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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19) - staying safe online

What you can do to stay safe online during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

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The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has impacted everyone's daily lives. More people are working from home, looking after children and spending time online.

Now more than ever, it is important for everyone to know how to stay connected, stay safe online, check the facts and remember to take a break.

We also have additional advice for parents and carers.

Stay connected

By following guidance on social distancing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults#background-and-scope-of-guidance>) and staying at home (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#looking-after-your-wellbeing-whilestaying-at-home>) you are helping to protect yourself, your family, the NHS and your community.

It is still important to stay connected with family and friends. Staying in touch with people you normally see often or reconnecting with old friends by phone, video call or social media can boost wellbeing.

The internet also offers people a wide range of educational resources, information and entertainment.

Stay safe

Many people are using new services, apps or devices, such as webcams and tablets, to work or socialise at this time. You may also be using existing devices and services more often.

To help you stay safe:

Check your security and privacy settings

- Adjust privacy and safety settings to increase security and control the personal data you share. Look for the 'privacy and security' or 'settings' on the app or website.
- Review the security settings (<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/smart-devices-in-the-home>) on your 'smart' devices. If your device is using a default or easily guessable password, change it (https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/cyberaware#section_2).
- Set up two-factor authentication (https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/cyberaware#section_4). This is a free security feature to stop unwanted people getting into your accounts. You'll receive a text or code when you log in to check you are who you say you are.
- Update your devices (https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/cyberaware#section_5). Using the latest version of software and apps can immediately improve your security.

Block unsuitable content

- It is important to understand the website or app you are using and how they do things - find out in their terms and conditions.
- If you see harmful activity, report it to the site. Platforms often offer advice on how to do this but you can also seek support at:
 - Samaritans (<https://www.samaritans.org/>)
 - Mind (<https://www.mind.org.uk/>)
 - BEAT (<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>)
- To prevent unwanted content from appearing, set filters on your home broadband and mobile networks. The UK Safer Internet Centre has advice (<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/parental-controls-offered-your-home-internet-provider>) on how.

Protect against Fraud

- Criminals will use every opportunity they can to scam innocent people. Beware of fraud and scams online including COVID-19 related phishing emails and text messages. There is guidance (<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/suspicious-email-actions>) on how to recognise these emails.
- You can forward any suspicious emails to report@phishing.gov.uk, a new service run by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) Suspicious Email Reporting Service. The NCSC's automated programme will immediately test the validity of the site and if found to be phishing scams, they will be removed immediately.
- Do not give out your personal information to websites or in response to emails/text messages you do not recognise or trust.
- There is further information on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-fraud-and-cyber-crime) on how you can protect yourself from fraud and cyber crime (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-fraud-and-cyber-crime>).
- If you think you have been scammed, defrauded or experienced cyber crime Action Fraud (<https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>) is the UK's national reporting centre for fraud and cyber crime.

Check the facts

Not all information online is reliable.

Before you like, comment or share something online use the SHARE checklist (<https://sharechecklist.gov.uk/>) to make sure you're not contributing to the spread of harmful content:

- **Source** - make sure information comes from a trusted source
- **Headline** - always read beyond the headline
- **Analyse** - check the facts
- **Retouched** - does the image or video look as though it has been doctored?
- **Error** - look out for bad grammar and spelling

SHARE (<https://sharechecklist.gov.uk/>) can help you understand and spot disinformation and NewsGuard has a free tool (<https://www.newsguardtech.com/free/>) to help the public identify fake news.

You can also check claims about COVID-19 at Full Fact (<https://fullfact.org/>).

Ofcom also has Cutting Through the COVID-19 Confusion (<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/coronavirus-resources>).

Reliable information on COVID-19 can also be found at www.gov.uk/coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>).

Take a break

It is easy to feel overwhelmed with information at this time. 24-hour news and constant social media updates can make you more worried.

It's important to take a step back and think about how this is affecting you. If it is, try to limit the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to coverage of the outbreak. Check in at set times or a few times a day.

There are a range of tools available to help you manage screen time:

Apple's Screen Time (<https://support.apple.com/en-gb/HT208982>)

Google's Family link (https://families.google.com/intl/en_uk/familylink/)

Xbox One (<https://beta.support.xbox.com/help/family-online-safety/browse>)

Playstation 4 (https://support.playstation.com/s/article/PS4-Parental-Controls?language=en_US)

Nintendo Switch (<https://www.nintendo.co.uk/Nintendo-Switch-Family/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls-1183145.html>)

Take regular breaks from your screens. Remember you are allowed to leave your house for one form of exercise a day - alone or with members of your household.

Advice for parents and carers

Schools, colleges and childcare providers are currently closed to most pupils. Daily routines have changed, with many working and studying from home. We understand there may be more concern from parents about the safety of their children online.

It is important for children and young people to stay both connected and safe online. Remember to make use of parental controls and to talk with your children.

Reliable information on COVID-19 can also be found at www.gov.uk/coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>).

Make use of parental controls

If you have downloaded new apps or bought new devices like web cams or tablets, remember to adjust the privacy and security settings to suit you.

There is technology to help you manage the content your children can access:

Government has encouraged Internet Service Providers to help parents easily filter content. Switch on family friendly filters (<https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>) to help prevent age inappropriate content being accessed on devices in your home.

Parental controls put you in control of what your child can see. Internet Matters has step by step guides (<https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>) on how to set these up.

If you are concerned or upset about something your child has seen online:

Seek support from the online platform using the report function on the app or website - you can often find these in the 'help' section or 'settings' or seek support from other organisations and helplines.

The UK Safer Internet Centre offers a service, Report Harmful Content (<https://reportharmfulcontent.com/>), which you can use if you are not satisfied with the result of a report.

Have a conversation with your child about staying safe online

Most children have a positive experience online, accessing educational resources and entertainment and connecting with friends and family.

Spending time online can be very beneficial for children, particularly at the moment, but we recognise that many parents may worry about online safety.

Reduce the risk. The UK Council for Internet Safety has guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers>) on minimising children's exposure to risks online. The UK Safer Internet Centre with Childnet International has specific guidance on under 5s (<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/keeping-young-children-safe-online>).

Talk to your child. Childnet has guidance (<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers>) for parents and carers to begin a conversation about online safety and Ditch the Label (<https://dtled.org/>) teacher resources that can be helpful for parents to discuss cyberbullying and the government also has helpful advice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying>). Encourage your child to speak to you or a trusted adult if they come across content that makes them uncomfortable.

If you have concerns about specific serious harms, this guidance outlines how to protect your child

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>) from child sexual abuse online, 'sexting' or radicalising, pornographic or suicide content.

Stay safe and healthy

You may be concerned about how long your children are using their devices. The government has published guidance for parents and carers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>) on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19.

The UK's Chief Medical Officer has also provided advice on screen time (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777026/UK_CMO_commentary_on_screentime_and_social_media_map_of_reviews.pdf). Here are a few of the tips to help your children strike a balance:

- **Sleep matters** Getting enough good quality sleep is very important. Leave phones outside the bedroom when it is bedtime.

- **Sharing sensibly** Talk about sharing photos and information online and how photos and words are sometimes manipulated. Parents and carers should never assume that children are happy for their photos to be shared. For everyone – when in doubt, don't upload!
- **Talking helps** Talk with children about using screens and what they are watching. A change in behaviour can be a sign they are distressed – make sure they know they can always speak to you or another responsible adult if they feel uncomfortable with screen or social media use.
- **Keep moving!** Everyone should take a break after a couple of hours sitting or lying down using a screen. It's good to get up and move about a bit. #sitlessmovemore
- **Family time together** Screen-free meal times are a good idea – you can enjoy face-to-face conversation, with adults giving their full attention to children.
- **Use helpful phone features** Some devices and platforms have special features – try using these features to keep track of how much time you (and with their permission, your children) spend looking at screens or on social media.

Remember you are allowed to leave your house for one form of exercise a day, and you can do this with members of your household as a family activity.

Useful links

| Organisation | Link |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| BBC | The BBC's Own It app (https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/49738921) helps children stop and think before they press the 'send' button. |
| Childnet | A tool kit (https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/parent-and-carer-toolkit) to support parents and carers of any age child to start discussions about their online life, to set boundaries around online behaviour and technology use, and to find out where to get more help and support. |
| CTIRU | You can report terrorist content they find online through the public referral tool (https://www.gov.uk/report-terrorism). More information about what to report and what happens (https://act.campaign.gov.uk/) when you make a report. |
| Every Mind Matters | Advice and simple tips (https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/) on how to maintain your mental wellbeing if you need to stay at home during the coronavirus outbreak |
| Internet Matters | StaySafeStayHome (https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/staysafestayhome-tech-advice-and-resources-to-support-families-at-home/) online resources and advice to support families. |
| Let's Talk About It | Support for parents and carers to keep children safe from online radicalisation (https://www.ltai.info/staying-safe-online/). |
| LGfL | Support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online (https://www.lgfl.net/online-safety/default.aspx), including 6 top tips to keep primary aged children safe online. |
| Net-aware | Support for parents and carers from NSPCC, providing a guide to social networks, apps and games (https://www.net-aware.org.uk/). |
| Parent Info | Provides support and guidance for parents (https://parentinfo.org/) from leading experts and organisations. |
| Rise Above | Public Health England's Rise Above social marketing programme (https://riseabove.org.uk/) aims to help build resilience and support good mental health of young people aged 10-16. |
| Thinkuknow | Provides advice from the National Crime Agency (NCA) (https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/) to stay safe online. To help families manage during this time, the NCA has launched #OnlineSafetyAtHome (http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/), a set of fun, engaging activities based on Thinkuknow cartoons, films, games, and advice articles. |
| UK Council for Internet Safety | Education for a Connected World (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759003/Education_for_a_connected_world_PDF.PDF). A framework to equip children and young people for digital life. |

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Explore the topic

- Digital inclusion and accessibility (<https://www.gov.uk/society-and-culture/digital-inclusion-and-accessibility>)
- Cyber security (<https://www.gov.uk/government/cyber-security>)