

SAFE and SMART

Keeping Children Safe Online

March 2024



Welcome to the March 2024 edition of this half-termly newsletter.

In this edition we are taking a look at online bullying, managing screen time and the online service Twitch.

IMPORTANT: the information in this newsletter is intended for adults. By its very nature, online safety goes into aspects using terminology and explanations which may not be suitable for younger children. Please use your discretion, only you can decide what is or is not appropriate for your child.

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What is ONLINE BULLYING

A form of bullying that is carried out through the use of electronic media devices.

Often called cyberbullying, there are many different statistics when it comes to identifying online bullying trends, but on average around a quarter of children will experience some form of online bullying and just under a fifth of children will bully others. Furthermore, the majority of children who are experiencing online bullying will also be subjected to face-to-face bullying.

Bullying in any form can be significantly traumatic for a child, but the online aspect means that there is no escape. The most common type of online bullying is often name calling.

Who is at risk?

Any child can be at risk from all forms of bullying, but if a child is seen as different to others in some way they can be more vulnerable, such as being shy, introverted or have low self-esteem. But the opposite is also true, for example popular children can be bullied as others may be jealous of their popularity.

Additionally, children may be more vulnerable because of race, gender, sexual orientation or a disability.

Signs and Effects

With all forms of bullying different children will exhibit different signs and effects, but these can include:

- Being afraid to go to school or feigning illness.
- Changes in behaviour, such as losing confidence, being nervous, being distressed, withdrawn or anxious.
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits.
- Changes in friendships and being wary of others.
- With online bullying, you may see changes in their tech use, such as not playing games as much as they used to or playing with different people..

DID YOU KNOW?

In January 2024 Instagram updated their app in an attempt to prevent young people from seeing sensitive content as well as 'nudges' to encourage young people to close Instagram at night. A very welcome update for young people 16 and under is that they can only be messaged or added to group chats by people they already follow. In other words, unknown adults will not (or should not) be able to DM (private message) young people.



Support for children being bullied

It goes without saying that, as parents/carers it is important we support our children if they are bullied, so here are some tips:

1. **Open communication** - encourage children to share their online activities, including any issues they face such as bullying, as this behaviour can have a significant emotional impact.
2. **Educate** - teach your children what bullying is and how to spot the signs. Some see it as banter or just larking about and may not recognise bullying behaviour.
3. **Report and block** - ensure your children know how to report and block on the games/apps they are using. Also ensure they know how to take screenshots in case evidence is needed.
4. **School** - your child's school will already be doing a lot of education with your child about bullying and can offer lots of help and support.

Support for the bully

As well as supporting children who are being bullied, it's important we support the bully too, this



is because there is often an underlying cause of the behaviour:

1. **Start the conversation** - if you become aware your child is bullying others, chat with them without judgment or accusations, try to find out why they are exhibiting this behaviour.
2. **Impact** - children don't often realise the impact of their actions, especially online where empathy can be more difficult. Ensure they understand the impact they are having on others by encouraging empathy and accountability.
3. **Seek help** - if the behaviour persists or your child refuses to engage, they may need further help from a professional. Discuss this with your child's school who may be able to advise.

DID YOU KNOW?

There's a lot going on around the world, especially events that may be scary or traumatic for children given the likelihood they will see these events on the news, social media feeds etc.

It is really important that we are able to talk to our children about these events in order to minimise any negative impact.

The Mental Health Foundation have put together a really useful article giving lots of advice which you can read by clicking [HERE](#) or go to the following web page:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/articles/>



How to: Manage Screen Time

It's a common, understandable concern that many parents have, particularly when screen time is continually in the media, often referencing 'addiction', but is 'time' the most important factor?

It can be, especially if it is having a negative effect on exercise, relationships, family dynamics, homework etc. But unless you understand the motivation of your child you will rarely sort the matter of time out. In other words, WHY is your child spending longer and longer behind their screen, playing games, using apps etc.?

Try to shift the conversation from 'screen time' to 'screen use'. For many children, it's simply because they want to be with their friends, e.g. playing online games with them or chatting via messaging (including FOMO (fear of missing out on what their friends are doing)). For some, it's because they have few or no friends and they go online to compensate for this or even practice their social skills with others, which is easier to do behind a screen rather than face to face.

There are so many nuances, a single piece of advice is impossible, which is why it's important to have the conversation with your child: finding out their motivation and using this to develop a strategy.

For example, in conversation with children, they often say::

- Screen time is misleading. Time is important, but talk to me and understand what I am doing, this is more important.



- Learn the dynamics of the games that I'm playing; when you call me down for dinner I might be annoyed because I've just spent 30 minutes trying to finish a level in my game and I can't save it. Instead give me a warning - 15, 10 and 5 minutes.
- Understand what I am doing online; you might see me sitting in front of my device for hours and get annoyed with this, but I'm doing lots of different things. I'm learning, I'm having fun and I'm socialising with my friends. Spend some time with me and learn what I am doing (children sometimes describe this as 'spend a day in my shoes').

Top Tips

- Have regular conversations - and make daily chats a part of their life so that it becomes natural.
- Healthy habits early - start the conversation and set boundaries at a young age.
- Agree boundaries - every child's needs is different, create a Family Agreement.
- Set up parental controls - many devices/apps/games have controls that can help, click HERE for guidance.

Social Media - Twitch

Twitch is “an interactive live-streaming service for content spanning gaming, entertainment, sports, music and more.”

Age Requirements: 13+ but there are no restrictions preventing accessing.

Put simply, Twitch is similar to YouTube but content is live streamed rather than pre-recorded video.

Twitch first launched in 2011 and bought by Amazon in 2014. It isn't as popular as other online services such as YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok etc. but a lot of children and young people use Twitch to either watch live streams (often their favourite games or gamers) or to live stream themselves (again, often their favourite games).

The most popular games streamed are Fortnite (12+ rating) and Grand Theft Auto V (18+ rating).

Key Features

- **Watching Streams:** You can browse by game (or other genre) or by channel.
- **Streaming:** You can set up your own channel and live stream yourself and your screen.



- **Chat:** While watching a stream or streaming yourself you can chat with others in the chatroom, however only users that follow each other can chat directly.
- **Donate:** You can donate money (called bits) to your favourite streamers.
- **Subscribe:** Some streamers offer subscription services for access to exclusive content/perks.

Risks

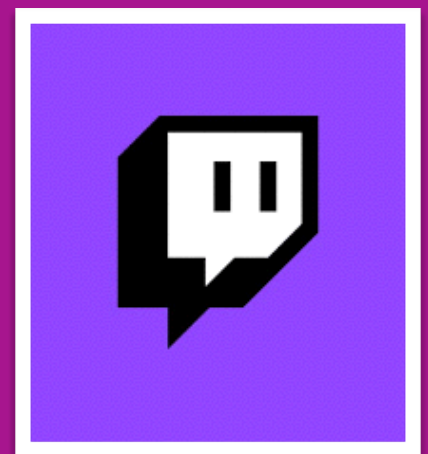
Much like YouTube there is a huge amount of family-friendly, fun and inspirational content on Twitch, but as with anything like this there are risks too:

- **Inappropriate content:** although sexually explicit content is not allowed on Twitch

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2023 the most followed channel on Twitch belonged to Ninja (Richard Tyler Blevins) who, at the time, had just under 19 million followers on Twitch, media reports suggest that he earns around 50,000 dollars per month.

On YouTube Ninja currently has just under 24 million subscribers on his channel from which he reportedly earns around 50,000 dollars per month.



there has, in the past, been an abundance of 'suggestive' content, although Twitch are trying to clamp down on this.

- **Inappropriate chat:** although channels and chat are often moderated, it isn't difficult for inappropriate/illegal chat to slip through the net with comments related to sex, gender, race etc.
- **Unwanted contact:** Private messages on Twitch are known as 'Whispers'. Is your child friends with, and chatting with unknown persons?

Safety Settings

The safety settings available within Twitch are limited, but include:

- **Enable Chat Filter** (as a viewer): scroll to the bottom of the chat, click 'Settings', then toggle 'Chat Filters' on.
- **Report a Streamer:** if a Streamer goes against community guidelines they can be reported by going to the bottom of the live stream, click the 3 dots, then click 'Report User'.



- **Report or Block a user:** Within chat you can block/report another user. Click on the user, click the 3 dots and then click on either 'Block' or 'Report'.

Talk to your Child

If your child is using Twitch, either to watch streams or if they are going live, ask them what they love about Twitch, who their favourite streamer is and what they enjoy watching. Ask them if they know what 'whispers' are and if they have ever received a whisper from someone they didn't know.

If your child is live streaming, are you happy with this? What are they streaming and why?

DID YOU KNOW?

Like many platforms, Twitch has a guide for parents and, although quite limited, it has some useful advice for parents and carers on age restrictions, chat filters, stream moderation, donation scams and more.

You can view the guide by clicking [HERE](#) or go to the following link:








https://safety.twitch.tv/s/article/Guide-Parents-Educators?language=en_US



Common Apps

This is not an exhaustive list, but tends to be the more popular apps used by children and young people.

Age requirements are set within the terms and conditions of the app provider, don't be confused by ratings in the app store which can sometimes be different.

App	Age	Comments
	13 and over	Discord - is a voice, video and text chat app that's used by tens of millions of people aged 13+ to tap and hang out with communities or their friends. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	Instagram - is a photo and video sharing app where people can upload photos, videos and messages to share with others. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	Snapchat - is a very popular app that lets users swap pictures and videos (Snaps) with others which are meant to disappear after they are viewed. There is also a messaging feature. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	TikTok - is a social media app that allows users to create, watch and share short videos shot on mobile devices or webcams. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	Twitch - is where people come together to chat and interact live. Think YouTube, but it is live rather than pre-recorded. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	16 and over	WhatsApp - is a messaging app which uses text, images, video and voice record features to connect with others. Parental settings can be found HERE
	18 and over	Reddit - is a network of communities (called subreddits) where people can share information, their interests and hobbies. Reddit is an 18+ app, there are no parental controls.