



هيئة أبوظبي للطفولة المبكرة
Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority

CHILD ONLINE Protection Guide



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Parents' Guide to Online Protection for Early Years Children

1.0 Introduction to the Guide

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) defines child online protection (COP), as the holistic approach to respond to all potential threats and risks of harm that children and young people may encounter online. It is everyone's responsibility to protect children from the risk of harm. In context of child online protection, whilst most children will be susceptible in one form or another to online threats and the risk of harm, it is important to highlight that some children are especially vulnerable, particularly migrant children or children living with a form of disability.

The UAE has one of the highest rates of internet usage per head of population with **99% of the UAE population being active on social media.**

UNICEF statistics inform us that globally **"more than 175,000 children go online for the first time every day - a new child every half second"**.

With the high rates of internet usage in the UAE, and the fact that more children are engaging in online activity than ever before, this guide is intended to signpost parents towards developing good digital habits and provide local and international resources to ensure they can fulfill their responsibility in keeping their children safe online.

Think of the online world as a reflection of the real world; children can be at risk, both in the real world, and online. In the online world, however, parents may have little insight into the risks their children face - the reality is that child online abuse does exist and can present itself in many different ways.

Online predators are constantly looking for opportunities to exploit children and the more children that use technology, the greater the risk. They may produce, access, or share, online sexual abuse materials of children, and/or try to groom them in order to sexually exploit them. Predators use technology as a gateway to achieve their goals and will be aware of the loopholes they can take advantage of to gain access to children online. The majority of this guide is structured around the risks of online activity for children, however, it is important to set out the benefits as well, of which there are many.

This guide aims to strike a balance and help parents to understand the ways in which they can support their children by creating safe, structured and healthy online activity for their child in the early years and beyond.

2.0 Benefits of Online Activity for your Child

There are multiple benefits for a child using technology in a positive way, as described in the table below.

Benefit	Explanation
Access to Educational Content	Access to Educational Content: The internet provides a wealth of learning opportunities for your child, with unlimited resources to help advance their education. Applications that are specifically targeted at certain age groups enhance the learning experience and can create many positive outcomes for your child.
Logic and Problem Solving	Logic and Problem Solving: Many applications that are aimed at children are built around the requirement to solve puzzles and overcome challenges in order to 'advance to the next level'. This can be in both entertainment and educational formats. From an early age, this exposure to problem solving can be a real benefit to their educational development.
Reaction Times and Hand-Eye Coordination	Moving objects around a screen, pressing buttons at the appropriate time, and ensuring that multiple actions happen simultaneously, all demonstrate how online activity can support and enhance reaction times and hand-eye coordination in your child. As your child develops and the online activities they participate in become more complex, so does their development in this area.
Research and Language Skills	Using online resources is a great way for your child to evolve and adapt their research skills. This in turn will aid language development as they become more deliberate in their choice of words for more efficient researching. Being able to prioritize information also enhances these skills.
Familiarization with Technology	Technology is here to stay and as it continues to evolve, is likely to become an even bigger part of our daily lives than it is now. If your child is able to enjoy a positive relationship with technology from a young age, this can only benefit them in the future.



2.1 Children of Determination

For children with learning disabilities and autism, there are many online resources that can assist them with their social and educational needs, with content that is designed to specifically cater for the difficulties that children of determination may face. Accessible sites with language and design that is easier to process can be of huge assistance for these children and their families.

Children who face difficulties with face-to-face communication can often find online interaction less challenging. Tailor-made learning resources provide opportunities for children who may need to learn through repetition and supports those children whose learning process may take longer.

Digital communication offers children of determination a way to express themselves and make their own choices - it can open up channels of communication with friends and peer groups and help reduce feelings of isolation. All of these benefits can provide a greater feeling of independence. The internet is also an invaluable tool for parents of children of determination as it allows them to research support groups and resources.

To find resources for Children of Determination, click here. 

3.0 Risks of Online Activity for your Child

Risks are elaborated on later in this guide, but the summary is that your child faces a wide range of risks online including the production and distribution of images of a sexual nature, child grooming through games and online applications, plus exposure to offensive, inappropriate and violent materials. Research shows that technology, and creating healthy digital habits with your child, will benefit them over the long term. Parents should also be aware of how risks increase, as their child gets older and develops more risk related online behaviors.

3.1 What is Child Online Abuse?

Defined by the UAE Ministry of Interior Child Protection Centre, online abuse is any harm to children through information technology such as gaming consoles, smartphones, tablets and computers. Such harm includes, but is not limited to, online bullying, exposure to harmful and illegal content such as violence or inappropriate material, online extortion, internet addiction and online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSE) are acts where the perpetrator does not come into physical contact with a child, such as in the case of possession, distribution or production of child sexual abuse material. The perpetrators engage through chat rooms, social networking sites, instant messaging and online games, and use all kinds of devices. They are sometimes difficult to track down and often trick the child by posing as a child themselves.

In the UAE, this is covered under the Child Rights Law 3 of 2016 and Combating Cybercrimes 5 of 2012 for legislation governing all criminal acts related to children and information technology, and the internet, including the penalties associated.

Child Abuse Material (CAM) is electronic data depicting the abuse or exploitation of children. The data can include text, images, video, sound or adult sexual activity. The acts of viewing, distributing, downloading and producing such material is illegal and punishable by law. Online abuse can be incredibly traumatic, which is why parents need to understand how they can minimize risks and use protective mechanisms.

Online abuse can be displayed in many ways such as a victim experiencing:

- Threatening or harassing behavior
- Online grooming which may lead to meeting in real life
- Sexual exploitation
- Cyber bullying
- Communication with a child in a sexual context
- Coercing a child into performing a sexual act
- Showing a child inappropriate images or videos of a sexual or violent nature
- Children can also be re-victimized if evidence of their abuse is recorded or uploaded online or shared, causing repeated trauma.

3.2 How Real are the Risks?

The risks are increasing globally year on year with the speed of new technology developing and the increasing number of children online

Examples:

- **Contact risks** — Where a child can be contacted by someone who intends to bully them, groom them, or cause them harm online.
- **Conduct risks** — Where a child may be at risk from their own online conduct, which can include over sharing of images or personal information, engaging in inappropriate conversations with strangers online who may have presented themselves as ‘friends’.
- **Content risks** — Where a child is exposed to harmful or inappropriate content online, playing games that are not age appropriate or accessing social media or online platforms that they are not prepared for.

In addition, a child that has been sexually exploited online following a video or image of them being uploaded or shared is revictimized every time it is viewed.

Parents may question how a child in the early years can be considered ‘at risk’ online, yet it is evident that more and more pre-schoolers have regular online access to tablets and smartphones on a daily basis.

This is why it is important for parents to model good screen habits and talk to their child early about using digital technology, as raising awareness in a child at an early age will better prepare them for their next digital milestones.

3.3 Points to Remember

When guiding your child about their online behavior, here are four key points that you can ask them to always remember.



- 1. Be kind online** - demonstrate how to show respect, and to consider how their online activity can affect others. Kindness, teaching empathy and positive habits are the key to this.
- 2. Be safe online** – teach them how to protect personal information and always maintain a safe online environment.
- 3. Be alert online** – teach them not to be tricked into giving away personal information. Run through a scenario of how they might be asked for their name, school, address, or passwords and why they should always say ‘NO’!
- 4. Help them to make good choices online** – remind them of the importance of keeping themselves safe by making good choices in what they watch or play online, this means that whenever they want to use a new site or app, they must check with you first.

Your child should understand that their online experiences will be discussed regularly, so that as a parent, you have a clear understanding of what your child’s digital world looks like. Let them know that they can come and talk to you or a trusted adult about any aspect of their online experiences, whether they are positive or negative.

3.4 Guidance for Carers and Home Help

For families that have home help or babysitters spending time with their child, it is very important to share a clear understanding of your preferences and boundaries for not only your child's online activity, but also the online activity of those caring for the child.

Here are a few considerations for parents to discuss with carers:

Keep phone use to a minimum

Make sure your carer is aware that you do not wish your child to mimic overuse of devices and to consider refraining from being on devices whilst supervising your child, unless it is an emergency.

Do not let your child see or hear inappropriate content

Carers may receive content from their own networks that in their view may be silly or funny, however, you may feel it is inappropriate for your child. Also, ensure that even if your child is not looking at content, there may be content that you do not wish for them to hear either.

Do not post or tag photos

Carers may not understand the risk that posting and tagging photos of your (or other parents') child online can pose. Set clear boundaries that no images of your child should be posted without your prior approval.

Pay attention

Ask carers to ensure your preferences and boundaries are followed consistently with your child. Spend time discussing the controls you have in place, why they are important and how you can work together to keep your child protected.





3.5 Child Online Abuse Through Social Networks & Live Streaming

FACEBOOK*	TWITTER*	YOUTUBE*
Between July and September in 2018, Facebook removed 8.7 million pieces of content relating to child nudity and sexual exploitation.	Between January and June 2018, Twitter suspended 487,363 user accounts for activity relating to child sexual exploitation.	Between October and December 2018, YouTube removed 73,573 channels owing to concerns around child safety.

*according to their own statistics

4.0 Preparing for the Next Milestones



Age 2 to 4 years

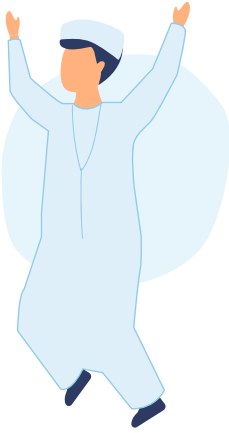
During this phase of development, children are interacting on devices with parents and maybe their siblings too. This is the perfect time to build a bond with your child and create shared experiences. This is less of a safety concern and more about building a positive online experience together, as a foundation for future behavior. It is important to discuss the importance of online safety and what is not appropriate for the little ones to see or hear, with other members of the household including older siblings.

Towards the end of this phase children may be allowed a little more independence and be left to explore websites that you have chosen for them, however, no device should be left in the bedroom of the child, as online predators have been known to access children’s devices including the camera.



Age 4 to 7 years

This is the age when parents will need to consider putting extra safeguards in place, such as child-friendly search engines, content filters and site restrictions. With these in place, children can be allowed to explore a little more independently. This is a great time to ask your child questions about what they enjoy in their online activities and ask them to show you. Be mindful that as your child becomes more adept in using their device and navigating content, they must consistently be reminded about being safe online.



Age 7 to 10 years

This is the age range when children look more towards their peers for online interaction and validation. They will be seeking further independence and it is a good idea to allow them to explore more independently, but check safeguards around them so they cannot wander into unsafe online territory. It is also a good time to reassess all the safety measures that you have put in place and to adapt them in-line with your child's development. Set parental controls across all devices and have an open discussion with your child about how these controls work and what you are trying to protect. Children should find a balance by engaging in multiple activities and avoid spending excessive time on their devices. Differences in the online behavior between girls and boys becomes more apparent at this age. Boys can be more interested in multiplayer gaming and girls may prefer social and live streaming sites. It is important to understand your child's interests and the associated risks.

4.1 Beyond the Early Years

4.2 Social Media

As children develop beyond the early years age range, their exposure to, and use of, social media will become more prevalent. Although the majority of social media sites are for children aged 13+, many children under this age have successfully opened accounts. There are many risks associated with social media and children accessing social media sites at an early age, as they are considered more vulnerable online and often not developmentally prepared for it, especially when faced with inappropriate content or hurtful messages.

4.3 Fake Social Media Accounts

Parents should be aware that the UAE has confirmed reports of fake social media accounts, where a profile is impersonating another child. The impersonated fake account may use the name, and even an image of the child. The fake account will then attempt to connect with other children (friends) that would be known to the real child. It can be a difficult task for parents to ask the social media network to remove the account, even when it is clearly false.

When impersonating accounts have been reported, social media networks have asked for:

- Birth certificate
- Passport copies
- Current photographs

Even when supplied with these documents, the network has reportedly still refused to remove accounts of this nature, responding with: 'The account did not breach community guidelines'. However, through persistence parents have sometimes been successful in having fake accounts deleted.

4.4 Child Friendly Social Media Sites

There are child friendly social media sites that are designed for younger children who are not quite ready for Facebook or Instagram. These include:

*Please note the child friendly social media sites listed are not endorsed or validated by ECA.

Go Bubble (Aged 3+)

<https://gobubble.school/>



The web and app version of Go Bubble is available to schools for free. Outside of school, parents and children can access Go Bubble via the web for free for two weeks, then for a minimal monthly fee have the option of downloading the app onto their tablet, laptop or mobile device.

Safety features

- Live moderation team who review flagged messages.
- Removes any inappropriate images, text, audio, video, or emojis.
- Advert free.
- Due to its comprehensive safety features, the site has been awarded a PEGI 3 rating – the safest age rating available from the Pan European Gaming Information governing body.

Spotlite (Aged 8+)

<https://www.gospotlite.com/>



The photo-sharing free social media app gives children the opportunity to explore the world of social networking in a safe environment.

Children can edit their pictures by adding text and drawings and then share the images with an approved list of friends. Friends who receive the image are only able to like, react (limited to three positive reactions) and comment on the photos.

As the main aim of the app is to teach preteens the etiquette of interacting online, it has constant reminders to keep things positive like the comment box that directs users to 'leave a nice comment'. The app also picks users who have modeled good behavior to be ambassadors to other Spotlite users.
















Safety features

- All accounts require a parent or carer to provide email authentication and approval. No friends can be added until a parent approves the account.
- Geo-targeting is not offered so images will not share your child's location.
- Photos are monitored to make sure they are not inappropriate and all the likes made on photos are not anonymous.

4.5 Social Media Usage as your Child Develops

As your child develops beyond the early years and towards their teens, it is likely they will become more exposed to social media. However, it is important to note that the legal age for most social media applications is 13, therefore any accounts should be managed by their parents. The chart below shows an example of the level of social media usage of children up to 10 years old.

Table 1. The social media used by Year 4 and Year 5 groups and how often children used them.

	A few times a month	Once a week	Most days of the week	Daily	Multiple times a day
Year 4 Boys 8-9 year olds					
Year 4 Girls 8-9 year olds					
Year 5 Boys 9-10 year olds					
Year 5 Girls 9-10 year olds					

Source: Children's Commissioner Report "Life in Likes".





More Personal More Private Less Supervised

With social media usage comes a great deal of peer group pressure, with it being incredibly important for children to get 'approval' for posts and images via likes, shares, posts and comments. In the same way parents take time to understand who their child's friends are in and outside of school, they should also ask who their online friends are.

Children are also more exposed to celebrity status and may wish to mimic their online behavior. It can be difficult for a child to hear from a parent that 'Likes don't matter', as to them, they can mean everything. Likes represent a sense of acceptance and belonging, which is why they matter so much at this age.

Children need to be made aware of the future impact that posts made at a young age may have. This digital footprint can be long lasting and what may seem harmless and fun could later be deemed as inappropriate.

As they approach their teenage years and their interests are developing, children will want more independence online. If they are using their online activity to broaden their knowledge, and research and develop their interests, as well as for safe use of social media and online gaming, then they will develop healthy habits online. As children mature and their abstract reasoning develops, they are less likely to share the opinions of their parents and more likely to reflect the opinions of their peers and try to get their approval and acceptance too.

This is an important time to discuss finding trusted sources of information on the internet with your child and explain that not everything they read may be true. As children develop, more risk-associated behavior will increase as their use of technology increases along with their independence.

Risks such as cyber bullying, grooming, Sexting, and live streaming are all covered later in this guide.

5.0 Gaming and Associated Risks

What children think

Fun interaction with friends and others through games.

I can show people how good I am at an online gaming and buy V-Bucks!

I can live stream videos of myself on TikTok and impress my friends; they'll think I'm so cool!

What online predators think

I can pretend to be a child and join this group.

I can try and make friends with a child by buying them V-Bucks online and making them feel like they have earned them.

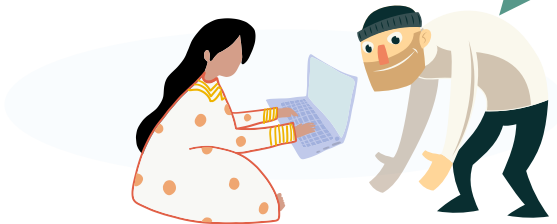
I can pretend to be a child of their age, tell them how cool they are and try and get a child to send me naked pictures and then blackmail them for more.

Protective Measures

Create a friends group with only friends they know in real life, so your child knows exactly who they are playing with.

Make sure your child knows not to accept any gifts online from anyone they do not know, and advise your child to only accept friends they know in real life.

Restrict access to any applications that allow live streaming.



5.1 Gaming Risks: Key Terms Explained

Cyber Bullying, Trolling, Griefing, Grooming, Gifting, Live Streaming, Blackmail, Voice/Video Chat, Child Sexual Exploitation, Online Predator

Key Terms Explained

Cyber Bullying has no universal definition, however, the UAE Ministry of Interior Child Protection Centre defines it as acts of tormenting, threatening and harassment through electronic mediums, including the internet and mobile phones. Cyber-bullying is illegal in the UAE.

Some examples include:

- Delivering threats or hurtful messages
- Constantly sending negative messages (harassment)
- Spreading false rumors
- Impersonating someone else online in order to harass others
- Sending pictures of another person



Trolling is the act of starting an argument by using language that will upset someone else, which can be false or critical.

Griefing takes place when one player in a game deliberately tries to ruin the game for another person, in order to make them feel bad. This can be popular in the Minecraft game by use of destruction.

Grooming occurs when someone builds the trust of a child in order to persuade them to take actions such as taking sexual pictures or videos of themselves or arrange a face-to-face meeting. They may pretend to be someone else, such as another child of a similar age with similar interests, to gain their trust or flatter them with compliments or gifts to win affection.

Gifting in the context of risk, is when an online predator, (sometimes pretending to be a child), offers online gifts to children in order to build their trust as part of the grooming process. This might happen within games where items can be bought with gaming currencies such as V-Bucks (Fortnite), and Robux (Roblox).

Live Streaming is the creation of live content that is posted online in real time and is becoming increasingly popular with children. This can give children access to inappropriate content that may include sexual images and videos, violent acts, offensive language or hate-filled content. Children may also post content themselves that can be used against them by online predators or content that can negatively impact their digital footprint.

Blackmail occurs when someone uses materials or information that the other person does not want others to see, such as asking children to take sexualized photos or videos of themselves or provide personal information.

Voice or Video Chat are facilities within games or apps that allow participants to connect with others, using voice or video. The identity of participants is not usually known, so your child will not know who they are connecting with, and that person could be an adult pretending to be a child.

Online Child Sexual Exploitation most commonly includes grooming, live streaming, consuming child sexual abuse material, and coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purposes. As technology advances, new forms of this crime emerge. Never before has it been easier for perpetrators to make contact with children, share images of abuse, hide their identity and profits – and inspire each other to commit further crimes (Source: ECPAT).

Online Predator is someone who exploits a child on the internet, often grooming them over time, using gifts or affection followed by threats and extortion to get what they want.

5.2 Live Streaming

Live streaming applications are increasing in popularity and are shifting children's behavior away from recording then posting, into live broadcasting. This provides the opportunity for instant feedback, and therefore gratification, from not only friends, but also strangers, who provide comments or likes in real time. Popular live streaming apps for children include: YouTube; TikTok; Live.ly; Facebook Live; Periscope; and Instagram Live.



Why is Live Streaming so popular with children?

If used correctly, these applications can be an outlet for creativity, and can provide a platform for children to show a particular talent and increase their confidence.

Common Sense Media observes that a child's desire for popularity and internet fame, combined with their youthful inexperience this could create situations that may place a child in danger, or lead them to posting inappropriate content, an act that could have a long-term effect and create a long-lasting, irreversible digital footprint.

Parents need to know that live streamed content is, by definition, unedited content and this could expose your child to inappropriate and offensive content. Children who are posting, may, in the moment, exaggerate their behavior, dress inappropriately or do something potentially dangerous in order to show off to their live audience. Once the content has been broadcast there is no way to correct any inappropriate behavior and no controls can then be added. A strong analogy is that live streaming is like allowing your children to entertain audiences of complete strangers from the privacy of their bedroom. This is an act many would never allow in real life, so parents should consider putting safety measures in place if their child is accessing live streaming apps.

Live Distant Child (Sexual) Abuse -LDCA

LDCA is where child sexual abuse takes place via a live video or streaming application. It involves child sexual exploitation and/or the production of child abuse material by directing the child to act inappropriately.

A parent's guide to live streaming:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/parents-guide-to-live-streaming-and-vlogging/>

Points to Remember

- Once content is live streamed then all control of it is lost, and if privacy settings are not in place and the live stream is public, it can be recorded, shared with others, and even used to blackmail the child.
- Online predators looking to exploit children may use praise, positive comments and likes in order to build a relationship with a child and persuade them to engage in online sexual activity.
- Posting inappropriate behavior has lasting consequences and can also raise itself again at some point in your child's adult life, impacting future prospects, job opportunities and personal relationships.
- Children have been groomed online in as little as 45-minutes.

5.3 Gaming for the Early Years

Common Sense Media is recognized as a leading source of entertainment and technology recommendations for parents. Below are examples of what they say about some of the most popular children's games:

	Roblox *	Minecraft	Fortnite
What is it?	Platform where users can create games or play existing games with multiple users.	Users construct buildings and infrastructures playing individually or with multiple players.	A cartoon-like game where users have battles in order to become the last remaining person or team to win the game.
PEGI Rating (age)	7	7	13
Benefits	Collaboration, teamwork, problem solving, creativity.	Design, creativity, logic, resource management, geometry skills.	Strategic thinking, teamwork, collaboration, memory, reaction time and hand-eye coordination.
Risks	Children can connect with not only friends but also strangers, receiving messages via online chat or headsets.	Videos of users playing Minecraft are increasingly popular but can contain offensive language. Multiplayer options allow connection with other unknown participants.	Some children aren't only playing Fortnite - they're watching other people, including celebrities, play it on Twitch. Twitch is a social media platform for gamers where they can livestream themselves playing popular video games, including Fortnite.
Need to Know	Predators take advantage of Roblox's easily accessible chat to target their victims.	When playing a multiplayer game, children can interact with other players through text chat. But it is possible to hide the chat window if you don't want to see messages or interact. To minimize contact with strangers, children can join a server organized by someone they know or set up their own. Players can also play 'local' games with people in their homes.	There is live, unmoderated chat possible between users in the console and PC versions of Fortnite: Battle Royale. Both voice chat and on-screen text chat are options. This exposes players to random strangers and the likelihood of profanity.

Addiction	There are multiple reports for all three games that addiction and addictive behaviour can be a concern for parents.
Currency	All three games allow in-game purchasing i to advance the status of the player during gameplay. There are many parental reports of unauthorized spending within the games. Parental controls must be set to prevent uncontrolled spending by children.

*The Attorney General banned Roblox in the UAE in May 2018 due to risks posed to children through the game, deeming it inappropriate for children, as there were reports where players would display nude or inappropriately dressed avatars and use offensive language.

The UAE also uses the UAE Age Classification:

<https://nmc.gov.ae/en-us/Pages/About-Age.aspx>

<https://nmc.gov.ae/en-us/Media-Center/Events/Pages/Age-Classification-System.aspx>

The UAE restricts various other forms of online content related to pornography, gambling, certain political views and illegal downloads.



5.4 Benefits of Gaming with your Child

It is recommended that parents spend time engaging in online activity with their children and this includes gaming. There are many benefits to doing this aside from general interaction and increasing the understanding between parent and child.

These include:

Remove Isolation

Children who use online gaming on their own may become isolated. Even if they are in the same house as you, even the same room, if they are locked in within their own imaginative world, this could become a solitary experience. Joining in with your child breaks down the digital divide that can exist between generations.

Teaching Opportunity

Often gaming requires choices. You can discuss these choices with your child and frame them in a variety of contexts: moral, logical, emotional and discover the drivers behind your child's choices and how, if required, you can help them think about alternative motives. You can also collaborate with your child and help them understand the benefits of discipline, time management and language use.

Teamwork and Collaboration

Supporting your child in achieving their gaming goals can build up a collaborative approach that can be translated into the real world.

Empathy and Respect

By increasing your knowledge of your child's digital world, you will be better placed to address any issues around their gaming activity should they arise. Your shared experiences will allow you to speak with firsthand knowledge on their gaming activity, and when required, make informed decisions to support them if required.



Want to know more? Here are some resources you may find useful.

5.5 Online Gaming Reviews

Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews>

Age-specific games to play together

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/online-gaming-advice/amazing-video-games-guide-for-families/>

Ask about Games

<https://www.askaboutgames.com/family-games/>



6.0 Creating Healthy Digital Habits

The online environment can be a place for positive education, entertainment, and knowledge enhancement. Like any activity children engage in, there should be a full understanding of the rules and acceptable boundaries. Establishing these at an early age can be the pathway to healthy digital habits for your child, as well as remembering that your child will learn their habits from you, so set the example you wish your child to follow.

6.1 Healthy Digital Habits: Key Terms Explained

Sharenting, Digital Footprint, Screen Time, Family Digital Contract

Key Terms Explained

Sharenting is the act of sharing too much about your children’s lives on social media. This is a negative term as it relates to the risks of putting too much information about children online. This information could reveal their location, create a digital footprint that cannot be erased, or lead to somebody misusing your child’s image without your knowledge. This video, created by Atlantic Media, describes how many children growing up today will discover that their digital footprint began even before they were born. This phenomenon has come to be known as “sharenting”—when parents over share pictures and videos of their children on social media, creating an lasting digital trail.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpirtXdzkII>

Digital Footprint is the information that is created and exists as a result of online activity. This includes images, personal information, social media posts and websites you or your child have visited.

6.2 Screen Time

Screen Time is the amount of time, usually measured in hours, that is spent using a device that is connected to the Internet. Experts advise that devices should not be used to replace family interaction or physical exercise, and parents should avoid using a device as a calming tool for upset or distressed children.

Concerns around excessive screen time include:

- Mental health including depression, language development delay and behavioral issues.
- Physical health including tiredness through irregular sleep patterns, eye fatigue, and obesity.
- Displacement of positive child and parent interaction and bonding.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends



No screen time for children younger than 2 years

60 minutes

No more than 60 minutes of screen time per day for children 2-5 years old

120 minutes

No more than 120 minutes of screen time per day for children 5-8 years old

Healthy Screen Time usage requires a balance between the benefits of using devices and creating acceptable limits that mean children are not spending too much time in front of their screens. Forming healthy habits in the early years can ensure that as your child develops they will maintain a positive relationship with technology and their devices.

6.3 Healthy Screen Time Habits

- Schedule frequent screen breaks for at least 30 minutes away from the screen.
- Limited time but interactive video calling with family & friends.
- Children need a range of activities for stimulation such as exercise, reading and puzzles. Ensure Screen Time is part of a mix of your child's daily activities.
- There is a difference between active (where a child is engaged in an online activity) and passive (where a child is simply watching content) screen time – active screen time has more benefits than passive screen time so ensure your child has a balance between the two.
- Share Screen Time with your child – the more you can be involved, the healthier your child's relationship with their device will be.
- Install parental control software to limit the time and content on your child's device.
- Create screen-free times or zones so your child understands clearly when Screen Time is not an option. Mealtimes should be designated screen-free times, and it is a good idea to restrict Screen Time at least two hours before bedtime.

6.4 Too much Screen Time?

Signs that could indicate that your child is having too much screen time include:

- Appearing distressed, upset or anxious when the child's screen is removed from them.
- No desire to visit friends or leave the home.
- Problems with sleeping patterns.

Personalised Screen Time Plan

Here is a link that allows your family to personalise your screen time usage by inputting your family names into the web page, which then generates your family plan:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx#wizard>

6.5 Being a Parental Role Model

As parents, we know that our children look to our own behavior, as their role models, and how we use our devices is likely to be mirrored by our children. If your child observes that your devices often distract you, with no set boundaries when you use them, then it is only reasonable to expect your child to follow the same behavior patterns. When you adopt a responsible and healthy approach to screen time and device usage, then you are setting your child a positive example.

Previous studies have found that young children, especially newborn babies, use eye contact as a way to form a bond, yet evidence suggests that more parents spending increased amounts of time on their smartphones, with one study suggesting that 1 in 3 parents will continuously check their phone during meal times.

Being a role model is important not only to guide children as they develop, but also when considering the message you are giving your child, and how this is impacting on parent/carer and child relationships.

6.6 Tips on Being a Great Tech Role Model

Children develop their communication and social skills through listening, talking, reading, playing and singing with parents, but these interactions can be lost when you are on a smartphone.

- Spend at least 15 minutes of uninterrupted 1-1 time with your child every day - without any device.
- Set time aside each day for you and your child when you have agreed there will be no devices.
- At any time when you are in discussion with your child, try to not let yourself be interrupted or distracted by your device. This sets an example that your device is more important than the moment you are spending with your child.
- Avoid using screens as the main source of distraction for your child on car journeys, appointments, family occasions, or eating out – mix it up with other options such as reading, playing games, or telling stories.
- Talk about your own social media and online activity with your child, and show them how you spend your time on your device. If you want to take their picture to post or tag, then ask their permission. This sets the example that they have the right to determine how their own digital footprint is managed. This is an extremely important lesson for later on in their lives.
- When your child is talking to you, put down your device and make eye contact.
- Have an agreement that there will be no devices during meal times.

Further supported comments coming from the UAE Ministry of Interior Child Protection Centre:

- Be honest about what content they may be exposed to.
- Discuss with your children that they may be exposed to inappropriate content online.
- Be open about family and cultural values, and what content is considered acceptable.
- Remind them that nothing online is really private as anything can be recorded.
- Teach your children to recognize signs of potential grooming and to be resilient.
- Make use of parental controls for browsing, gaming consoles, and mobile devices.
- Parental Controls allow you to place limits on your child's use of devices and allows you to better protect them and prevent harm. You may request a copy of our guide for Parental Controls on Mobile Devices by e-mail. Etisalat also provides a guidebook for using parental controls.
- Practice privacy of passwords and accounts.
- Encourage high usage of privacy, tell your children not to share their Wi-Fi password or personal account passwords with anyone. In addition, ask them to set their accounts to private.
- Limit screen time and lead by example.
- Encourage family or at home activities that don't involve the Internet. In addition, limit your own screen time to be an example.
- Develop an open relationship with your children.
- It is advisable to have your children use the Internet in open spaces so you can monitor their activity better.
- If your child has become a victim of grooming, listen to them without being judgmental. You will need to contact the police as this predator may be threatening to harm other children as well. Try to gather details such as usernames and what threats were being made.

6.7 Family Digital Contracts and Agreements

A family digital contract is an agreement between the whole family that covers the use of devices and online activity in the home. The agreement unifies the family and will help reduce any potential conflict that may arise.

Introducing a family digital contract at an early age is just as important as following general safety guidance in the home. Discussing these rules with your children will set the tone for a safe, positive future relationship with devices and technology.

A great way to build a family agreement is to start a discussion around online usage. You can use these points as a framework for discussion, in order to get to the best result of a family digital agreement or contract.

Getting Started	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do we currently spend our time online?• What do we enjoy about our time online?• What devices do we use?• Do we already have any rules we should include?
Time Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How much time do we spend online already?• Should we consider reducing this time?• Are there times when using our devices can cause problems in the house or create conflict with family members?
Sharing Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whose permission do we need before sharing anything online?• How can we make sure we do not give personal information away?• Do we all know the family passwords?• Should we have rules about what is acceptable if there is live streaming?
Content Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do we understand what age appropriate content means?• What settings shall we put in place to restrict access to inappropriate content?• What action do we take if we see something we should not see online?• What websites am I allowed to visit?
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who am I allowed to interact with online?• How can we keep safe when communicating online?• What do I do if a stranger asks me for information or to send pictures of myself?• Do we regularly talk about our online experiences?



Example of a Family Agreement:

Who is this Agreement for?

What devices does it cover?

We agree to...

Who is responsible for this?

What happens if this Agreement is not followed?

This Agreement will be reviewed on this date:



[Click Here to print](#) 

6.8 Checklist of things parents can do to create healthy digital habits:

- Talk to children about the risks in online behavior.
- Create a Family Digital Contract or Agreement.
- Do not use a device as a means for calming or distracting an upset child.
- Discuss with everyone in the household (including older siblings and carers) what is appropriate, and inappropriate content for your child.
- Keep devices in a shared family space, and do not allow in bedrooms.
- Do not allow devices at family mealtimes, and turn off all devices at least two hours before bedtime.
- Set clear boundaries about screen time and the online activity your child is allowed to participate in.
- Schedule breaks away from devices frequently for your child.
- When talking to your child, do not allow yourself to be distracted by your own device. Make eye contact with your child, not your device.
- Join in your child's online activity so you can learn about and share their online experiences.
- Ask your child to come to you if anything that happens in a game makes them feel uncomfortable or upset, and what do in the game if this happens.
- Teach your children about personal information, so they understand that this information should be kept private and secure (and explain what that means to them). This includes their name, their picture, their date of birth, their address, and any other information about their family.

[Click Here to print](#) 

6.9 Ergonomics

As the use of connected devices increases, so does the risk of causing long term damage from sitting too long, in positions that can harm your child's posture.

The risk to children is from spending too long, in the same position, which over time can cause lasting pain and injury. These injuries can occur throughout the body affecting joints in the neck, back, hands, arms, and shoulders. There is also the risk of Repetitive Strain Injury, caused by repeated actions, or positioning. These injuries may develop over time, so even if your child may not be experiencing pain or injury at present, they could still be causing damage that will emerge over the long term.

Addictive behavior can add to these issues, with children refusing to eat, go to the bathroom and engage in other activities away from their devices.



What to watch out for:

Placement of Screens

Is the screen at a comfortable viewing angle that does not place strain on your child's neck or back? Your child should not need to bend or strain their neck in order to see their screen.

Comfort

Is your child sitting in a comfortable position? Is anything about the placement of their arms, legs, back, and neck likely to cause discomfort over time?

Lighting

Ensure your child sits in a well-lit area to avoid strain on their eyes.

Scheduled Breaks

Ensure there are set times when your child will move away from their screen or device. In these breaks encourage your child to move around, and go to a different area. These breaks will allow your child's eyes some rest and also improve their circulation.

Important to Remember:

Handheld devices are still screens – if your child is spending considerable time with their necks bent down looking at the screen, this could cause long-term muscular damage.





6.10 Internet of Things (IOT)

IOT is the term used to describe devices, toys, or household goods that function through online connectivity. For example Alexa or Siri (the voice controlled assistants for Amazon Echo and Apple Devices) are always connected and listening for commands. Similarly, a toy robot that contains a camera may also function through online connectivity, or a fitness monitor that a child wears can track a child's location.

The risk through IOT lies in this constant connectivity that takes place in the background of our lives. Parents should be aware if their child is using any connected device that could reveal their location, or provide access to cameras that may be activated without the child's knowledge.

There are also concerns that voice activated assistants may limit children's learning. For example, children may ask a voice activated assistant for information or research, and they are provided with a very limited response, as opposed to when they search on the internet for information and they are provided with extensive results from which they can select the information they need.

7.0 Using Technology to Protect your Child

7.1 Using Safe Internet Search Engines

While children search the Internet, they may accidentally find content that is inappropriate for them. Inappropriate images and videos can pop up in searches that are not related to the subject your child is searching for, potentially exposing them to content of a violent or sexual or inappropriate nature.

In recognition of this danger, many child-friendly search engines have been developed where the content is filtered so it is appropriate for children. Children's search engines are visually more stimulating, and designed to be child-friendly

Wacky Safe	KidRex	Kiddle.co
Designed by Microsoft and described as an "ultra-safe" environment for children to search. The site aggregates child friendly content and filters out inappropriate content.	KidRex is powered by Google and describes itself as a safe search for kids, by kids and is designed to be visually appealing for children.	Kiddle was created by and functions similarly to Google. It is highly visual so children can easily navigate the search results. Google has created a list of censored search words that lead to an error message if inputted by children.

Important points to remember to advise your child:

- If they discover inappropriate content that makes them feel uncomfortable, tell them to immediately shut down the device and inform you or a trusted adult immediately.
- If your child receives any form of bullying, harassment or threats online, or is asked to send personal information or images, then they should inform you or a trusted adult directly.
- If your child is contacted online by someone they do not know in real life or someone you have not approved them to connect with then they should block and inform you or a trusted adult instantly.

What can parents do?

- Listen to how your child feels and remain open and supportive.
- Record usernames and the material and report it to the authorities.
- Report the incidents on the platform, website, game or application it occurred on.
- Advise your child not to respond to any further messages and to block the user.
- Report concerns about cyber bullying, or online child abuse materials to the Hemayati application or call the child abuse hotline 116111.

[Click Here to Report](#) 🖱️

7.2 Parental Controls

Most games and devices now come with the ability for parents to be able to set controls that create boundaries for a child's online experience. These include screen time, access to content, chat, cameras, and their ability to spend money online.

It is important for parents to familiarize themselves with parental controls, how they operate, and how they can be switched on and off.

Checklist of things parents should consider when setting parental controls:

- ✓ Discuss the settings with your children, and explain what the settings do and why they are important to protect your child online.
- ✓ Regularly check the controls and settings to ensure they are still active and relevant to your child's online activity.
- ✓ Ensure all passcodes and passwords remain private and do not disclose them to your child.

Important to remember:

You can create a safe environment within your own home and on your child's devices, but when they are out of home, or visiting their friends, the same controls may not be in place. Let your child know they can discuss their online activity with you, and if they find anything inappropriate, they should always inform you.

Checklist of things parents can do to protect children online using technology:

- ✓ Understand and use privacy settings for devices and apps, explain these to your child.
- ✓ Anti-virus programs and ISP'S also include parental controls.
- ✓ Check whether games are age appropriate using the **PEGI** rating as a guidance which is displayed in the app, or on the packaging and compare with expert and user reviews.
- ✓ Set devices and apps so only known and trusted contacts can interact with your child.
- ✓ Create family settings on devices so you can monitor your child's online activity.
- ✓ Disable location settings so others can't see the location of your child.
- ✓ Do not allow purchases within games.
- ✓ Use app age ratings as your guide for age appropriate content for your child.
- ✓ Use child friendly search engines that are designed for your child's age group and keep a bookmarks folder of your child's favorite sites so they can easily find them.





7.3 Play Dates and Older Siblings

It is a good idea to discuss the boundaries you have set for your child with the parents of your child's friends. They may also be interested to learn about the technologies that you are using and the controls that you set. Let them know the games that you are comfortable for your children to play, and the acceptable amount of Screen Time that you have set for your child.

Once boundaries have been discussed and your child is clear about what is considered to be a deal breaker, they will speak out when they are not allowed to do something. Reinforcing this with clear and consistent communication is a protective factor in itself. Older siblings should also form part of the family discussion around Healthy Digital Habits, Screen Time, and what is appropriate content for your younger children.

Older siblings should be mindful of what they share with younger siblings. They should also be comfortable to share any concerns they may have about their younger siblings use of technology and the content they are viewing. The more open the discussions around technology are in the household, the healthier your family's digital habits will become.

8.0 Reporting

8.1 Reporting Child Online Abuse - including Child Abuse Material

Use the Hemayati application or call the Child Abuse Hotline 116111. [Click Here to Report](#)

You can also report cybercrimes to the nearest police station in your area or call 999 for emergencies.

8.2 Message from the UAE Ministry of Interior Child Protection Centre

Everyone in the UAE must report suspicions of abuse and neglect of a child and has the right to remain anonymous as per the below articles of Wadeema Law.

Obligation to report (Article 42)

Everyone has the responsibility to report suspicions of child abuse and harm. There is a special obligation for those hired to care of children to report (school staff, medical professionals, etc).

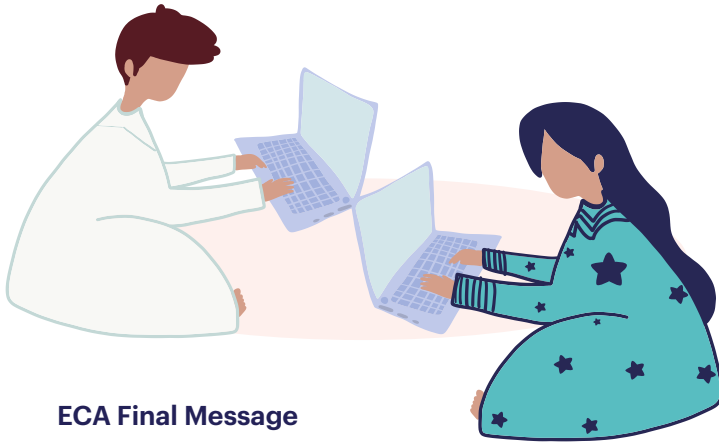
Anonymity (Article 44)

You have the right to remain anonymous. You can request this when making the report.

8.3 Protection of Children's Data Online

Article 29 of Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 Concerning Child Rights, also known as **Wadeema's Law** states: The telecommunications companies and internet service providers shall notify the competent authorities or the concerned entities of any child pornography materials being circulated through the social media sites and on the Internet and shall provide necessary information and data on the persons, entities or sites that circulate such material or intend to mislead the children.

- **Related links:** the 'My Safe Society' app launched by the UAE's federal **Public prosecution** (the app is available on **iTunes** or **Google Play**).
- 80091 is the **UAE Digital Wellbeing Support Line** (content in Arabic), the first initiative of the **Digital Wellbeing Council**. The support line provides professional advice from dedicated experts for all members of the family on practical daily situations we face in the digital world.



9.0 ECA Final Message

There is no doubt that the online world will continue to evolve at a significant rate and offer your child more and more benefits as it develops. As parents it is important to be mindful that with the development and increased use of technology comes increased risks too. Endeavor to use technology tools to protect your child, continuously reevaluate online behaviors, talk regularly to your child about their online experiences as well as join them wherever possible. They should then be in a strong position to explore and develop safely within the digital world, as it will inevitably play a significant role in their future.

Thank you for taking your time to read through this guide and we hope you found the information valuable and useful.

10.0 Appendix for Resources

Here are some links to online safety resources that you can explore with your child.

* Please note the resources provided in this guide are not endorsed or validated by ECA.

Child Resources

The Digiduck® collection has been created to help parents and teachers educate children aged 3 - 7 about online safety. The collection includes eBooks, PDFs, a poster and an interactive app.
<https://www.childnet.com/resources/digiduck-stories>

These cartoons illustrate 5 e-safety SMART rules and include a real-life SMART Crew of young people, who guide the cartoon characters in their quest, and help them make safe online decisions.

<https://www.childnet.com/resources/the-adventures-of-kara-winston-and-the-smart-crew>

A series of short stories to help your child learn about their own feelings as well as those around them. 'WellRead' contains a continuously updated, curated collection of short stories accompanied with a series of questions that help spark conversations with your child.

https://www.mywellread.com/?fbclid=IwAR0tj7_3t8p5myDKzUhAuUR_BuVGjChfAmJX26AU1Ar-j8e2WJQSzSl3cCE

Parents' Local Resources

UAE Ministry of Interior Child Protection Centre

MOI Child Protection Centre has been established in the UAE to undertake the role of developing, implementing and customizing the initiatives and processes aiming at providing, safety, security and protection for all children living in or visiting the UAE.

www.moi-cpc.gov.ae

Child Safe ME

"We are a UAE registered organisation, aiming to raise awareness on child protection and safeguarding."

www.childsafeme.com

ICDL Arabia – Online Sense

A Cyber Safety Awareness website.

<http://onlinesense.org/>

Beat the Cyberbully

"We provide education, awareness and training on online and mobile topics to children and young people and those who work with them to promote safe, responsible and inspiring online communications".

<https://beatthecyberbully.ae/>

eSafe (Emirates Safer Internet Society)

"We are a registered non-profit organization, licensed under the Ministry of Social Affairs, United Arab Emirates (UAE)."

<https://www.esafesociety.org/>

The National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing

Launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing, and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), the **UAE Digital Wellbeing Support Line** provides professional advice from experts and specialists through a dedicated toll-free number (80091). It helps parents and community members address online challenges, protect their children, and promote meaningful and positive digital behaviour.

<https://www.mocaf.gov.ae/en/media/news/uae-digital-wellbeing-council-launches-the-digital-wellbeing-support-line>

Parents' International Resources

The International Telecommunications Union has produced Child Online Protection Guides for Children, Parents and Educators

<https://www.itu.int/en/cop/Pages/guidelines.aspx>

A series of guides to give parents and pupils the knowledge they need to understand online dangers.

<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/guides>

Tips to manage your kids' virtual playdates with advice to help children who want to socialise online with their friends.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/tips-to-manage-your-kids-virtual-playdates/>

5 ways to support children's mental health - An easy way to understand wellbeing is to say it's 'feeling good and doing good'.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zndp6v4>

5 reasons why recognizing your emotions is important. Child mental health expert, Shahana Knight, shares her insight into why it's important for both children and adults to understand and recognise their emotions. Recognising your emotions and learning to manage them is one of the most important skills you can have.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/five-reasons-why-recognising-emotions/z7gxjvh>

A parents guide to buying tech - When buying devices for your child, it can be difficult to know what to look out for from an online safety perspective and what's age appropriate. With the help of a tech expert, we've created a guide recommending the latest child-friendly tech to help your child to get the most out of their digital experience.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/tech-guide/>

Home activity pack (15 mins) 4-5 years - home activity packs with simple 15 minute activities you can do with your child to support their online safety at home. This page includes all packs for children aged 4-5.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/early-years/>

Home activity pack (15 mins) 5-7 years - home activity packs with simple 15 minute activities you can do with your child to support their online safety at home. This page includes all packs for children aged 5-7.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/5-7s/>

Home activity pack (15 mins) 8-10 years - home activity packs with simple 15 minute activities you can do with your child to support their online safety at home. This page includes all packs for children aged 8-10.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/8-10s/>

This booklet for families offers practical advice and strategies for parents and carers, to help them tackle the key online safety issues for children from birth to 5 years old.

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/children-under-5/online-safety-for-under-5s-booklet>

Resources for Children of Determination

The Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination is working to provide advanced services for people of determination and invest resources and energies in a positive environment to enable them educationally, functionally, culturally and socially in line with their abilities and aspirations towards effectiveness of community roles and to achieve a social development.

ZHO for People of Determination have many e-services available via their website.

<https://zho.gov.ae/en/>

Talk about Autism - An online community for parents, carers, professionals and adults with autism:

<https://forum.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/talk-about-autism>

Ability Net provides a number of factsheets about assistive technology. Topics include:

- Voice recognition
- Customising your computer
- Autism and computing
- Free accessibility resources
- Keyboard and mouse alternatives
- Specific adaptations for people with learning disabilities

<https://abilitynet.org.uk/>

Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority Disclaimer

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