-16 year-olds





# Guidance and advice for parents

## Should I set strict limits for my children's use of screens?

There is a lack of concrete research evidence to inform any setting of rules about screen time. In this context, it is more helpful to ensure your child has a healthy, balanced life in which screens play one part alongside play, getting physical exercise, enjoying being with family and socialising with friends, doing school work and so on.

If you think your child is spending too long on screens, then divert them to other activities. If they seem reluctant to stop using phones and tablets every time you ask them to do so, then it signals that it would be good to get them to turn the devices off more often. Changes in behavior, such as eating and sleeping patterns, and moods, could also be signs that screen use is out of balance. Experts in this area have suggested that parents should ask themselves the following questions about their children:

- **Is my child physically healthy and sleeping enough?**
- **Is my child connecting socially with family and friends (face-to-face or online)?**
- **Is my child engaged with and achieving in nursery or school?**
- **Is my child pursuing interests and hobbies (face-to-face or online)?**
- **Is my child having fun and learning in their use of digital media?**

Alicia Blum-Ross and Sonia Livingstone (2016)

If any of the answers suggest that your child could be having problems, and if you feel these problems could be related to your child's media use, then strategies to change the patterns in your child's use of screens would be useful. Strategies should have the long-term aim of helping children to monitor and self-regulate their own use. Strategies that some families have adopted include:

- Having schedules for the use of devices. You can ask your child to help set the times they can and can't use them.
- Not allowing smartphones or tablets to be used at mealtimes.
- Having screen-free periods when all family members do something together.
- Having all mobile devices charged in parents' bedrooms overnight as a means of ensuring that children cannot access them unobserved for periods of time.
- Ensuring that you provide a good role model with regard to the use of screens.

Setting rules such as these is very much a family affair, and what will work for one family may not work for others. However, having regular family discussions about these issues, and setting relevant and appropriate boundaries, is of value.

If you feel that your child's time with screens is generally OK, then think instead about the quality of that use – are they accessing good quality apps and websites? Are they having fun and learning when using the devices? Try and use the devices with your child, so you are learning together.

Children love to play and make things based on favourite media they enjoy, so when suggesting time out from screens, you can find out more about what they like about them by doing related creative activities together. The CBeebies website, for example offers lots of support to help you do activities with your child that are related to the programmes. With older children, you could ask them to show you how to play their favourite games, such as Minecraft and Fornite, and join in now and again!

## **I understand it is good to use devices with my child, but sometimes I am too busy. Is this OK?**

Life is busy for parents, and it is unrealistic to think that you can interact with your child every time they use a device. It is best to do this when you are feeling unhurried, and can focus on your child and their needs. It can also show them that it can be really useful to sometimes pay full attention to one activity at a time.

When they are using devices independently, try to ensure you are aware what they are doing, and who they are engaging with. With younger children this requires active monitoring, but with older children, you can talk with them about what they are doing and encourage them to use devices in shared family spaces. It is likely that your children will take an interest in the social media and television you like, just as they take an interest in other parts of daily life. This provides another chance to talk about what you like and why, and perhaps whether it is not only children who need to be mindful of their screentime!

It is worth remembering that as your children move into their teenage years, they do not welcome feeling as if they are being 'policed'. Rather, they want caring adults to engage with them in constructive ways to guide them through the world of social media. This can be done by sharing with them your own uses and concerns, which may then lead to them feeling able to be open about their own uses and concerns. Exploring news items together and talking about how the headlines relate to the reality of everyday life is also of value.

## **How can I find good apps and websites for my child to use?**

There are some good quality websites for children that are produced by public broadcasters and children's media producers, such as the BBC (CBeebies and CBBC), because they spend a lot of time finding out about what children and their families want, and what educational and other experts feel is appropriate. There are also some helpful websites that rate apps and websites, and some which allow parents and children to submit their own reviews of them. Some of these are outlined below.

[Common Sense Media](https://www.common sense media.org)<sup>1</sup>

[National Literacy Trust: Literacy Apps](http://literacyapps.literacytrust.org.uk)<sup>2</sup>

[Net Aware](https://www.net-aware.org.uk)<sup>3</sup>

If you have time, after you have downloaded apps from the Play Store or App Store, give them a rating so that other parents can learn from your experience.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.common sense media.org>

<sup>2</sup><http://literacyapps.literacytrust.org.uk>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.net-aware.org.uk>

## **When is the best age to let my child have a social media account?**

This is up to you as a parent to decide what is best for your own child. Most social media sites are recommended for children from the age of 13 years, and from parental reviews of such sites outlined on the Common Sense Media site (see, for example, the review of Snapchat), this would appear to be the average age that parents suggest is appropriate for most of the sites.

It is important to talk with your child about the benefits and risks social media before accounts for children are set up.

Best practice means ensuring that your child is aware of how to manage the data privacy and safety settings of such sites, and it is always good to talk to them about responsible use. They may well be aware of stories in the press about the negative impacts of using social media, and so this is a good starting point for discussion, as it does not focus on them as individuals. You can use these stories as a means of setting up best practice about the use of social media from the first time they join services.

Whilst it is important that children understand the potential dangers of social media use, however, these dangers should not be overstated, so that your child misses out on the benefits of social media. Instead, you could also discuss, and demonstrate in your own use, the positive effects of social media use to your children. Using social media, we can keep in touch with families and friends, keep up to date with news and events, search for information, share creative work, get involved in the community, find jobs and help others.

When first setting up an account for children, you could model good use of the sites by engaging them in fun and collaborative activities with family members. If you are concerned about some trends on social media, such as selfies, fake news, memes and clickbait, it is worth talking to your child about them and pointing out what you do not like. If we saw an image in a magazine that was stereotypical of women we might want to talk about that, and social media is no different. This kind of talk encourages your child to ask important critical questions about all the media they engage with.

As children begin to use social media, they may feel overwhelmed by the number of messages and posts they receive. It is helpful to talk to them about this, suggesting that they should not feel obliged to respond to every conversation or comment.

Positive and supportive parenting is important for fostering children's online resilience. Keeping children away from social media and focusing only on its harmful effects can make children fearful and unable to deal effectively with risks. Talking regularly to your child about her or his use of social media as they grow up, and about the reasons why you have the rules you do, engaging them in reflecting on and constructing these rules, is essential.

## **What challenges might there be in letting my child use social media, and how can I respond to them?**

Self-regulation is important in managing social media. This means being able to think about and manage our use of social media, rather than letting it rule us. Knowing how to manage the constant flow of online traffic, and being aware of when it is necessary to ignore it or even turn it off altogether, is crucial for the development of a healthy relationship with technology. Adults need to be good role models in this respect.

Children may come across inappropriate content online. It is important that parents do not overreact, or blame children for this. Instead, you could talk to your child about how the content was accessed, and about how it affected them. You could then talk to your child about how encountering such content can be avoided in the future, such as by not including certain words in searches. You may also want to report the issue and show children that it is possible to act on any concerns you have. Many social media sites have such reporting facilities.

Parents and children need also to consider the long-term implications of posting content on a website that is open to anyone to view. You could also talk to your child about the notion of a 'digital footprint'. That is, when we post media to some sites it is then difficult to remove it. Whilst they may be happy to share particular material now, how might they feel when they are older? Show them the photos of you as a child that you might not want everyone to see, and explain why! You might also want to ask their consent before posting pictures of them; this enables you to discuss the issues and shows you take seriously their privacy.

It is also helpful to talk about the challenges faced by sharing pictures of themselves with friends, as once they send out content to others, they lose control of where that content can end up. Friendships break up, and this can lead to content that was intended to be private being shared online.

Data privacy is also a challenge. Some social media sites collect data on individuals and it is sometimes difficult to understand what they are collecting, and how. The more children understand about their rights in this respect, the more they will have control over their data.

Finally, knowing how to manage challenging situations online is important. If for example, either you or your child subject to criticism on social media, it is good to stand back and not respond immediately, but to consider the implications of posting a hastily worded response that might be misunderstood and escalate the situation.

Talking about these kinds of issues on a regular basis with your child is beneficial.

## How can I monitor the activity on my children's social media accounts?

You could talk to your child about how they are using social media in a non-threatening manner, so that they feel that they are able to open up to you and talk about their experiences. Given that most children link to existing friends on social media, it is good to try to discuss with other parents any ground rules and how they have worked. Social media is new to all of us and there's still much to understand about both the risks and the benefits.

It is good to agree with children that one of the rules for allowing them to have a social media account is that they should let you know who they are communicating with. This will enable you to monitor the children's contacts to ensure they are appropriate in an open way, so that it doesn't seem like you are not secretly spying on them.

You can also use software to monitor children's use of social media. You could let children know that you are using the software, and outline when and what you will be checking. [Internet Matters](#)<sup>4</sup> offers a guide to monitoring apps.

As we noted previously, however, such monitoring should be done in a way that respects children's own feelings and experiences, and uses these as a starting point for constructive dialogue, rather than children feeling they do not have any independence and privacy.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/apps-guide/monitoring-apps-parents-guide/>



## What tips can I offer my child about using social media?

Here are a few tips parents have shared:

- Be in control of your profile and what you share publicly – don't let social media companies manipulate you!
- Understand that some features of social media apps, such as 'likes' and 'streaks', are mechanisms designed to get a user to use an app frequently and so you should manage your engagement with them and not become obsessive about these features.
- Have fun sharing photographs and ideas with people you know and trust, but don't overshare. Not everything is appropriate to be shared online.
- Be nice to others online – treat other people the way that you would like to be treated.
- Don't judge your own life negatively because of what others post online – you should not think that someone is better than you or happier than you because of what they post, as they will be carefully choosing what they post and will no doubt have the same kinds of problems in life that everyone faces from time to time.
- Have a break from social media now and then if it is getting you down in any way – you will find that the world does not cave in, and your friends will still be there for you offline.
- Think about why you post messages about anxieties and worries before you post them. Will this really help, or will it make others unduly worried? There are lots of things children can be anxious about, such as friendships, school success, getting picked for a team, and so on. Social media can be an outlet for these anxieties, but they are not likely to be the cause. Encourage your child to think about when using social media is helping them to express their feelings and get support and when it is making those feelings and pressures linger. Again, parents can model this in their own use and share these experiences with children.

By providing your child with this kind of guidance you could develop your child's 'media literacy' skills. This means helping them to understand the ins and outs of media use, and how people can be manipulated and misled by the media. Fake news, for example, is encountered on social media. The National Literacy Trust has developed a [handy guide](#) for parents on talking to children about fake news.

We also recommend that parents introduce children to [BBC Own It](#).<sup>5</sup> This is a BBC resource, launched just over a year ago by the Duke of Cambridge, which is aimed at children and young people to help guide them through the online world

Full of fun and empowering tips, insight, stories and advice to help 9–12 year olds get the most out of their time online, it aims to help children develop the confidence and resilience to tackle the everyday challenges they face. An [Own it app](#)<sup>6</sup> will be launched shortly.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/ownit>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/childrens-app-own-it>



### **What should I do if I suspect my child is getting bullied online?**

Rather than ask your child directly about this, it is better to talk generally about what is happening in their online lives, and provide opportunities for them to feel safe enough to open up to you.

When they do, it is important that adults listen carefully to children and do not make any judgements about what they hear. Ask them about what they think the next steps should be, rather than just suggesting them yourself, as it gives a little more control to your child.

It is best not to immediately remove your child from all social media unless they say they want that, it may make them feel isolated and there are lots of useful spaces online for support. Help them to learn strategies from these to use to avoid being bullied and pressurised on social media. There are many websites that offer children guidance, such as the BBC's [Own It](https://www.bbc.com/ownit/dont-panic)<sup>7</sup> site, outlined above.

If the online bullying and/ or anti-social behaviour is happening at school, then let the school know about this so that it can be dealt with.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/ownit/dont-panic>

## Where can I get more help and advice on managing my child's use of screens and social media?

The UK's Chief Medical Office in England has produced guidance for parents and carers on [children's use of screens](#)<sup>8</sup>, and makes eight recommendations which resonate with the guidance offered in this booklet. The eight points are outlined in the following table:

<b>Sleep matters</b>	Ask children to leave their phone outside the bedroom before they go to sleep
<b>Education matters</b>	Abide by the school's policy on screen time
<b>Safety when out and about</b>	Advise children to put screens away as they cross the road
<b>Family time together</b>	Have screen-free family meal times
<b>Sharing sensibly</b>	Think and talk about how photographs and information is shared online
<b>Keep moving</b>	Remind children to take a break and move about after a couple of hours of sitting or lying down when using screens
<b>Talking helps</b>	Talk to your child about their use of screens
<b>Use useful phone features</b>	Some devices track usage – use these features for you and your child

There are lots of good websites out there for parents. Here, we offer a few that we know parents have found helpful.

[Digital Parenting Coach](#)<sup>9</sup>

[NSPCC](#)<sup>12</sup>

[The Digital Parenting Community](#)<sup>10</sup>

[Safer Internet](#)<sup>13</sup>

[Internet Matters](#)<sup>11</sup>

[Think U Know](#)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/777026/UK\\_CMO\\_commentary\\_on\\_screentime\\_and\\_social\\_media\\_map\\_of\\_reviews.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777026/UK_CMO_commentary_on_screentime_and_social_media_map_of_reviews.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.digitalparentingcoach.com>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheDigitalParentingCommunity/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.internetmatters.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>



# Conclusion



---

This booklet has offered some guidance for managing your child's use of social media, but there are also other ways for parents to find advice.

If your child attends a nursery or school, can you arrange with other parents in the class to have a group chat facility (for example, using WhatsApp), in which you can exchange questions and experiences about bringing up children generally. Media use is one area of children's lives that parents wonder about, but there are others, and such discussions could be of value. You could also talk to staff in the nursery or school about the kinds of rules and practices they have, so that your approach is consistent with theirs.

Finally, if you find approaches that work well with your child, share them with others, so that they can learn from your experience. Some of the sites above have chat facilities, and so letting others learn from your successes (and mistakes) can be of value.



Social Media,  
Television And Children



[www.stac-study.org](http://www.stac-study.org)