

Parental Controls for Smartphones and the Internet

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Mobile technology is getting more sophisticated every day, and more kids at younger ages have regular access to smartphones and other mobile devices. Although use of this technology has given kids opportunities to learn new and exciting skills, use of phones has also provided a means of access to potentially risky entertainment such as YouTube videos. Access to smartphones also gives kids easy access to forms of communication such as voice conversations, text messages, and social media. Parental supervision is crucial when kids have access to the Internet, whether on a computer or a mobile device. Parental controls can provide protection while allowing kids to use high-tech gadgets.

When to Use Parental Controls

Parental controls usually include both built-in and add-on software that filters and blocks content. Parents simply set up the controls to block a child's access to specific websites or even an entire device or computer. It might be obvious to set up parental controls on a desktop computer, but it's important to remember that other devices can connect to the Internet, too, such as:

- Tablets
- Smartphones
- Handheld gaming systems
- Video game consoles such as the Sony PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and Nintendo Switch

Monitoring the Internet

Mac and Windows operating systems have built-in parental control software, and you can also purchase software that offers expanded features and flexibility. While parental controls are important, parents should also take additional steps to ensure Internet safety.

- Create a password that's required to access the Internet on a home computer, so kids only have access when parents are supervising.

- Place the computer in a common area of the home.
- Set up your router to restrict Internet access to times when parents are home.
- Find out if your Internet service provider offers extra filtering software.
- Create and maintain strong privacy settings for a child's social networking accounts. Supervise children's interactions on social media, where predators may prey on children.
- Ask about Internet access in homes your child may visit.
- Be wary of instant messaging and chat rooms a child may visit online.
- Watch for use of file-sharing programs that make it possible to download music and other content illegally.
- Monitor children's viewing of online videos to ensure safety.

Cell Phone Controls

Today's cell phones are basically tiny computers with most of the same capabilities as a full-size desktop or laptop computer. Smartphones give users the ability to access websites, email, and apps. Users can also have voice conversations, send text messages, take photos, and watch videos. Parental controls are available for cell phones, either with native or add-on apps.

- Apps can give parents the ability to restrict phone use, block phone numbers, and block inappropriate content. Many cell phone carriers also make these types of services available.
- It's also possible to install apps that will locate a child and ones that allow monitoring of text messages.
- Installing mobile spy software is another option, giving parents full access to text messages, phone calls, and other information. If you opt for spy software, it's wise to be up front with the child, possibly making installation of this software a condition of having a phone.

Education Is Key

Even with the most expansive security software, it's impossible to always know what kids are doing on the Internet. The most effective parental controls are education and communication to actively teach children about dangers and talk about issues. Before providing a child with a smartphone, take the following steps:

- Talk about the dangers present on the Internet, and have ongoing conversations about their online activities.
- Remind children that many things presented on the Internet are untrue.
- Encourage kids to talk to you about anything that is seen or heard on the Internet that doesn't seem right.
- Teach children not to share personal information on the Internet, including their address and phone number.
- Ask kids to use fictitious screen names instead of real names on the Internet.
- Talk about cyberbullying.
- Restrict online activity to age-appropriate websites.

- Encourage kids to engage in real-life activities, limiting screen time.

Additional Resources

- [Kids and Mobile Phones](#): Every family needs to determine the best age for a child to have a mobile phone, based on the maturity, needs, and personality of the child.
- [Family Digital Literacy Practices and Children's Mobile Phone Use](#): A family's home environment has a direct correlation to whether online activities are safe for children.
- [For Parents: Steps to Keep Your Child Safe Online](#): Talking about Internet dangers with children is an important step in keeping them safe as they navigate the Internet.
- [Talking With Kids About Being Online](#) (PDF): Parents need to set rules and communicate expectations when children begin using the Internet so kids know how to use it safely.
- [How Safe Is Your Child Online?](#) Understand how child predators operate and explain these dangers to a child before online activity begins.
- [Cyber-Safety](#): Child predators often target kids between the ages of 10 and 17.
- [Setting Family Computer Rules](#): Computer rules should be in place before kids start using a computer.
- [Prevent Cyberbullying](#): Watch for signs of cyberbullying, including increased or decreased use of a device and hiding devices.
- [How Teens Are Connected](#): Teens are connected every day via mobile devices, accessing social networking platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.
- [When to Give Your Child a Smartphone](#): Introducing responsible mobile device use at a young age can be a good idea for many families.
- [Youth and Smartphones: Important Tips for Safety](#): Turning off geolocation on a child's smartphone may be a wise safety measure.
- [Keeping Kids Cyber-Safe](#): Kids may not tell parents about a cyberbullying problem because they don't want to lose online access.
- [Just How Bad Is Kids' Smartphone Addiction?](#) Many teenagers use their smartphones to the point of feeling addicted to them.
- [How to Use Cell Phone Monitoring Software on Your Teenager's Mobile Device](#): Cell phone monitoring software gives parents real-time access to a child's activities.
- [Smartphones and Privacy](#): Anyone using a smartphone should become educated about potential privacy issues.
- [Cyberbullying: Keeping Your Kids Safe](#): Cyberbullying often feels worse than old-fashioned bullying because the teasing tends to be more vicious.