Summer Safeguarding snippet
June 2025

Once again, there is a lot to report in this issue, as the media are always full of safeguarding issues and concerns. I have also selected some guides and updates that I hope you and your children find useful. As we head toward the summer break, I will ensure there are some useful numbers and contacts you can access over holidays. In case anything arises that is of concern, and you require further advice. As ever, with any of the articles in here, please do not hesitate to contact me or the year team should you require any further help or guidance, we will always do our best to support or signpost you appropriately.

All Wake Up Wednesday guides will be downloaded and attached to the email.

ZEPETO

A world of fun… but what are the risks? 🔵

ZEPETO is a popular app where children create 3D avatars and explore virtual worlds, but its lack of parental controls and the potential for anonymous chat means adults need to stay switched on 👀

This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide explains the risks young users might face on ZEPETO – from chatting with strangers and encountering inappropriate content, to in-game spending and the pressure of daily rewards. We also share top tips to help parents and educators support safer screen time 💡

SEARCH ENGINES

🔍 Search engines are a huge part of daily life, helping us find information in an instant. But with this convenience comes a hidden risk, especially for young users. ⚠️

🖥 With billions of websites just a click away, children can easily encounter misleading, inappropriate, or even illegal content. Search engines don't always filter this effectively, and features like AI-generated summaries or unlabelled ads can make things even trickier to navigate.

That's why this week's #WakeUpWednesday guide focuses on what parents and educators need to know about search engines. From the risks of misinformation and AI errors to practical steps like activating parental controls and promoting digital literacy, it's packed with expert advice to help keep children safe online. 👧🛡

FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING

A strong sense of belonging is the foundation for emotional wellbeing ❤️ confidence 👍 and academic success 🎓 But how can schools and families create truly inclusive environments where every child feels seen, heard, and valued? Our free guide has the answers 📋

Packed with ten practical, easy-to-apply tips — like celebrating individuality 🎉 promoting participation 🙋 and tackling bullying head-on 🚫 — this free guide empowers parents and educators to foster a culture of belonging at school and at home 🏫🏠

MINECRAFT

Still the best-selling game of all time, Minecraft has hundreds of millions of players - making it more important than ever to stay informed. With its vibrant worlds 🌍 and endless potential for creativity 🎨 it's no wonder Minecraft continues to capture young imaginations 💭

With the Minecraft movie hitting cinemas in April, interest in the game has remained strong 🎬 But whether they're mining resources or building digital castles, children could also encounter strangers, scary content or bullying behaviour online.

We've created this free guide offering parents and educators the latest top tips on how to keep children safe from issues like griefing, chat risks, and unintended purchases, while still embracing the game's educational and creative benefits 🎮💡

Traffic-related incidents are a major risk for young pedestrians and cyclists ◈ - which is why it's so important to equip children with the skills they need to stay safe.

We explore essential, easy-to-teach habits that help children build lifelong road safety awareness 🚦 From spotting quieter electric vehicles to crossing safely at designated points, our latest guide is packed with tips to keep young road users visible, vigilant and secure.

This week's free guide shares practical advice like making 'practice' journeys, wearing reflective clothing and staying focused near roads.

Around 70% of teenagers say they've seen real-life violence on social media in the past year. Violent content online isn't just something young people are occasionally stumbling across – in many cases, it's becoming a routine part of their digital world 📱 From fights 🥊 and stabbings 🔪 to toxic ideologies 🗣️, disturbing videos are often just a click away on social media or group chats.

This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide highlights the unseen risks this poses to children's mental health 🧠, sense of safety 🛡️, and social behaviours. With insights from a leading expert 📋, it offers practical ways for parents and educators to respond with empathy 💞 and support 💛 – not punishment or panic 🚫.

They say a picture's worth a thousand words and when it comes to emojis, that's often true 🚩😁💬 But in the wrong context, these innocent-seeming icons can take on a whole new meaning, sometimes hinting at things that aren't as light-hearted as they appear.

This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide breaks down some of the slang and symbols young people use online and explains how some could be masking real issues, from bullying and exclusion to harmful behaviours 🏘️🐍. With our handy cheat sheet and top tips, adults can keep pace with this ever-changing digital language 💬✨

Facebook failing to protect children, warns National Crime Agency
The Daily Telegraph
Alex Murray, director of threat leadership at the National Crime Agency (NCA), has told the *Telegraph* that a sharp decline in the number of child sexual abuse incidents reported by Facebook - while other social media firms have stepped up detection efforts and seen reports rise - raises concerns that the company is failing to protect children. Figures to be released today are expected to show that globally, Facebook reported 11.1m incidents in 2024 - down from 18m the previous year, a drop of around 40%. Mr Murray said the "widespread rollout of end-to-end encryption by major tech companies, without sufficient consideration for the actual harm it will cause, is putting users in danger", adding that tech firms "cannot protect children and their other customers and live up to the Online Safety Act when they choose not to see illegal behaviour, often victimising the most vulnerable, on their own systems". "They are unable", he said, "to proactively identify offending taking place, or provide evidence of such offending on request."

Smart devices threaten children's wellbeing
The Independent UK

Baroness Hilary Cass, senior Clinical Advisor to Health Education England, has warned that the impact of smart devices on children's sleep, attention span, and education poses "an economic timebomb." She stressed the need for dedicated training for teachers and education for parents to address the risks associated with digital technology. During the debate on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, she said: "Any legislation addressing the subject of safeguarding children cannot possibly ignore the impact of digital technology." Lady Cass highlighted that the dangers extend beyond cyberbullying to include adverse effects on learning and mental health, particularly due to addictive apps. Meanwhile, Baroness Kidron, a child's rights activist, has criticised the Government's "evangelical" support for EdTech, arguing that there is insufficient evidence of its benefits for most students.

Academy's phone ban boosts grades
London Evening Standard

Excelsior Academy in Hackney has reported a significant improvement in A-Level results, with average grades rising from a C to a B after implementing a complete ban on mobile phones. Headteacher Omar Deria described the transformation as "miraculous", noting that students have become "nicer" and more engaged. "Banning mobile phones in the sixth form has been a game changer for our students," he explained, highlighting the positive impact on classroom dynamics.

New initiative to enhance student wellbeing
The Times *The Times*

Proposals to measure the happiness of schoolchildren aim to address the rising mental health crisis among young people in the UK. Senior figures, including Lord O'Donnell and Lord Blunkett, advocate for a nationwide program to assess children's well-being as part of the Children's Well-Being and Schools Bill. If implemented, this initiative would allow parents and Ofsted inspectors to evaluate schools' ability to prioritise pupil wellbeing, particularly concerning bullying and social media. Current studies indicate that the UK ranks poorly in child happiness, with one in four pupils dissatisfied with their lives. O'Donnell said: "The impact of mental health on welfare and NHS budgets is huge," emphasising the need for consistent data on young people's wellbeing. The initiative could cost around £20m annually and aims to improve long-term productivity and resilience among children.

Growing fears over children's energy drink consumption
The Sun *The Sun on Sunday*

A new study from The Nutrition Society has revealed that 15% of people in Britain now drink high-caffeine energy drinks with their breakfast - while UK adolescents now consume an average of three litres of the drinks a month, compared to the European average of two litres. The *Sun on Sunday* talks to dietitian Prof. Amelia Lake, who says she has "heard horror stories of kids literally bouncing off the walls at school after drinking energy drinks in the morning", which children as young as 10 "high as kites during lessons and then barely able to sit up straight when the effects wore off". Darren Northcott from the NASUWT teaching union comments: "Teachers can restrict them at lunch and break times. But before and after school, we see excess consumption that impacts kids' ability to learn. They aren't getting enough sleep, so to counteract that effect, they have another energy drink. That becomes a vicious circle."

Young offenders on the rise
BBC News

Recent findings reveal a concerning increase in violent crime among children aged 10 to 14 in London, with 7,512 cases reported in 2023, marking a 38% rise since 2020. Lib Peck, director of London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), described the situation as "disturbing." The report, commissioned by the VRU and conducted by Crest Advisory, highlights that this age group now represents a larger share of serious offences compared to previous years. The VRU has initiated a £3m project to support language and communication skills in primary schools, aiming to address underlying issues contributing to youth violence. Despite the challenges, there has been a noted improvement in behaviour among students involved in the programme, suggesting a potential pathway to reducing violence among young people.

Most children to be overweight in some areas by 2035
The Guardian

Modelling carried out by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) has projected that the majority of 10- and 11-year-olds will be obese in nine local authority areas by 2035 - including Blackpool, Knowsley, Sandwell, and Barking and Dagenham. Overall, the RSPH predicted, the proportion of overweight and obese children is expected to rise in 136 of 151 local authority areas, accounting for 41% of the age group nationally, up from 36% of Year 6 pupils now. RSPH chief executive William Roberts said while the causes were "wide-ranging", junk food and inactivity are "major factors", adding that childhood obesity "leads to several complex health problems that can last a lifetime", including "diabetes, high blood pressure, certain types of cancer and poor mental health."

Deepfake crisis threatens school safety
Sky News *London Evening Standard*

Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism project, has warned that sharing deepfake pornography is "the next sexual violence epidemic" facing schools. During her testimony to the Women and Equalities Committee, she highlighted that schools have spent thousands on PR firms for reputation management but have failed to support victims or address the perpetrators. Bates stated: "It is happening, it's significant," noting that female teachers are also affected. She called for statutory guidance to help teachers handle this issue effectively, stressing the need for education, prevention, and regulation rather than criminalising underage boys. The Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, has also raised concerns about nudifying apps targeting young girls, calling for an immediate ban. The inquiry into the "manosphere" has revealed rising misogyny affecting both female pupils and staff, with sexual harassment described as "rife."

Education needed to tackle rise in child cyberstalking
BBC News

A *BBC* investigation has found that children as young as 10 have been reported to police forces across England in relation to suspected cyberstalking offences - with charities warning that constant online monitoring is becoming normalised among even young children. The *BBC* also points to data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, which shows that among over-16s, young people aged 16-19 were the most likely to be victims of stalking. Within that age group, 10.5% of young women and 6.7% of young men have been the victim of stalking. Safeguarding minister Jess Phillips, responding to the *BBC's* findings, said: "We really need to be out there educating young people on what healthy relationships look like and that will be part of the Government's violence against women and girls strategy."

Shops selling illegal vapes to children in school uniform
The Daily Record
An investigation by consumer watchdog Advice Direct Scotland has revealed that it received a total of 112 complaints last year about underage vape sales - with Hazel Knowles from the group saying some reports involved "children as young as 11". "In some cases", she said, "these sales were made to children in school uniforms, and some traders were reported multiple times." While welcoming new legislation that will ban the sale of single-use or "disposable" vapes from June 1, she warned that if "enforcement mechanisms are already under pressure, there is a risk that they may struggle to keep pace with the demands of new regulations". "It's important", she added, "that we learn from current gaps in oversight and ensure that the necessary resources, training and support are in place to make the new rules work in practice."

Child mental health issues have major impact on life chances
Daily Mail *The Independent UK*
A study carried out by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has found that children with severe mental health or behavioural issues are 68% more likely to have a long-term condition that affects their ability to work by age 51, and are 85% more likely to have symptoms of depression. The study, drawing on data from the 1970 British Cohort Study, found that poor health in childhood casts a "long shadow", and that children "who grow up in poor health are likely to experience worse health outcomes in adulthood, achieve less at school, earn less and rely more heavily on public services throughout their lives". The IPPR has called for targeted investment in "high-impact, cost-saving interventions that can deliver early wins", including ringfenced spending on children's mental health and extra mental health support for those aged 14-19 who are preparing to enter the labour market.

For Parents - Webinar - Understanding and Safeguarding Children's use of AI Chatbots
Internet Matters are putting on a free webinar for parents to examine their findings in their latest report about how children in the UK are engaging with AI chatbots including the risks and opportunities. This would be a really worthwhile webinar for parents to attend, it will be taking place on 17th July at 1100 and parents can register **HERE**

Interesting links:
For parents: manage your child's access to Gemini apps - **HERE**.
Article: Why AI Companions are Not Kids Friends - **HERE**
For Parents - How to Report Online Harm
There are so many apps with different reporting functions, organisations, helplines and more it can be really frustrating for parents to get help. Internet Matters have a really useful page which details some of these organisations and what they can do, how to report specific issues, how to report on many of the social platforms and games and where to go for more help.
You can see all the details **HERE**.
For Parents - New Tools to Manage Roblox
At the beginning of April Roblox announced some new tools which will allow parents a greater degree of control over their child's Roblox experience. These tools include:
- Limiting who their child can connect with.
- See which experiences (games) their child plays the most.
- Limit experiences their child can access.
There's a lot more, all summarised in an article from Roblox **HERE**.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
ZEPETO

AGE RESTRICTION 14+

ZEPETO is a fast-growing app blending social networking with a virtual world experience – attracting around 20 million monthly users, with 15% from Europe. Players create 3D avatars to explore immersive environments, play games and interact with others; however, with minimal safety controls, anonymous chat and monetised content, ZEPETO poses a number of online safety concerns that parents and educators should be aware of.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

NO PARENTAL CONTROLS

Although ZEPETO is intended for users aged 14 and up, it lacks built-in parental controls or age verification, instead relying on safety features on the device it's played on. This lack of a parental controls feature raises concerns about whom children may be interacting with on the platform.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

As a mix between a virtual world and a social media platform, ZEPETO features a wide range of user-generated content. Some areas may reference mature themes, such as TV series aimed at adults, or include inappropriate material created by other users – all of which children may stumble across without warning.

STRANGER DANGER

By default, users can message and interact with anyone else. This open communication creates an environment where predatory individuals can pose as peers to gain trust, potentially leading to grooming, scams, and exploitation, such as blackmail.

CYBERBULLYING RISKS

As with many social platforms, children can be targeted for bullying, harassment or exclusion by both strangers and their peers. Unfiltered chat and avatar-based interaction can allow bullying and other forms of harassment to continue, impacting children's wellbeing and mental health.

ADDICTIVE GAMEPLAY

Daily log-in rewards, such as coins, and in-game incentives can encourage compulsive behaviour, with some users feeling pressure to check in constantly to avoid missing out. This can lead to excessive screen time and conflict with schoolwork or offline hobbies or commitments.

SPENDING REAL MONEY

While the game is free to play, ZEPETO includes a store offering virtual clothing and accessories for avatars. These items are bought with 'ZEMs' – a paid currency – and the appeal of exclusive items or branded collaborations can make it easy for children to overspend.

Advice for Parents & Educators

ENABLE PRIVACY SETTINGS

Visit the child's profile settings to restrict who can send messages – options include Everyone, Followers Only, or No-one. Encourage children to avoid sharing any personal information on their profile, as this is visible even on private accounts.

CONTROL SPENDING

To prevent accidental purchases, set up purchase approval systems such as Apple's Ask to Buy or Google's Purchase Approvals. Alternatively, consider removing payment methods or using pre-paid cards with set budgets.

LIMIT IN-APP TIME

Use parental controls on Android (Google Family Link) or iOS (Screen Time) to restrict app usage by setting hours or daily limits. Encouraging breaks can help children develop healthier habits and reduce app dependency.

HAVE REGULAR CONVERSATIONS

Talk openly with children about whom they interact with online and the kinds of things they see or experience. Encourage them to speak up if someone makes them uncomfortable or if they come across inappropriate content. Teach them how to recognise red-flag behaviours such as asking for secrets, giving gifts, or requesting personal information.

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, The Telegraph, The Evening Standard, The Guardian and The New Statesman.

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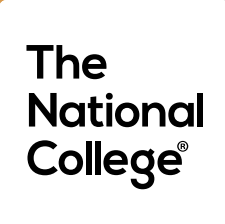
What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
SEARCH ENGINES

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Search engines are an integral part of everyday life – with Google alone processing around 100,000 searches every second. Search engines use algorithms to predict which results will be useful to us, though this can expose children to inappropriate content, misinformation and even scams. This guide explains the risks associated with search engines and offers practical advice to help safeguard young users online.

MANIPULATED SEARCH RESULTS

Although search engines take site reputation into account, trustworthiness isn't the main factor. Instead, they use algorithms that can be gamed via tactics like search engine optimisation (SEO), which is big business. As a result, users may encounter misleading content and low-quality commercial products that appear more credible than they actually are.

MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

Search engines index billions of web pages – and not all of them are factual or safe. Children might stumble across false information or even deliberate disinformation, especially when searching for trending topics or controversial issues.

ENGINES BEYOND GOOGLE

Even if Google's SafeSearch is enabled, children may use lesser-known search engines that don't have similar protections. Some of these alternatives are less effective at blocking unsavoury content – sometimes by design – making it easier for children to encounter harmful or explicit material. Parental controls may also struggle to detect and block these sites.

ILLEGAL CONTENT CAN SURFACE

Search engines are designed to retrieve content based on keywords – not to judge whether that content is lawful. As a result, even illegal or harmful material can appear in search results. Children might assume that anything found through search engines must be safe, just because they're so widely used. This misunderstanding can lead to accidental exposure to seriously inappropriate content.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT EXPOSURE

Although parental controls like Google's SafeSearch exist, they aren't foolproof, and search engines may bypass them. Young users may still see inappropriate images or content, especially in image searches, even though they may not be able to click on the results. Some niche search engines lack even basic filtering, posing further risks.

UNRELIABLE AI SUMMARIES

Some search engines now offer AI-generated answers at the top of results. While these can be helpful as webpage summaries, they're not always accurate. There have been instances where AI summaries have presented false or even dangerous information, reinforcing the need for critical thinking.

Advice for Parents & Educators

ACTIVATE PARENTAL CONTROLS

While no parental controls tool is perfect, this software can help reduce the likelihood of inappropriate content appearing in search results. Use tools like Google Family Link to set search restrictions and monitor your child's browsing activity.

QUESTION AI-GENERATED CONTENT

While AI content is generated quickly and often appears legitimate, teach children that, just because an AI summary is well presented, it doesn't mean it's accurate. Encourage them to review the sources behind AI summaries and check the information with reputable sites or fact-checkers.

IDENTIFY AND AVOID ADVERTS

One of the ways search engines generate revenue is by showing adverts to their users. Sponsored search results are labelled, but they're not always easy to spot and can sometimes be malicious. Show your child how to distinguish between paid ads and organic search results – explain why some ads might be misleading or unsafe.

PROMOTE DIGITAL LITERACY

Encourage children to question the motivation behind online content and develop critical thinking, as not all sites can be trusted. Some deliberately misinform users in order to sell products or promote misinformation. Developing a critical mindset is one of the best defences against these tactics.

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, Tom's Guide, The Evening Standard, The Guardian and The New Statesman.

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10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators
FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING

Feeling a genuine sense of belonging is essential for the emotional and social development of children and young people. Belonging significantly boosts self-esteem, resilience, and mental wellbeing, reducing feelings of isolation and anxiety. This guide provides practical strategies to help parents and educators cultivate inclusive environments, enhancing both academic outcomes and overall happiness among young people.

1 CELEBRATE INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Acknowledge and celebrate the uniqueness of every child. Promoting diversity and inclusion creates an environment where differences are valued rather than stigmatised. This acceptance empowers children to confidently express their identities and feel genuinely included, fostering a robust sense of belonging within both school and home settings.

2 CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

Regularly communicate and actively listen to children, showing genuine interest in their thoughts and experiences. Creating open communication channels helps young people feel heard and valued. This approach not only builds trust but also reinforces children's perception of themselves as a vital part of their family, school and community.

3 MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

Give children opportunities to actively participate and contribute, whether in classrooms, at home, or in community activities. Meaningful participation helps children feel their input matters, reinforcing a sense of purpose and value. Including them in decisions and responsibilities enhances their self-worth, promoting a deeper sense of belonging and inclusion.

4 FOSTER STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Support and encourage positive relationships between peers, educators, and families. Strong, healthy relationships significantly impact a child's sense of belonging, providing emotional support and reducing feelings of loneliness. Facilitate social interactions through group activities, teamwork, and collaborative learning to strengthen these vital connections.

5 CREATE INCLUSIVE SPACES

Design environments that reflect diversity and are welcoming for everyone. Inclusive spaces where all children see themselves represented can dramatically improve their feelings of safety and acceptance. Consider classroom displays, books, and resources that celebrate various cultures, abilities, and backgrounds to visibly reinforce inclusivity and belonging.

6 MODEL POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Adults play a crucial role by demonstrating inclusive, empathetic, and respectful behaviours. Modelling positive interactions and attitudes sets a clear standard for children to follow. Children are likely to replicate inclusive behaviour, creating a supportive community atmosphere where everyone feels accepted and valued for who they are.

7 BUILD EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Teach and encourage emotional expression and understanding among children. Developing emotional literacy enables young people to articulate their feelings and empathise with others. An emotionally intelligent environment cultivates mutual respect and compassion, fostering a deeper sense of belonging and interpersonal connection within groups.

8 SUPPORT PEER MENTORSHIP

Encourage peer mentorship or buddy systems within educational settings. Peer support enhances feelings of connectedness and security, reducing feelings of isolation. When children support one another, they naturally build community bonds, nurturing a supportive culture where belonging and friendship thrive.

9 RECOGNISE EFFORTS REGULARLY

Consistently acknowledge children's contributions and achievements, however small. Recognition reinforces a child's understanding that their presence and efforts are important. Celebrating individual and collective successes helps cultivate a positive environment where children feel acknowledged, motivated, and deeply connected to peers and adults around them.

10 ADDRESS BULLYING PROMPTLY

Quickly address any incidents of bullying. Promptly intervening demonstrates a clear commitment to an inclusive and safe environment. Creating a culture where incidents are swiftly and effectively addressed reinforces trust, security, and a sense of belonging for everyone involved.

Meet Our Expert

Anna Bateman is Director of Halcyon Education Ltd and Director for Wellbeing and Family Services at Leigh Trust. With extensive experience in systemic mental health in schools, she supports educational leaders across the UK to develop inclusive, resilient, and supportive learning environments. Anna is also the lead expert for mental health at The National College.

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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
MINECRAFT

AGE RESTRICTION
PEGI 7

Still the best-selling game of all time, Minecraft is a bastion of creativity and community, with hundreds of millions of players building and crafting in its almost endless world. The popularity of Minecraft among gamers of all ages means it's important to remain informed about the game, including how to play it safely and whether it's suitable for the children in your care. That's why we've created this guide explaining the risks associated with Minecraft and how to ensure a purely enjoyable gaming experience.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

SCARY ELEMENTS

While Minecraft can be seen as a kind of 'digital LEGO', certain game modes include creatures accompanied by eerie sound effects. These can be a bit too frightening for some younger players, potentially leading to distressing in-game combat and other encounters – although the combat is quite basic and free from any real depiction of violence.

GRIEFING

Some players in Minecraft take pleasure in deliberately damaging or destroying another person's creations. This behaviour, known as 'griefing', is a form of bullying – it intentionally ruins someone else's experience by erasing hours of their work and forcing them to start over. Many public servers regard griefing as a serious offence and often ban those who engage in it.

ADDICTIVENESS
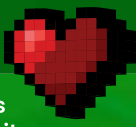
Minecraft's focus on creativity means that, as with any creative endeavour, it can be easy to get carried away. If your child is finding it difficult to manage their time because they're drawn in by Minecraft's gameplay loop of resource gathering and building elaborate projects, it could have a knock-on effect on their social interactions and schoolwork.

PUBLIC SERVERS AND COMMUNICATIONS

With public servers being so easily accessible in Minecraft, it's highly likely that children will end up chatting with strangers through the in-game text chat. Some servers even place an emphasis on social interaction, actively encouraging communication between players. While there's nothing inherently wrong with this, it does carry certain risks. In addition to the concerns around speaking with strangers online, players who host their own servers may have their IP addresses exposed, posing a further security concern.

ADDITIONAL PURCHASES
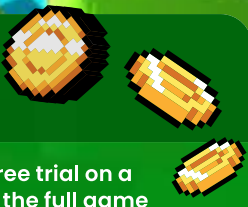
Minecraft is available as a free trial on a variety of devices; however, the full game requires a one-off purchase. After that, players have the option to buy additional cosmetic upgrades or subscribe to Minecraft Realms. Realms is an entirely optional subscription service that allows users to run their own private server to play with friends. Without proper supervision, younger players may end up making unintended or excessive purchases.

Advice for Parents & Educators

CHOOSE THE RIGHT MODE

Selecting Creative or Peaceful mode allows children to play Minecraft without having to contend with enemies. It's also a great way for you to get used to playing the game with them, since the difficulty level is far lower. This allows you to work together on a long-term project, creating something special without the threat of enemies and creatures attacking you or damaging your building.

HOST A PRIVATE SERVER

The easiest way to find a safe server for children to play on is to make one yourself. Hosting a server prevents strangers from finding it, unless they've been given its address and password. A private server also lets you control who's allowed to enter and – if necessary – ban anyone who shouldn't be there. This is the closest equivalent to parental controls in Minecraft. Hosting a private server, however, will cost a monthly fee.

TALK ABOUT STRANGERS

At some point in their lives, almost everyone will make contact with a stranger online. Talking to children about online safety, therefore, is essential – as is having a plan for dealing with any hostile or difficult people. It's important that a child knows never to tell a stranger about themselves online and that they should come to you straight away if they do encounter a problem.

RESEARCH CONTENT CREATORS
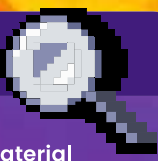
Much of Minecraft's early stages can be an exercise in frustration for players who don't know where to start. Thankfully, there's a wealth of material online and in video format to help you learn the basics. Just be mindful that some of this content may not be appropriate for children, so you should consider watching it yourself first.

PLAY MINECRAFT WITH YOUR CHILD

As a creative building tool, Minecraft makes it great fun for children to team up and construct vast buildings accompanied by imaginative landscapes, much like working with LEGO or model kits. Playing in a game mode that includes enemies can encourage critical thinking and teamwork; however, you should consider which game mode is appropriate for the child in your care.

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Gaming Editor at the Daily Star, and has worked in games media for more than 6 years. A long-time gaming enthusiast, he is also a parent and therefore a keen advocate of online safety for children of all ages.

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10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators
SAFETY ON THE ROAD

Traffic-related incidents are a significant risk for young pedestrians and cyclists, so understanding road safety is crucial for children's wellbeing. While all road users share responsibility for keeping one another safe, this guide offers strategies for empowering young people to navigate the roads confidently and responsibly.

1 TAKE PRACTICE JOURNEYS

Making 'practice' journeys with children is a great way to help them stay safe, thereby modelling responsible behaviours and having road safety conversations as they prepare to travel independently. Add hazard perception activities like spotting electric vehicles – which may have a green number plate – and point out how quiet they are. Children learn by watching others; remind them that their peers might not always be the best role models.

2 BE BRIGHT, BE SEEN

Visibility is lower during darker winter days, and drivers need to take extra care to look out for pedestrians. Wearing bright and reflective clothing can help make children more visible to drivers near roads. In poor daylight conditions, encourage children to wear light, bright or fluorescent clothing. When it's dark, wear reflective clothing or materials such as a reflective armband or jacket.

3 EYES UP

Encourage children to look up and keep their eyes on the road. Teach them to constantly watch for traffic and practise double-checking the road before crossing – looking right, left and then right again.

4 LIMIT DISTRACTIONS

Where possible, devices like phones should be kept away from children while out and about near roads. If they're carrying devices, these should be put away until they've reached their destination. Children must also avoid playing with toys or being distracted by friends. If a friend wants to show them something funny on their phone, there'll be time for that once they've safely arrived.

5 SLOW DOWN

Discuss the importance of waiting instead of crossing immediately. It can be tricky to judge the speed of traffic and spot obstacles that could cause a trip or a fall. For safety, children must stop and think before they get to the kerb and should always walk – not run – when crossing the road. They should avoid crossing until they're certain they have plenty of time. Even if traffic seems a long way off, it could still be approaching very quickly.

6 STOP BEFORE THE KERB

Teach children to stop before reaching the kerb – not right at the edge of it. Halting before they get to the kerb allows them to see if anything's coming, whereas getting too close to traffic is dangerous. If there's no pavement, children should stand back from the road's edge but ensure they can still see approaching traffic.

7 CROSS SAFELY

Children should always find a safe spot to cross the road, prioritising zebra crossings or pelican crossings, footbridges and subways. Find a place where they can see traffic coming from both directions. Avoid crossing near junctions, bends in the road, or obstacles that block their view, instead moving to somewhere they can see and be seen. Remind them to use their eyes and ears together when checking the road, as sometimes they can hear traffic before they can see it. Looking and listening while crossing helps them quickly spot traffic, including cyclists and motorcyclists driving between other vehicles.

8 PARKED VEHICLES

Crossing between parked vehicles is very dangerous. Teach children to use extra caution if crossing in this way, and, ideally, avoid it altogether. They should use the outside edge of a vehicle as if it were the kerb, waiting and checking for traffic before moving. They should ensure vehicles aren't about to move, by looking for drivers in the vehicles and listening for engines running – but remember that electric vehicles may move off silently. They should always make sure there is a gap between any parked vehicles on the other side, so they can reach the pavement.

9 REVERSING VEHICLES

Children must never cross behind a reversing vehicle – it's extremely dangerous. Remind them to look for white reversing lights and listen out for warning sounds. Can they hear the engine sound or a radio playing inside the vehicle?

10 WAIT FOR THE BUS TO LEAVE

When getting off a bus, children must wait for it to leave before crossing so they can have a clear view of the road in both directions. This also allows them to see and be seen by other road users. Crossing near large vehicles is particularly dangerous and should be avoided.

Meet Our Expert

THINK! is a year-round national campaign that aims to encourage safe road behaviours – whether we're driving, cycling, horse riding or walking – with the aim of reducing the number of people killed and injured on the UK's roads each year. Find out more at: https://www.think.gov.uk/education-resources/

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The National College

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
VIOLENT CONTENT ONLINE

Around 70% of teenagers say they've seen real-life violence on social media in the past year – often from as young as primary school age. Just 6% actively seek it out; most encounter it through group chats or social media algorithms. From fights and pranks to hate speech and graphic media, exposure to violent content online is more widespread – and more harmful – than many adults realise.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

MENTAL HEALTH AND TRAUMA

Children and young people report feelings of anxiety, guilt, shame or fear after seeing violent content. For some, these effects may be short term, but for those with existing vulnerabilities or past trauma, the impact can be more severe. Many also feel pressured to 'laugh off' violent content to fit in with friends, even when they find it distressing.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGES

Exposure to online violence can lead to fear and avoidance behaviours – such as skipping school or staying indoors. When children see weapons used in videos, it can heighten their perception that the world is unsafe and, in rare cases, increase the likelihood they'll consider carrying a weapon themselves, such as a knife for protection.

ESCALATION AND PARTICIPATION

Violent videos often go viral quickly. What begins as an online argument can spill into real-world fights – which are sometimes filmed and shared to gain views or status. Some children even admit to sharing or creating violent content themselves to gain attention or boost their reputation.

DESENSITISATION

Older teens may become numb to violent content after years of exposure, admitting they're unlikely to report it. Younger children also tend not to report it – usually because they don't believe anything will be done or because they're afraid of being labelled a 'snitch' by their peers.

HARMFUL IDEOLOGIES

Violent content online may overlap with racist, misogynistic or otherwise extremist ideas. These messages can dehumanise others or glorify violence as a way to gain power, popularity or notoriety. Over time, this can normalise dangerous behaviours and attitudes among impressionable viewers.

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT

Not all children are affected equally. Those who are excluded from school, marginalised, disabled or neurodivergent are often more vulnerable to the effects of online violence. It's essential to consider wider context – including home life and access to safe spaces – when thinking about potential harm.
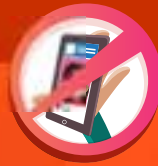
Advice for Parents & Educators

CREATE SUPPORTIVE SPACES

Many children feel adults are too busy or won't understand their experiences online. Take time to build trust through non-judgemental conversations about what they're seeing. If they don't want to speak to you directly, gently signpost towards trusted services they can turn to for support.

KNOW WHAT'S ILLEGAL

Some violent content is simply upsetting, while other examples may be criminal or a safeguarding matter that needs reporting. Help children understand the difference by staying informed about online laws and social media reporting procedures. A useful resource is reportharmfulcontent.com.

AVOID HARSH RESTRICTIONS

Fear of punishment is a major reason young people stay silent about violent content. Try not to overreact or threaten to take away devices. Instead, reassure children that they can speak openly and that asking for help won't get them into trouble.

UNDERSTAND TECH AND TRAUMA

Older children may already know how to block accounts or avoid triggering content. Help younger or more vulnerable children learn these tools and encourage habits that reduce exposure. Just as importantly, teach techniques that help them process distress – building resilience and emotional literacy for both online and offline life.

Meet Our Expert

Dr. Holly Powell-Jones is the founder of Online Media Law UK and a leading UK expert in digital safety, media law, and young people. Her PhD investigates children's understandings of risk online. She works with schools, businesses, and universities to provide award-winning education on the criminal, legal, and ethical considerations for the digital age. Visit onlinemedialawuk.com for more.

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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
EMOJIS

Emojis are more than playful expressions — they form a fast-evolving digital language that many adults struggle to decode. For young people, this 'secret code' is central to how they communicate identity, humour and emotions. With over 5 billion emojis sent daily on Facebook Messenger alone, understanding these symbols is key to engaging meaningfully with digital youth.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

GENERATIONAL MISCOMMUNICATION

An emoji like 👍 (thumbs up emoji) might seem friendly to adults, but teens often interpret it as sarcastic or passive-aggressive. These differing interpretations can create confusion or unintended tension in cross-generational conversations.

SHIELDING BULLYING OR PEER PRESSURE

When embedded in emojis, mean-spirited jokes or exclusionary language can fly under the radar. Terms like 'mid' or 'delulu' may seem harmless, but they can be used to undermine peers in subtle ways.

RAPIDLY SHIFTING MEANINGS

Emoji meanings can change overnight. A person standing emoji (🧍) once signified awkwardness but might now be repurposed for something entirely different. This ever-changing lexicon can leave adults in the dark and young people vulnerable to misunderstanding or misuse.

MASKING DISTRESS OR HARM

Some emojis are used to discreetly signal troubling behaviours. For instance, 🍃 (falling leaves emoji) or 💊 (pill emoji) might suggest drug use, while 🥀 (wilted flower emoji) could hint at emotional struggles. Such usage can obscure serious issues, making them harder for trusted adults to detect.

NORMALISING RISKY BEHAVIOURS

Emojis can make harmful actions seem light-hearted or fashionable. Strings like 🔥🥴💊 (fire + 'woozy' face + pill emojis) may appear humorous but can reference partying, intoxication or dangerous challenges, which might otherwise raise red flags.

Advice for Parents & Educators

LEARN THE LINGO

Stay updated with emoji trends and definitions using resources like emojipedia.org or Urban Dictionary. Knowing current meanings builds confidence when engaging with young people and helps spot potential concerns early.

ASK, DON'T ASSUME

Approach unfamiliar emojis with curiosity rather than suspicion. A light-hearted "What does 🧃 (juice box emoji) mean these days?" can open conversation and show that you respect their knowledge.

CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR DISCUSSION

Encourage casual chats about emojis, online slang, memes, or social media trends. Showing interest without judgement reassures young people that they can talk about their digital world openly and safely.

PRIORITISE TRUST OVER SURVEILLANCE

While parental controls and monitoring tools can be useful, emotional safety matters most. Be someone children and young people feel they can come to — not just someone who's watching them.

EMOJI CHEAT SHEET -
The following slang terms and emojis are some common examples – please be aware this isn't an exhaustive list.

COMMON EMOJIS:

🤡 (Clown face) Foolishness or clowning around

🥶 (Cold face) Cool, stylish or ruthless

🥵 (Hot face) Intense attraction or excitement

🗿 (Moai) Stone-faced, unbothered

👑 (Crown) 'Slaying', as in doing great

🥺 (Pleading face) Over-affectionate or 'simping'

👀 (Eyes) Watching drama unfold

🐐 (Goat) Greatest of all time (G.O.A.T.)

💅 (Nails) Confidence, sassiness, or indifference

🚩 (Triangular flag) Red flag; a warning sign about someone's behaviour

POTENTIALLY CONCERNING EMOJIS

🌽 (Ear of corn) Slang for pornography (avoids censorship algorithms)

❄️☃️🌨️ (Snowflake, snowman, snow cloud) Can symbolise cocaine

🔑😐 (Key, lying face) Related to cocaine use

🍃🌿🍁 (Falling leaves, herb, maple leaf) Can symbolise cannabis

💊 (Pill) May reference drug use or prescription misuse

🥀 (Wilted flower) Often used to convey emotional struggle or sadness

🐍 (Snake) Can represent betrayal or being 'two-faced'

🔫 (Water pistol) Sometimes used to reference violence or self-harm

⚠️ (Warning) Used to emphasise drama, threats or emotional turmoil

🍜 (Steaming bowl) Refers to nudes ('noods' is an abbreviation of noodles)

Meet Our Expert

Keith Broni is a globally renowned emoji expert and the Editor in Chief of emojipedia.org, the world's number one emoji resource. He has an MSc in Business Psychology from University College London and an MBA from Quantic School of Business and Technology.

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