



Online Safety Newsletter

May 2023

Snapchat update: My AI

You should be over 13+ to use Snapchat.

Snapchat have announced that My AI will now be available to all users, it was previously only available to paid subscribers of Snapchat+. My AI will show as one of your chat contacts and users will be able to ask it questions and have a conversation with it.

Snapchat are planning to incorporate an overview in their parental tools (Family Centre) to allow you to see if your child is chatting with My AI, but there is no confirmed date as to when this additional tool will be available.

There were concerns with My AI when initially released, for example it was providing responses that weren't always age appropriate. Snapchat have stated that 99.5% of responses now conform to their community guidelines, but we would recommend talking to your child about their use of My AI.

At present the only way to delete My AI is to become a Snapchat+ subscriber.

You can find out more here:
<https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/13266788358932-What-is-My-AI-on-Snapchat-and-how-do-I-use-it->



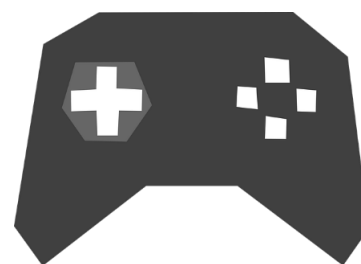
Fortnite

Fortnite is rated PEGI 12 for frequent mild violence which means it is not suitable for persons under 12 years of age.

It is important to remember that when rating games, PEGI do not take into consideration the communication features of a game. Fortnite does include a chat facility, which adds further risks.

What is Fortnite?

There are different versions of Fortnite, including a free-to-play Battle Royale game (although money can be spent within the game) where up to one hundred players compete against each other.



What do I need to be aware of?

- **Chatting to strangers and inappropriate language:** Fortnite contains voice and text chat. Due to the nature of the game, your child may be chatting to strangers and may hear inappropriate language. Ensure your child knows how to report players for any inappropriate behaviour.
- **In app purchases:** All users can purchase V-Bucks directly through the game. This currency can be used to purchase items in the Fortnite store so make sure you don't store your payment details within the game/device and restrict purchases.

Parental Controls

Fortnite includes several parental controls to help you make it a safer environment for your child including disabling voice chat, filtering language and setting privacy settings. **Also, remember to set up age-appropriate parental controls on the device your child is playing on.**

Further information

Virgin Media outline how to set up the different parental controls available:
<https://www.virginmedia.com/blog/parental-controls/gaming-fortnite>

From the Financial Times – 'Capture: who's looking after the children?'

This is a 15-minute drama produced by the Financial Times looking at online harm, regulation and responsibility. The drama features Jodie Whittaker and Paul Ready. You can watch it here:

<https://www.ft.com/video/ea39f3a9-8993-477d-a763-317ba51c2e75>

Minecraft Legends

Minecraft Legends was released last month and is available across a variety of platforms. It is rated as 7+ by PEGI with a further content descriptor of 'violence.' As



mentioned earlier though, when rating games, PEGI do not take into consideration the communication features of a game. Minecraft Legends does include a chat facility, which adds further risks of seeing inappropriate language/content. This can be switched off.

What should I be aware of?

- **Multiplayer** – children can interact with others (including strangers), you can switch this option off within settings or choose to play offline.
- **Additional purchases** – be aware of in app purchases and the purchase of additional items to support (although not needed) game play. You can set up appropriate parental settings to restrict/prevent purchases.
- **Block and report players** – if your child is playing with others, make sure they know how to block and report players within the game.

You can find out more in this article:

<https://www.esrb.org/blog/what-parents-need-to-know-about-minecraft-legends/>

Rocket League

Rocket League is rated as 3+ by PEGI. In Rocket League, players use cars to play in football matches and is available for free across a variety of platforms.

What should I be aware of?

If your child is under 13, then their account will have chat and purchases disabled (unless you override these settings). For children over 13, you will need to disable/restrict these settings as appropriate. There is the option to play online with others as well as make purchases to enhance your car. You can set up appropriate parental controls by setting up an account with Epic Games and applying settings on your child's device as well.

Further information:

You can find out more in this article:

<https://www.vodafone.co.uk/newscentre/smart-living/digital-parenting/digital-parenting-pro/rocket-league/>

Microsoft Family Safety app

Does your child have a Microsoft device e.g. an Xbox? If so, you can access the Microsoft Family Safety mobile app, which provides you with a variety of free features including:

- The ability to set screen time limits to devices, apps and games.
- Set content filters and block inappropriate apps/games.

Additional features such as location sharing are available as part of a paid subscription.

To access the app, you will need to enter your mobile number or email address at the link below and Microsoft will send you a download link:

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/family-safety>

Tackling Online Hate

One way in which we can tackle online hate is ensuring our children learn about what it is and how they can stop it. Internet Matters have created a quiz that you can complete with your child. As you progress through the questions, you will be given advice as well as questions to discuss and help you have a conversation with your child. The quiz is available here:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/theonlinetogetherproject/tackling-online-hate-quiz/>

What is Online Grooming?

This is a really informative article from Thorn:

<https://www.thorn.org/blog/online-grooming-what-it-is-how-it-happens-and-how-to-defend-children/>



How to talk to your child about TikTok



The best way to do this is to **keep the conversation open**. Let your child know they can **always come to you** to talk about social media and that you're creating a **judgement-free zone** for them to speak freely about their concerns and their thoughts. It's best to **refrain from criticising social media too much**, as this could make your child feel as though they can't talk about it. You can tell them that social media is **very complex**, and that **it's okay if they make a mistake**, but the important thing is that they talk to you or another trusted adult about it. The NSPCC recommends making social media **part of a daily conversation**. Talking about it in a **neutral, casual manner** on a regular basis may help your child to feel more relaxed, and increases the likelihood they'll approach you about anything they've found upsetting or anything they have questions about. It can also help break down barriers to conversation with older teenagers who may be more resistant to serious, sit-down conversations about social media. Your child will learn about online safety at school, so it's a good idea to make sure you're aware of **when and what they're learning about** and provide the opportunity to ask any further questions they have.

Misinformation

A lot of information posted on TikTok simply **isn't true**, so it's important to teach your child to **think critically about what they see online**. You could show them how to use a **fact-checking website**, such as snopes.com, which fact checks and debunks a lot of content that goes viral online. You could also teach them the **CRAP test**.

The CRAP test:

- **C** – currency. When was the video posted? How recent is the information included?
- **R** – reliability. Does the video point to sources that back up the information? Do credible sources such as broadsheet newspapers or journal articles support what is being said?
- **A** – authority. Does the poster have qualifications or experience to back them up?
- **P** – purpose. Could the person be biased? Is what they're saying opinion or fact? Is there an ulterior motive, such as convincing you to buy something?



TikTok Protests



Recently, there's been a surge of protests in schools, originating with ideas spread on TikTok. It's important to acknowledge that one of our fundamental rights in a democratic society is peaceful protest; however, you can remind your child that it isn't acceptable for them to hurt anyone, physically or verbally, or to damage property to advance their cause. It might help if you try to **encourage empathy for school staff**, reminding them that, while they might not always get everything right, their ultimate goal is to **keep children safe** and to **help them learn and develop**.

Conversation key points:

- Protests in schools can be dangerous and can cause serious safety concerns, including you or your friends getting hurt.
- Protests like the ones on TikTok can lead to you being excluded from school or even arrested.
- Your opinion matters, but there are more respectful and productive ways to raise a concern. If you have an issue, you can tell your teacher, the student council, or even tell me so I can talk to the school.



Cyberbullying

When talking to your child about online bullying, it's important to ask them **what they know about cyberbullying** and if they've ever seen any cyberbullying happening. The key is letting them know **you're there for them**, and that they can talk to you if someone's being unkind to them online.



It's important to **encourage empathy for everyone** to make sure your child treats everyone with kindness. No one wants to think their child is capable of bullying, but, sometimes, children **simply get carried away** and can bully other children even if it's out of their usual character. This can be for a number of reasons – for example, peer pressure, low self-esteem, past history of being bullied themselves, or simply a result of their still-developing ability to regulate their emotional responses when someone has done something they don't like.

You can read [more information](#) about how to talk to your child about online bullying [here](#). It may also be important to bring up the issue of **discriminatory bullying** – click the following links to learn more about talking to your child about online [racism](#), [LGBTQ+ discrimination](#) and [misogyny](#).

Conversation key points:

- If someone is being unkind to you online, tell me or another adult you trust as soon as possible. It's okay to tell on someone if they're bullying you.
- Even if you don't like someone, it's still not acceptable to be unkind to them online. Remember, everyone has their own struggles and you need to think about how you would feel if someone said unkind things to you.
- There are real-world consequences to your actions online – talk to me if you make a mistake and we'll make it right together.



Harmful challenges



Many TikTok challenges are **completely harmless**; however, some can be very dangerous and **even deadly**. Making sure your child knows to avoid dangerous challenges is vital. It pays off to be careful when bringing up online challenges to your child. If you bring up a challenge that they haven't heard of, it might prompt them to **investigate it themselves**, and this could lead to the TikTok algorithm showing them a lot of videos of the challenge.

For challenges, it's especially important that you **keep an ongoing conversation open** about what your child sees online, so they know they can come to you if they have questions or concerns. If you hear them talking about a challenge you know is dangerous, you could tell them that **children have lost their lives** through participating in dangerous challenges, and that they should **question whether a challenge is safe** before they participate in it.

Conversation-starting questions:

- What kinds of challenges have you seen on TikTok?
- Do you think there are some challenges that are dangerous?
- How would you find out if a challenge was safe to do?
- Do you stop and ask yourself before you do a challenge if you could get hurt?



Grooming

One of the most vital lessons to teach your child about online safety is how to **recognise and stay safe from grooming**. This topic will be covered at school, but parents reiterating the message is crucial to ensure they fully understand the risk, and how to reduce it.

The best way to do this is by ensuring they understand the **five stages of grooming**. They are: **targeting**, **gaining access**, **developing trust**, **desensitising the child to sexual content and touch**, and **maintaining control**. You can find out more about the stages of grooming [here](#).

Conversation key points:

- Never accept follow requests from people you don't know – not everyone is who they say they are online.
- Never meet anyone you've met online in real life without me there.
- If an adult tries to be your friend online, sends you anything inappropriate, or talks about touching you – tell me immediately.
- Sometimes bad people try to trick you by giving you lots of attention and compliments.



Other concerns to talk about

TikTok dances

TikTok dances are usually innocent and fun, and can be a great way for children to engage in their interests and show creativity with a **private account only followed by their friends**. There are some dances that trend online which are overtly sexual, or performed to age-inappropriate songs, and it's important to make your child aware when a dance is **not intended for someone their age**. When a child's account is public and they are engaging in dance trends, this can increase their risk of sexual exploitation and grooming.

TikTok 'glow up' trends

Users will show images of themselves before and after a change in their appearance, e.g. the change from when they were younger to now, or the difference before and after getting dressed up. The intention of the video is to show **how their appearance improves**, and can sometimes involve provocative posing and clothing. A lot of the time, these trends are intended for young adults, and when teens and pre-teens engage in them, this can put their safety at risk and can lead to bullying.

Coded trends

Users have developed ways to get around restrictions by talking in code. A common trend at the moment is the 'mascara trend', where users talk about the age they were when they first used mascara, and share opinions on their experiences with it. In this trend, **mascara is a metaphor for sex**, and it's a way for users to talk about their sexual experiences, and even share stories of sexual violence, without their videos **being taken down or blocked by the algorithm**.

While this trend is often used positively to spread awareness, some of the videos could be **too mature for young audiences**. It's important to question trends such as this, as using **coded language** is becoming increasingly popular as TikTok ups its restriction measures. It's beneficial to **reassure your child** that if they see something online that upsets them, they can always talk to **you or another trusted adult** about it.