# Online Safety Newsletter March 2026

## YouTube Safety Update: New Parental Controls

YouTube have published their latest update on how parents can support their child on YouTube. YouTube will now allow parents to set the amount of time viewing Shorts – this can even be set to zero. YouTube Shorts are short videos, usually less than 60 seconds long, which when continuously watched, can lead to excessive screentime. Furthermore, parents will also be able to set bedtime and 'take a break' reminders. You can find out more here:

https://blog.youtube/news-and-events/updates-youtube-supervised-accounts-teens/

If you would like to find out more about supervised accounts on YouTube, then this article explains the different settings available:

https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/10315420?hl=en-GB&ref_topic=15279060&sjid=15225282118002181205-EU

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# 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/online-resources/what-effects-do-mobile-phones-have-on-children-and-young-peoples-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-kids-aA03C3Y8aTzr

# 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-and-online-safety/

# Social Media Algorithms

### What is an Algorithm?

Algorithms influence what we see on social media platforms and predict what type of content we are most likely to interact with, thereby keeping us online for longer. The algorithm uses information such as who you follow, what you have searched for and what you have watched, liked or shared to determine what it thinks most interests you. It will then show you this content more, for example, in the explore tab on Instagram.

### What do I need to know?

Whilst there are benefits to algorithms, for example it means we tend to see content that does interest us, unfortunately there are negatives as well. They can lead to increased screentime as we continue to see things that interest us. Secondly, it can lead to users being shown large amounts of inappropriate content which can for example, exacerbate negative body image or heighten access to misogyny content. It can also lead to 'echo chambers' where you are only seeing content that relates to your opinion rather than seeing a balanced viewpoint.

### Further information

- https://cybersmarties.com/behind-the-screen-how-algorithms-shape-what-kids-see-online/
- The BBC discuss algorithms in this article about doomscrolling: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zwnk3qt

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## Five Nights at Freddy's

Five Nights at Freddy's is a horror game designed to frighten players with jump scares or creepy characters. It can be accessed from several places, for example on an Xbox (PEGI rating of 12) and on the App store (age rating of 13+). There is merchandise available, which may suggest that it is child friendly. We would recommend that you preview the game first to ascertain its suitability for your child. You can view Bark's review here:

https://www.bark.us/content-review/five-nights-at-freddys-review/

## Screen time and online harms

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health have created a page that brings together key resources on screen time. Find out more here:

https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/screen-time-online-harms-resources-members

## New government campaign: Is your child influenced by toxic content?

The Government have launched a new campaign providing guidance to parents on safety settings, conversation prompts and advice for tackling misinformation and harmful content. It also includes a quiz to help you and your child spot misleading or unreliable information online. You can find out more here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/is-your-child-influenced-by-toxic-content-new-government-campaign-supports-parents-to-talk-about-harmful-online-content