



## Online Safety Newsletter February 2025

### Messaging others

There are many ways in which our children can communicate online, for example via messaging apps, social media apps and online games such as FIFA and Fortnite. We need to understand how and who our children our communicating with to keep them safe online.

Ensure your child knows to talk to a trusted adult should they need to. However, remind them that it is not appropriate to contact teachers online, they should only use official school communication methods.

#### What are the risks?

- Bullying and inappropriate chat.
- Contact from strangers.
- Sharing personal information including images.
- Sextortion - this is a form of extortion where somebody threatens to share a nude/sexual image of you.

#### How can I mitigate the risks?

- Ensure your child is accessing age-appropriate apps/games and that appropriate parental controls are set up.
- Chat to your child about the risks so they are aware of what can happen online.
- Depending on the age of your child, it may be more appropriate for devices to be used in family rooms so you can monitor what they are doing.

#### Further information

- <https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/Concerned-about-your-child/Online-contact-and-staying-safe/>
- <https://www.brightcanary.io/what-to-do-when-your-child-sends-inappropriate-texts/>

### Snapchat

#### What is Snapchat?

Snapchat is a social media app used for messaging and sharing photos and videos. **You must be 13+ to sign up.** Users can send messages (snaps) to others that are only seen for a set time e.g., 10 seconds and users can also upload snaps to stories, which disappear after 24 hours.

#### Key Concerns

There are potential risks to using Snapchat, including:

- the risk of your child viewing content that is not appropriate for their age.
- location sharing (via Snap Map) (this can be switched off).
- cyberbullying.
- contact from strangers.
- excessive screen time.

#### Family Centre features

Snapchat's Family Centre is a set of parental controls and includes tools such as allowing you to:

- see who your child is friends with.
- see who your child has sent messages (not the contents of conversations though), photos or videos to in the last week.
- view a list of group members for groups that your child has been active in.
- restrict content to limit access.
- report any accounts that you are concerned about.

You can learn more about Family Centre here:

<https://parents.snapchat.com/parental-controls?lang=en-GB>

#### Safety tips

Please make sure the appropriate privacy settings are set up on Snapchat.

- <https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/7012343074580-How-do-I-change-my-privacy-settings-on-Snapchat>

#### More information

For more detailed advice and information:

- <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/blogs/the-risks-snapchat-poses-to-children>
- <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/social-media/snapchat/>

### Should children have mobile phones?

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/blogs/should-children-have-mobile-phones>



# 10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators USING TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST READING SKILLS

The way we engage with text has changed dramatically over the years. Whether reading captions on social media, instructions in a video game or an e-book on a digital device, technology plays a major role in modern literacy. While traditional books remain invaluable, digital tools can enhance reading skills by making text more accessible, interactive and engaging.

## 1 CHOOSING THE RIGHT TYPE OF TEXT

Before integrating technology, consider the types of text that a child engages with. If they need help on occasion, digital reading pens can assist by scanning and reciting words or sentences. These tools are especially useful for students with reading difficulties, and can even be used in exams if they're part of their routine learning process. Proper training and practice are required, but they can be a great help when tackling printed text.

## 2 READING ON SCREEN

Many devices now allow users to customise text for better readability. Adjusting font type, size and background colour can significantly enhance comprehension. For many readers, white text on a black background is the easiest to see, whereas other styles – such as dyslexia-friendly fonts – are designed to help those who are struggling. Teaching children how to personalise text settings on their devices empowers them to read more comfortably and with greater confidence.

## 3 ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS

Most modern devices include built-in tools designed to support readers. These features can be found in Settings under Accessibility and may include text-to-speech, speech-to-text and screen magnification functions. Enabling these tools can make digital reading more user friendly, especially for children with learning difficulties or visual impairments, who might have an easier time with spoken language than the written word, or who might simply require a closer look at the text.

## 4 INTERACTIVE READING PROGRAMMES

Many digital reading devices, such as Kindle and other e-readers, offer features like word highlighting, adjustable text speed and built-in dictionaries. These tools help learners to break down complex words and phrases while maintaining an appropriate reading pace. Some programmes even allow users to track their progress, making reading a more structured and motivating experience.

## 5 VIDEO GAMES AND READING SKILLS

Many video games require players to read instructions, character dialogues and mission objectives, making them an unexpected but effective literacy tool. Games that involve storytelling, puzzles or problem-solving often include large amounts of text – encouraging children to read these texts aloud or discuss them can improve their comprehension and vocabulary in a fun, engaging way.

## 6 SUBTITLES AND CLOSED CAPTIONS

Watching videos with subtitles or closed captions is an effective way to enhance reading skills. As children watch their favourite shows or online videos, they can follow along with the text, gaining a better understanding of how written words sound when spoken aloud. This is particularly beneficial for reluctant readers, as it exposes them to words in a familiar, engaging context. Repeatedly watching content with subtitles reinforces word recognition and comprehension.

## 7 USING AUDIOBOOKS

Audiobooks are an excellent way to develop listening and reading skills simultaneously. Children can follow along with the text while listening to a narrator, reinforcing word recognition and fluency. For struggling readers, listening to an audiobook before attempting to read the text independently can boost their confidence and comprehension.

## 9 TEXT-TO-VOICE TECHNOLOGY

Text-to-voice software reads digital text aloud, making it easier for learners to follow along. Most smartphones, tablets and computers come with this function built in. When enabled, users can highlight a passage or sentence and press Play to hear it read aloud. This tool is particularly helpful for auditory learners and those who struggle with decoding written words.

## 8 VOICE-TO-TEXT FOR WRITING AND READING

Voice-to-text tools allow users to dictate words, which are then transcribed into text. This feature helps children see the connection between spoken and written language. By using text-to-voice to have their dictated words read back to them, learners can identify mistakes and improve their reading and writing skills simultaneously.

## 10 SOCIAL MEDIA AND PARENTAL CONTROLS

While social media provides opportunities for reading, most platforms have age restrictions of 13–16 years old, making parental guidance essential. Many social media videos include captions and comments that can encourage reading. However, it's important to use the platform's parental controls (such as time limits and content filters) to create a safe and educational online environment for children. Encouraging responsible social media use can ensure a balanced and productive approach to digital literacy.

## Meet Our Expert

Catrina Lowri is a qualified special needs teacher and experienced SENCO. She recently launched her own site, Neuroteachers, which offers a library of short, 'how-to' and explanation videos for educators. Catrina also writes and delivers online training and events for multi-academy trusts, businesses, schools and training organisations.



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