

Keeping your under 5 safe online

Whether it's watching videos, playing games on their devices or talking to Alexa – today's under 5s are spending more and more time online. Within this article we highlight some of the benefits of young children accessing the internet, and share some key advice about how to make sure your child has a positive and safe experience online.

Recent statistics released by Ofcom revealed that over 50% of children aged 3-4 go online for nearly 8 hours a week, and 1 in 5 children aged 3-4 have their own tablet. This may be surprising, but [research](#) from the London School of Economics has shown that a number of families are making increased investments in digital technologies as a means of furthering their children's education, maintaining connections with family and friends, or simply facilitating and enjoying daily life.

How young is too young to start engaging with my child about online safety?

It's never too early to start taking action to keep your child safe online. As soon as your child starts talking about or exploring the online world, you should initiate conversations with them about their online activities and begin to put support in place. [Research](#) has found that children form 'digital habits' during early development (such as using devices after bedtime), and so it is important for parents and carers to support children to develop positive – and lasting – digital habits from an early age.

What are the benefits of my under 5 accessing technology?

There are many potential benefits of children engaging with digital technology from an early age. The internet presents children with opportunities to learn, connect with family, develop their creativity, as well as have fun. Apps, games and websites designed for under 5s help children to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and support them to develop their fine-motor skills (such as their ability to move fingers independently by pointing and pushing buttons, and improving hand-eye coordination). A number of families use video chat and messaging services as a way to connect with family and friends, which allows young children to maintain and strengthen relationships with relatives. There are lots of child friendly and fun sites which you can explore with your child, such as [Cbeebies](#), where children can watch videos, play games, learn and be entertained.

What can I do to support my under 5?

There are a number of things you can do to further support your under 5 as they begin to navigate the digital world. This is not an exhaustive list, but a range of strategies which you can use to help improve your child's online experience:

- **Explore together:** As a parent or carer, you will be aware of what your child does on a tablet; but as well as being aware, explore their favourite apps and websites with



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them. This can be a fantastic way to find out what your child enjoys doing online, as well as having fun and learning together.

- **Talk to your child about their online experiences:** Start and continue regular conversations with your under 5 about what they enjoy doing online, opening a dialogue about their internet use as well as introducing online safety messages. The earlier these conversations start, the better – introducing a culture of talking openly about the online world. These conversations can be a great way to reinforce messages that if your child sees anything online which makes them feel worried or sad, they can tell you or another adult they trust and they can help.
- **Supervise your under 5 while they're online:** Keep the devices your child uses in communal areas of the house such as in the living room or kitchen where an appropriate adult is able to supervise. Children under 5 should not access the internet unsupervised in private spaces, such as alone in their bedroom or bathroom.
- **Parental controls:** Make use of the parental controls available on your home broadband and any internet enabled device in your home (including the 'Internet of Things', such as smart speakers and toys which connect to the internet). You can find out more about how to use parental controls by visiting your broadband provider's website, or by viewing advice/step-by-step guides available on the [internet matters site](#). If you need any help setting up parental controls, you can also call up the NSPCC/O2 Helpline or visit an O2 store (you do not have to be an O2 customer to access this support).
- **SafeSearch:** The use of 'SafeSearch' is highly recommended for use with young children. Most web search engines such as Google and Bing will have a 'SafeSearch' function, which will allow you to limit the content your child is exposed to whilst online. Look out for the 'Settings' button on your web browser homepage, which is often shaped like a small cog. It is important to understand that no 'SafeSearch' function is 100% effective, and this cannot be used alone to protect your child from being exposed to harmful and inappropriate content. Remember: nothing is more valuable than open and frequent conversations with your child about their online activities.
- **Set boundaries:** As a family you can agree a set of rules, such as locations in the house where devices can be used, times of day your child can use devices, or which age appropriate apps or websites they can access (ones that don't allow them to talk to people they don't know online). On devices you do not wish your under 5 to access, use passwords and keep these devices out of reach of your child.
- **Lead by example:** Modelling the digital habits you expect from your child (for example, no tablets during meal-times) can be a really effective way of supporting young children to develop their own positive digital behaviours from an early age.

