

For more information, please visit our school page: <https://www.balliolschool.co.uk/page/?title=E%2DSafety&pid=83>
Sign up here for a free weekly parent e-safety newsletter: <https://www.internetmatters.org/about-us/newsletters/>

Mobile phones: Do you know the risks?

We know that children having access to a smartphone can expose children to risks including:

- Viewing inappropriate content
- Excessive screen time/use, which in turn can affect their mental health and sleep pattern.
- Contact from inappropriate people/grooming
- Cyberbullying
- Spending money on in-app purchases/scams

What effects do mobile phones have on children's mental health?

Compass discuss the research around this important topic, outlining the positive and negative effects that mobile phones have: <https://compass-uk.org/services/compass-changing-lives/onlineresources/what-effects-do-mobile-phones-have-on-children-and-youngpeoples-mental-health/>

EE Online Safety Hub

EE has published age guidance for smartphone usage to improve children's digital wellbeing. In summary, they recommend that children under 11 should use non-smart devices, for children aged 11-13, they advise that if a smartphone is used, then parental controls should be enabled and access to social media restricted. Finally, for 13-16-year-olds they still recommend that parental controls are implemented and appropriate restrictions set up. You can read the full guidance here: <https://ee.co.uk/internet-online-safety>

Could you delay when your child is given a smartphone with Smartphone Free Childhood?

The premise behind this movement is that all parents/carers of a class all agree not to give their children smartphones (therefore the level of peer pressure is reduced) for a set time or until a specific age: <https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/>

What device?

When you think it is the right time for your child to have a phone, then 'Which?' provide an overview of some options available: <https://www.which.co.uk/reviews/mobile-phones/article/buying-a-first-mobile-phone-best-dumb-phones-and-smartphones-for-kidsaA03C3Y8aTzr>

How old is your child online?

Has your child (or you on their behalf) signed up to access social media/or a game online but have said that they are older than they are so they can have an account? For example, did your 8 year old join TikTok and put their age as 13 or did you create their account and put your own age? If so, please read some of the implications outlined below that you should think about.

If TikTok thinks your child is 13 when they join but they are in fact 8, then by the time your child reaches 13, the app will think they are 18. This puts your child at risk of viewing content that is not age appropriate and may mean your child will view adverts aimed at adults.

In addition, now the app thinks your child is an adult, they will have access to all functionalities (whereas some apps place restrictions on access to under 18s for example to direct messaging).

The following news article from Ofcom explains this in further detail as well as providing tips to help keep your child safe online:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2022/risks-of-children-using-false-ages-on-social-media>

Age ratings Parent Zone provide some advice on age ratings and why they matter in this blog: <https://parentzone.org.uk/article/age-ratings>

Virtual Private Networks

A Virtual Private Network (VPN) helps make your connection between a device and the internet more secure and can help protect personal information and add privacy. However, whilst a VPN has benefits, it is important that you are aware that if your child is using a VPN, they may be able to get round Wi-Fi restrictions, access blocked or restricted websites and bypass parental controls. It may also mean that their browsing history is hidden.

The NSPCC provides a helpful overview of VPNs, plus top tips and conversation starters here:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/vpns-andonline-safety/>

Using AI to alter images

AI image generator and moderator tools are widely available and often used by children. Whilst these tools can be used for creative purposes, we need to ensure our children are aware of the appropriate way in which to use them and the circumstances when they should not be used, even if harm is not intended.

What are AI image generator and moderator tools?

It is when Artificial Intelligence is used to create or modify images, for example it could be used to swap faces, change expressions or for more sinister reasons, such as to remove clothes. These images are often very realistic and therefore difficult to see that they are fake.

Privacy concerns and consent

If your child is using these tools, they need to be aware of potential loss of privacy and the importance of consent. They should know that they should only use images of other people with consent.

What does my child need to know about using these tools?

- Children shouldn't use AI tools to manipulate images of school staff. Even if the child's intention is not malicious, children should not use AI tools to create or edit photos of teachers under any circumstances.
- Manipulation of images of friends or other children – if you are using images of other people, then consent must always be sought.
- The tools should not be used to create images that can embarrass or hurt others - this is a form of online bullying.
- Copyright issues – who owns the copyright? These images could be reused by others, which can affect their own digital footprint

What should I do?

- Chat to your child if they are using these tools and ascertain the reason why. Ask them to show you the images that they have created.
- Check the age ratings of any apps/websites that your child is using and set up appropriate parental controls.
- Develop your child's digital literacy by teaching them to recognise online risks and to behave responsibly online

Further information

- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/onlinesafety/talking-to-children-about-ai>
- <https://oursaferschools.co.uk/2025/02/18/understanding-imageconsent-at-schools/>

Balance screen time tips

Internet Matters have created simple tips to help you develop healthy online habits for your child. They also answer key questions such as “how much screentime is too much” and “is gaming bad for children.”

Access this information here:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/creating-a-balanced-digital-dietwith-screen-time-tips>

