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/

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into.
Current as of the date released 1.2.23.

Fall Guys

Fall Guys is a free, online multiplayer game in which players team up to take on obstacle courses and puzzles to try and be the last player standing. Fall Guys is available on multiple platforms.

Whilst this game has a PEGI rating of 3 (suitable for all ages), you need to be aware that up to sixty people will be playing in one game at the same time and it does have the option of **voice chat** and **in-game purchases**. Voice chat is off by default and is not needed to play the game. An Epic Games account is required to play Fall Guys, which does include parental controls. You can find out more here: https://www.epicgames.com/site/en-US/parental-controls

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

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/

Is your child playing Gacha Life?

Gacha Life is rated as 9+ on the App Store and for 'Everyone' on the Google Play Store. Players can dress up characters and add props (including weapons) and create scenes with their characters as well as play games. The app does allow in-app purchases ranging from £1.70 to £17.99 and does include adverts. This article from Internet Matters provides further information and discusses in detail what you need to be aware of: https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/esafety-news/what-is-gacha-life-what-parents-need-to-know/