My first connected device

Tips to get kids set up safe on their first owned devices

Get advice to help children explore, learn, and play safely on their first connected device whether it's a smartphone, smart watch, laptop, games console or tablet.

Things to consider

Are they ready for their own device?

From Ofcom's research we know that half of ten-year-olds now own their own smartphone and by the time they are five, **35 % of children own their own tablet.** As device ownership seems to be getting younger and younger, it's important to consider a couple of things to ensure children get the best out of their connected devices.

1. **What do they need it for?** Have a conversation with your child to find out the reasons why they want a new device. For example, to support a hobby, play games, stay in touch on the way to school, and back or for homework.

2. **Are they likely to take care of it?** If your child already is quite good at taking care of their stuff, that's a good sign that they'll be responsible with their own device. It's important that they understand the value of a device too and the importance of keeping it safe.

3. **Will having their own device help to support their growing independence?** If your child is becoming more self-sufficient and mature, the added responsibility of having their own device can help them learn how to self-regulate their screen use and build their digital resilience..

4. **Do you have online safety rules in place?** Following or not following these rules could indicate whether your child is ready to safely manage how they use their own device.

5. **Do they make good decisions about how they spend their time online?** Having a good balance of media is key to ensuring children thrive online. If your child is watching, playing, or interacting on websites, apps or games that may put them at risk it's worth having more conversations with them about how to stay safe before handing over a device.

6. **Choosing the right device for children's needs.**
   To ensure you choose a device that meets their needs, think about whether to go for a brand new device or a hand-me down device.

   Giving them a hand-me down device is cost-effective however, many children are not fond of hand-me-downs particularly when it comes to smartphones. They may have pressure to have the latest model for fear of feeling 'left out' or bullied. If you do buy a new device, ensure you have set parental controls prior to gifting your child. If you are going for a hand-me down device, it's important to factory reset the device and set parental controls to make it safer for them to use.

   Once you've considered these questions, if you think they are ready, you may want to create a family digital agreement. This will ensure your child fully understands the responsibilities of owning a device and the possible online risks that come with it.
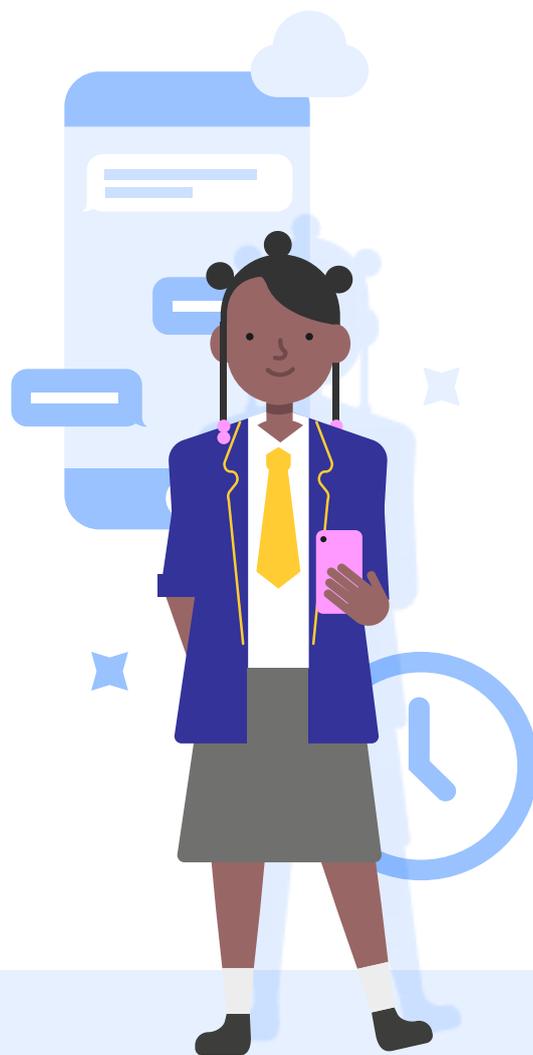
Getting started
Buying tips

If you have decided to go for a brand-new device for your child here are few things to consider:

Smartphone

- **Pay As You Go (PAYG) or contract?** As you're likely to be the bill payer for your children, it's important to know that data for internet browsing often has limits and can cost extra if exceeded. PAYG is a pre-pay system and therefore ideal for children. Monthly contracts cost a regular amount but could incur further charges for going over allowances.

- **Which phone to get?** Basic (non-smart) phones' batteries last much longer so they don't need charging every night. But if you want your child to access more features, then a smartphone is a better option. These are more expensive than a basic phone but provide much wider functionality.

- **Will the phone be used from gaming and socialising?** Most of the latest smartphone will be able to run complex video games with online interactions. If your child is likely to be using their phone to access apps like Instagram, TikTok, Among Us, Roblox or Fortnite to play and interact with friends, it's worth checking out the best ways to set some restrictions to keep them safe from online risks on the device.

See our mobile phone tech buying guide for more advice
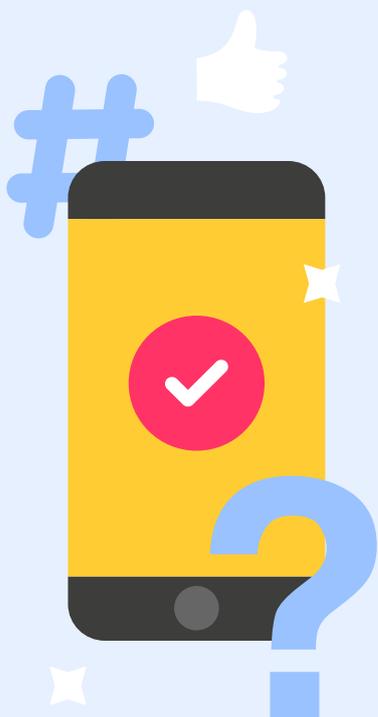
Laptop & tablets

- **Should you buy a tablet or laptop?** What has your child asked for? This will practically answer your question. If they haven't stated, the easiest way to decide which to buy is to consider how they will be used.

- **Deciding on the brand.** The three most popular laptop brands are Apple, Windows, and Chrome - these prices can vary according to what you need the laptop to do. With tablets, the most common are from Apple or Amazon (Kindle). There are other less expensive options such as the Samsung Galaxy tablet.

- **What about an eBook reader?** If you don't feel your child needs the connectivity offered by a tablet but would like to give them a tablet experience for reading and study, an eBook reader looks like a tablet but is technically different.

See our laptop & tablet tech buying guide for more advice

Gaming console

- **What games do they plan on playing?** Some can only be played on specific consoles so it's best to check with your child on this to help you choose the right console.

- **What tech do you already have?** A lot of games can be played cross platform if they already have a tablet. It's worth trying out games on that system before buying a console.

- **Think about starting with older consoles** - If they are not fussed on having the latest games, starting out with older consoles can be a good cheaper option to get started.

See our **gaming console tech buying guide** for more advice
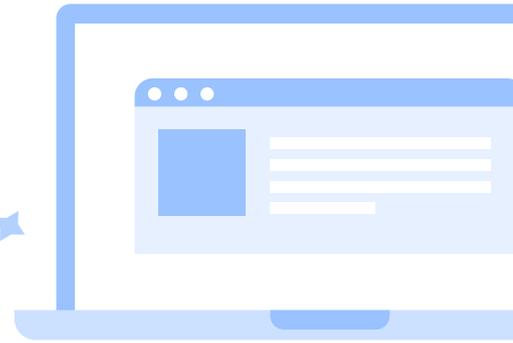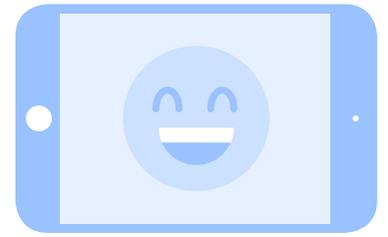
Setting up safely

Have you talked about the online risks?

Having access to their own devices can encourage children and young people to have more freedom to explore, interact and create. However, there are online risks your child should be aware of such as online grooming, cyberbullying, inappropriate content, etc.

It's important to use in-built device controls to create a safer environment for them to explore. Review these settings regularly and ensure your children understand why these settings are helpful, so they don't try to bypass them because they are keen to see a particular type of content.

If you can, set up their device safely before giving it to them. Have a discussion about why you are limiting the time they can spend on certain apps/games, or why the device can't be used after a certain time in the evening etc. Involving your children in these discussions and decisions means that they are more likely to follow the rules provided.

Check out our set up safely guide for more information.

Conversations to have

Setting digital boundaries

- Ensure you have regular conversations of these risks before they get their device and after. Click here for more information

- Talk about their digital footprint - make sure your child understands everything they do online, can be hard to remove so it's best to only put things out there they would want everyone to see.

- Create a digital family agreement. An agreement can cover digital etiquette, treating others fairly, bullying or sending inappropriate images or messages.

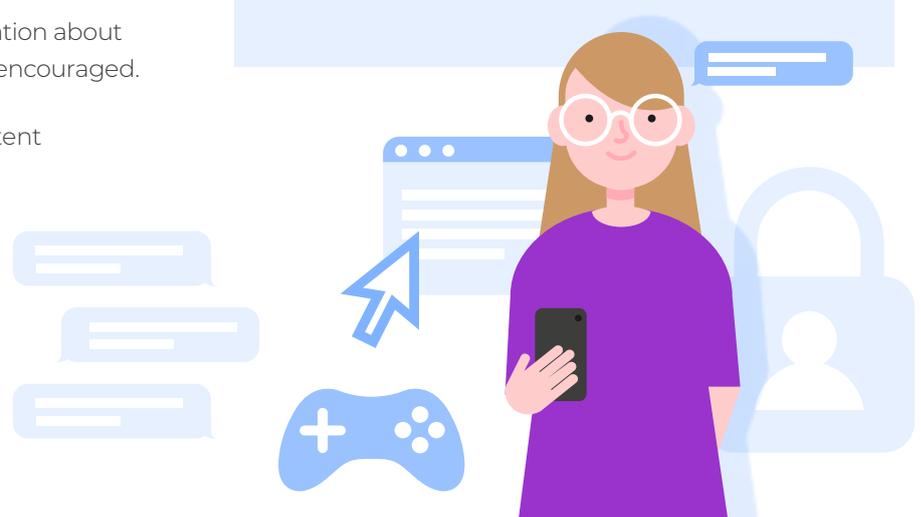- See here for some advice on how to tackle these topics.

Staying engaged in their digital life

- Be a positive digital role model. Children will tend to do what you rather than what you say so be mindful of your own digital habits and ensure you set an example.

- Screen time - Encourage children to think carefully about what they actually do while on screen. As well as setting boundaries on time, getting them to understand how to balance what they do on their devices can help them get the best out of them. See our screen time balance guide for more information.

- Talking regularly encourages conversation about their on and offline activities is highly encouraged.

- Make use of filters to help block content that is not age-appropriate.

Online safety advice by age

- **Under 5s:** For younger kids just starting out online, explaining what the internet is and exploring new website and apps together is key. While they may be using age-specific sites, it's also important to advise them to talk to you if they see anything upsetting.

- **6-10s:** As kids get more independent at this age, talking more specifically about issues they may come across like inappropriate content, talking to people they don't know and cyberbullying (if they are chatting in games) can give them a good foundation to build their resilience online.

- **11-13:** At this age, it's likely that they will have their own device. If they do, it's important to have regular check-ins about what they do online and who they are talking to. Getting them to walk you through how they use different apps can be a good way to learn more and help them stay safe.

- **14+:** As they get more active online, it's more than likely that they'll be more exposed to potential online risks. Although they may be less forthcoming with what they do online, it's important to make sure they know where to go to get help if they run into issues and understand how to report and block content on the apps they use.

For more age specific advice, see our age advice guides.