

# Online Safety Newsletter

## February 2023

### 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>

### PUBG (PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds)

PUBG is available on multiple platforms and is **rated 16+ by PEGI**, therefore it is not suitable for persons below 16 years of age. PEGI state that this game has been rated PEGI 16 "due to frequent, moderate violence towards human characters and encouragement of drug use" (<https://pegi.info/>).



PUBG is an online multiplayer game, in which a group of players play against each other until they are the only remaining player. One hundred players are dropped on to an island and they need to search for items, such as backpacks, body armour and guns.

#### What do I need to be aware of?

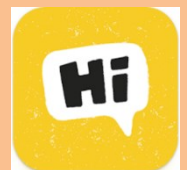
Parents need to be aware that this can be an addictive game, in game purchases are available and due to the live chat, inappropriate or offensive language may be heard/seen.

If your child is playing this game, then make sure they know how to use the reporting and blocking facilities within the game and they know to speak to a trusted adult should they need to.

#### Further information

Bark provides further information on PUBG as well as how to apply settings:  
<https://www.bark.us/guides/gaming-pubg/>

### HiPal – Walkie Talkie



**HiPal – Walkie Talkie is a social media app and rated 12+ on the App store and for 'Teens' on Google Play.**

When first accessing HiPal, it asks you if you are under or over 12 years of age. The area available to under 12 year olds states that no stranger interaction can take place. Users with this account type invite friends by sharing a code/QR code. As with all messaging apps, there can be instances of cyberbullying, so it is important to monitor who your child is interacting with.

If a user selects that they are over 12 years of age, then there is the risk of communication from strangers. HiPal features a public square where you can message strangers as well as an explore tab where you can view people's images and videos from around the world. There is a risk of viewing content that is not suitable or inappropriate. There are reporting and blocking features within the app. You can find out more from Safer Schools NI here:  
<https://saferschoolsni.co.uk/hipal-walkie-talkie-and-wizz-social-apps/>

# ChatGPT

Have you heard of the AI chatbot, ChatGPT? It is an artificial intelligence system that is currently free to access via a web browser and essentially you can ask it any question and it will give you an answer.

## What are the concerns?

In terms of education, there is the potential that these chatbots, particularly as they develop further could be used by students in producing essays or answering homework questions. This would be a form of plagiarism, which would have serious consequences. ChatGPT are currently reviewing how to prevent their content being used in this manner.

# Instagram: new features

*You must be at least 13 years old to have an Instagram account.*

Instagram have introduced several new features, including 'Quiet mode,' how to hide content as well as additional tools to help your child.

## Quiet mode

This gives users the ability to put their account in quiet mode, so you do not receive notifications and if you receive a DM, the sender receives an auto reply. This mode will help provide less distraction whilst studying and at nighttime.

## Recommendations

You can now hide content in Explore that you do not wish to see/are not interested in. Instagram will use this information to avoid showing you that type of content in other areas where content is recommended as well.

## Hidden words

You can already hide comments and DMs containing specific words, but this feature has now been expanded to recommended posts. If you add a word, emoji or hashtag that you want to avoid to your hidden words (in privacy settings) then Instagram will try to no longer recommend content with those words in the caption/ hashtag.

## Updated Parental Supervision Tools

You can see your child's Instagram settings (if you have set up a supervised account), including their privacy and account settings and accounts your child has blocked. If your child updates a setting, then you will receive a notification to inform you.

## Find out more

You can read more about the new features here: <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/01/instagram-quiet-mode-manage-your-time-and-focus/>



## Sky Broadband Shield

Do you have Sky Broadband? Sky offer a set of free tools to all customers to help make the internet a safer place for your family, for example safe search. You can find out more about the settings available and how to set it up here:

<https://www.sky.com/help/articles/sky-broadband-shield-start>

## Spotify

There have been news reports claiming grooming has taken place on Spotify (source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-64262918>).

Spotify is a music streaming service. You should be over 18 years of age to agree to the terms, or if older than 13, obtain parent/guardian consent. There is a Spotify Kids version, but it is only available as part of a Premium (paid for) Family plan.

Spotify have produced this Parental Guide to assist you with further information but if your child does use Spotify then it may be beneficial to have a chat about what they are viewing. [https://www.spotify.com/privacy/files/Parental\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.spotify.com/privacy/files/Parental_Guide.pdf)

You can find out more about Grooming and who to contact here: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/grooming/>

## Your mental health on social media

Social media can sometimes make us feel anxious, sad or upset and affect our mental health. If you or your child need further advice or support, then one place to start could be Childline. Childline have an area on their website with advice including ways to feel good on social media, coping mechanisms, how to get support when you are being bullied online and how to access further help. <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/feeling-good-on-social-media/>

## Hollie Guard App

This app allows you to keep an eye on your child while they are traveling using the Journey feature. Whenever they use this feature, their emergency contacts are informed when they have arrived at their destination.

With the free version, users can also use this app to get help quickly if they are in danger. If a user is in danger, they hold down the button for 5 seconds to raise an alert, which activates Hollie Guard and automatically sends their location to their designated contacts. Visit their website for further information:

<https://hollieguard.com/>

## Emergency SOS calls

You can set up emergency SOS calls on your iPhone/Android, so it calls the emergency services even when your phone is locked. Here's how to set it up:

### iPhone

At the same time, press and hold the side button and either volume button until the sliders appear. Once the countdown on Emergency SOS ends, release the buttons. You can also enable iPhone to start Emergency SOS when you press the side button five times.

### Android

Press the power button five times or more. A five-second countdown begins before emergency services are called.

## TikTok

**You must be over 13 years of age to use TikTok.** Some of the videos on TikTok may not be appropriate for your child to view and there is also the risk of strangers contacting your child. If your child is using TikTok then make sure the appropriate security/privacy settings are on.

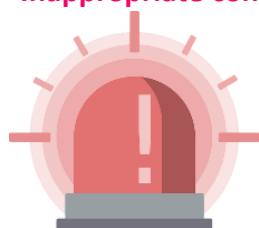


### Account set up

By default, accounts for people under 16 are set to private at the start and we would recommend keeping it as this. This means your child can approve follower requests. You can read more about the other settings available (such as switching off comments and switching on restricted mode) here:

<https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-privacy-settings>

### Inappropriate content, themes and challenges on TikTok



Whilst against TikTok's guidelines, explicit and inappropriate content can be found on this platform, for example nudity/sexual content and hate speech. We often see viral challenges on TikTok, some of which can be dangerous. If your child is using TikTok, chat to them regularly about what they are viewing and to ensure they know not to try challenges they see online.

### Family Pairing

This allows you to link your own account to your child's account. You can then set controls such as restricted mode (limit the appearance of content that may not be appropriate) and screen time management. You can find out more here: <https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/guardians-guide/>

### Blocking and Reporting

Ensure your child knows how to use the safety features available to them. You can find out more here: <https://support.tiktok.com/en/safety-hc/report-a-problem>

### Bullying on TikTok

This article makes suggestions on appropriate settings as well as how to deal with bullying: <https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en-sg/bullying-prevention/>

### Tech Tips Live with Parent Zone

You can watch back this 13-minute broadcast from Parent Zone (originally broadcast Jan 2023) which discusses what you need to know if your child is using TikTok. It's an excellent overview including how algorithms work on social media. You can access it here: <https://parentzone.org.uk/tech-tips-live>

# Online Scams

Internet Matters have published an article detailing common online scams targeting teenagers. Are you aware of scams involving social media spoofing, webcam and remote access scams and health and beauty scams? Internet Matters highlight a list of different scams, how they work and actions you can take to protect your teenager online. You can read the article here:



<https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/expert-opinion/common-online-scams-targeting-teenagers/>

# Steam online games platform

Steam is an online platform where users can play video games and chat to others. It is rated as 12+ on the App store and for Teenagers on Google Play. You should be aware that not all games are free to play, not all games will be appropriate for your child to play and some may include adult themes. Steam does offer 'Family View,' which allows you to set what is accessible to your child to view. Find out how to set it up here:



<https://help.steampowered.com/en/faqs/view/6B1A-66BE-E911-3D98>

## Discussion Guides from Thorn

Thorn was co-founded by Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore in 2012. It includes Thorn for Parents which contains a wide selection of discussion guides, designed to empower you to start conversations with your child. You can filter the guides by topic and age e.g., talk to your 9 year old about screen time or your 14 year old about the issue of resharing nudes. Each guide includes an introduction, how to start talking about the topic as well as an interactive conversation script based on your child's response.

You can find them here:

<https://parents.thorn.org/discussion-guides/>



## Gangs & County Lines

Would you like to find out more about gangs and county lines and how children can be exploited? LGfL have put together a number of short videos and a leaflet including more information for you. You can find the information here:

<https://parentsafe.lgfl.net/gangs-county-lines>

The National Crime Agency also provide information including defining what a county line is and what to do if you have any concerns:

<https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/drug-trafficking/county-lines>

## Nude selfies: what parents and carers need to know

CEOP look at what to do if your child has shared a nude pic of themselves. The page includes four videos - understanding why your child has shared a pic, talking to your child, looking at when you should be worried and finally where you can get help from. Find out more here:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Nude-selfies-a-parents-guide/>

## Gurls Out Loud

Gurls Out Loud is a campaign from the Internet Watch Foundation, which sets out to educate girls about online sexual abuse and how to stop it. Their tag line is: "Block. Report. Tell someone you trust." Find out more here:

<https://gurloutloud.com/>