

Safeguarding Newsletter

Christmas Edition



A Christmas Gift That Keeps on Giving: Reviewing Mobile Device Safety for Teenagers

Christmas is a magical time, and for many teenagers, it's also the moment they unwrap a shiny new smartphone or tablet. Whether it's their first device or they're seasoned users, the holidays provide the perfect opportunity to revisit and reinforce digital safety habits. As we approach the new year, here's how parents can help teenagers start 2025 with safe and responsible use of their devices.

A Fresh Start: Setting Up New Devices Safely

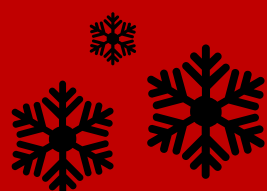
If your teenager is using their device for the first time, take these essential steps before they dive in:

- **Initial Setup:** Activate built-in parental controls and set up secure user accounts with strong, unique passwords.
- **Wi-Fi and Data:** Connect to secure Wi-Fi networks and teach your child about avoiding public, unsecured connections.
- **Updates and Protection:** Ensure the device's operating system and apps are up to date and install reliable antivirus software if needed.

A New Year's Resolution for Digital Safety

For teenagers already familiar with mobile devices, Christmas and the New Year offer a chance to reflect on their online habits and refresh their approach to safety:

- **Review Privacy Settings:** Social media platforms frequently update their policies. Help your teenager check their privacy settings and remove unnecessary permissions for apps.
- **Audit Apps:** Go through the device together, uninstalling unused or suspicious apps, and ensure all installed apps are age-appropriate.



Set Realistic Boundaries

Holidays can mean extra screen time, but as the new year begins, it's important to re-establish healthy limits:

- **Screen Time Rules:** Set app time limits and encourage device-free zones, like during family meals or bedtime.
- **Balanced Use:** Help teenagers balance gaming, social media, and schoolwork with offline hobbies or activities.

Discuss the Risks of New Devices

A new device can bring new risks, so make sure your teenager is aware of these:

- **Cyberbullying:** Remind them to report and block abusive behavior and never engage in online arguments.
- **Oversharing:** Teach them to avoid sharing personal information, such as their location or school details, on social media.
- **Scams:** Highlight the importance of ignoring suspicious messages, links, or calls.

Teach Safe Online Habits

Teenagers often trust technology more than they should.

Reinforce these habits to keep them safe:

- **Passwords:** Avoid reusing passwords across accounts and use a password manager if needed.
- **Two-Factor Authentication:** Enable it on key accounts to prevent unauthorized access.
- **Location Services:** Turn off location sharing in apps unless it's absolutely necessary.

Monitor, Don't Micromanage

It's important to strike a balance between oversight and trust:

- **Set Up Monitoring Apps:** Tools like Qustodio or Bark can alert you to risks without prying into private conversations.
- **Encourage Transparency:** Let them know they can talk to you about anything troubling they encounter online.

Emphasise the Importance of Respect and Responsibility

A device is a privilege that comes with responsibilities:

- **Respect for Others:** Discuss the impact of hurtful messages or posts and the importance of treating others kindly online.
- **Digital Footprint:** Remind them that what they post online can stay there forever, so they should think before sharing.

Prepare for Emergencies

Help your teenager know what to do if something goes wrong:

- **Reporting Issues:** Teach them how to report content or users on social media platforms.
- **Family Rules:** Have a clear plan for what they should do if they lose their device or encounter an online threat.

Lead by Example

As parents, our habits often shape our children's behavior. Set an example by:

- Limiting your own screen time.
- Practicing device-free family time.
- Modelling respectful online interactions.

Celebrate Progress

As the new year unfolds, celebrate milestones in your teenager's responsible device use. Whether they've stuck to screen time limits or learned to navigate social media safely, recognizing their efforts can motivate them to keep good habits.

Final Thoughts

A mobile device can be one of the most exciting gifts a teenager receives, but with great tech comes great responsibility. Whether they're using their first device or upgrading to the latest model, now is the perfect time to revisit safety measures. By fostering open communication and empowering your teenager to make smart choices, you can help them start the new year with confidence in the digital world.

Let's make 2025 a year of safe and balanced device use for the whole family!

At National Online Safety, we believe that empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to build up informed conversations about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, links and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SETTING UP APPS, GAMES AND SOFTWARE

Millions of new phones, tablets, laptops and games consoles will be nesting under Christmas trees this year. However, even if parents and carers have gone to the trouble of setting up these new devices and enabling the safety features, there are still potential hazards in the apps, games and software that children will want to install and use. Knowing what to look for and discussing those risks with your child may help avoid any nasty surprises this Christmas. Here are our top tips for ensuring that unwrapping this year's presents doesn't unleash any unexpected dangers.

TAKE NOTE OF AGE RATINGS

Back when most games were bought in shops, checking the age rating was easy: it was on the front of the box. Now that most games are downloaded, it's less so – but not impossible. All reputable download stores show a game's age rating at the point of purchase, and you can check the suitability of a specific title your child wants to play at www.fws.gov.uk/looking4good/games.

18

'FREE' ISN'T ALWAYS FREE

The games market has changed radically in recent years. Many titles are free to download, but then expect players to pay for cosmetic items (as in Fortnite) or to unlock additional content. There can be huge peer pressure for children to pay for these items. Agree a budget for in-game purchases before the game is downloaded, and make sure children don't purchase in-game purchases by themselves.

DISABLE IN-APP PURCHASING

It's not wise to leave children with devices that can make in-app purchases without your permission. Ideally, set up computers, consoles and phones as child accounts based on adult's authorisation to buy anything. On shared devices (like iPads, which don't allow user accounts), check the settings to ensure that in-app purchasing requires the account holder's password, fingerprint or face ID.

CHECK THE SPECS

To avoid let-downs, check a game's specs before buying – especially for PC or Mac, where games often need a particular graphics chip or processor to work. iOS like Apple's App Store and Google Play like Google's Play Store can show your computer to see if it will run certain games properly. On consoles, make sure you're buying the right version: some newer Xbox or PlayStation games won't play on older consoles.

MONITOR IN-GAME COMMS

Voice chat with friends is part of the fun of modern gaming – but danger lurks here too. Many titles have open chat systems, meaning that children could speak to strangers or hear about language and verbal abuse when games get particularly competitive. Using a shared family cred (as opposed to alone in bedrooms) for online gaming is a good way to keep an occasional ear on what's being said.

BE WARY OF GIFTS

Titles like Roblox, Minecraft and Fortnite have in-game currencies, which can be earned through progress in the game – but can also be bought with real money. A common scam is for a young player to be offered currency if they click a link, visit a certain site or contact another user directly. Warn your child about such offers; they should show you if they're in any doubt over an in-game gift.

APPS ARE AGE RATED, TOO

Like games, apps in the major stores have age ratings, but – so you can see in advance whether an app is appropriate for your child. Additionally, phones' parental control settings allow you to set age limits, preventing young ones from downloading unsuitable apps themselves. These ratings aren't infallible, however: we've seen TV apps featuring adult stars with an age rating of 2, for example.

18

CONSIDER STORAGE

Most apps and games will tell you in the app store how much space they need on a device. Check this carefully – especially with games, which can run into hundreds of megabytes and beyond. If you don't have enough free storage on a device to run the game or app, you won't get a refund from the store. You can normally check a device's available storage space through the settings menu.

WATCH OUT FOR IMITATORS

Even in the official stores, unscrupulous rogue apps can slip through the net. Common tricks are apps or games that have a slightly different name to the genuine article (Fortnite rather than Fortnite, for instance) or use logos which deliberately look very similar to the official app. To avoid downloading these imitations, read the app's description and check who the publisher is listed as.

16

LEGAL APPS THAT BREAK THE LAW

There are many apps that are perfectly legal but enable illegal activity – streaming apps which let people watch football matches, say, without paying for pay or BT sport. Prosecution for using such apps is rare, but they can lead to risky behaviour like viewing rogue streams on sites teeming with malware links. Watch for children installing untrusted apps with "TV" stream or sport in the name.

IN-APP REGISTRATION

It's common for apps and games to ask users to register, entering personal details like email address, date of birth and other information you might not want your child to divulge. Ask them to get your permission before giving any personal info to an app – and consider using your details rather than the child's, so they're not targeted by marketing spam or put at risk of having their data stolen.

STAY UPDATED

Most games and apps are subject to regular updates, which not only offer new content and features but also provide critical security improvements. Children tend to ignore such updates – usually because they don't understand why they're important, or they simply want to get straight on with gaming. Check your child's devices periodically to make sure these updates are being installed.

Meet Our Expert

Bobby Collier has been a technology journalist and editor for more than 22 years, working for titles such as the Sunday Times, Which? PC Pro and Caring magazine. He's appeared regularly as a technology pundit on television and radio, including on Newsnight, Radio 4 Live and ITV News at Ten. He has two children and has written regularly about internet safety issues.



NOS
National
Online
Safety®
#WakeUpWednesday

www.nationalonlinesafety.com

[@natonlinesafety](https://twitter.com/natonlinesafety)

[/NationalOnlineSafety](https://facebook.com/NationalOnlineSafety)

[@natonlinesafety](https://instagram.com/natonlinesafety)

None of this guide do so at their own discretion. Liability is reserved NOS. Content as of the date of release: 14.12.2022



We're still here

Supporting you over the festive period

Kooth's live chat hours over the holiday period

24th December	(Christmas Eve)	12pm – 8pm
25th December	(Christmas Day)	4pm – 8pm
26th December	(Boxing Day)	12pm – 8pm
31st December	(New Years Eve)	12pm – 8pm
1st January	(New Years Day)	4pm – 8pm

Other days over the holiday period will follow our usual live chat hours of 12pm – 10pm on weekdays and 6pm – 10pm on weekends.

kooth.com



MERRY
CHRISTMAS
AND
HAPPY NEW YEAR

