



25th October 2024



Important Notice: Online Safety Concerns

Dear Parents and Carers,

We hope this message finds you well. We have recently been made aware of concerns raised by several parents and carers regarding inappropriate behaviour and content encountered by children on popular platforms such as YouTube (including YouTube/Roblox Stories) and the game Roblox. This newsletter aims to address these concerns, highlight the potential dangers, and provide guidance on how to ensure a safer online experience for our children.

On October 15, 2024, the Daily Mail published an article titled "Campaigners' fears over gaming site that's a 'haven for paedophiles'." The piece highlights concern from child safety experts who are urging Ofcom to take action against Roblox, claiming the platform exposes young users to grooming and explicit content. For more details, you can read the full article here.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13961313/Roblox-child-safety-campaigners-Ofcom-report.html>

- **Inappropriate Content:** Exposure to videos and stories on YouTube that contain unsuitable material, including sexualised behaviour and bad language.
- **Online Chats:** In-game chats within Roblox where children may encounter inappropriate language, bullying, and potentially harmful interactions.

Dangers of Inappropriate Behaviour Online

1. **Exposure to Inappropriate Content:**
 - Children may come across videos or stories that are not age-appropriate, which can include explicit language, sexual content, or violent imagery.
 - Such exposure can have a negative impact on their mental and emotional well-being.
2. **Online Predators:**

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people/vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.



- Platforms like Roblox and YouTube can be used by individuals with malicious intent to exploit or groom children.
- Predators may use chat features to establish trust and manipulate young users.
- 3. **Cyberbullying:**
 - Online interactions can sometimes lead to bullying, with children being targeted by their peers or strangers.
 - Cyberbullying can cause significant emotional distress and affect a child's self-esteem and mental health.
- 4. **Privacy Risks:**
 - Sharing personal information online can lead to privacy breaches.
 - Children may inadvertently disclose sensitive information that can be misused.
- 5. **Addiction and Screen Time:**
 - Excessive use of these platforms can lead to addiction, affecting a child's sleep, academic performance, and physical health.

[Recommendations for Parents and Carers](#)

Monitor your child's online activity

- Regularly check the content your child is accessing sites such as YouTube and the games they are playing through these.
- Use of parental controls to restrict access to inappropriate content. Please see links below for tutorial instructions:
- Have open conversations with your child about the dangers of sharing personal information and interacting with strangers online.
- Teach them to recognize and report inappropriate behaviour.

Set Boundaries

- Establish clear rules regarding screen time and the types of content that are acceptable.
- Encourage a healthy balance between online activities and other interests.

Use Safe Settings

- Enable privacy settings on YouTube and Roblox to limit who can contact your child.
- Use features like restricted mode on YouTube to filter out inappropriate content.

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Stay Informed

- Keep yourself updated on the latest trends and potential risks associated with online platforms.
- Join online safety workshops or webinars offered by the school or other organizations.

Please see links below to helpful videos on how to keep your child safe online:

Roblox -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWzhE8fUi7E&pp=ygUhZ292ZXJubWVudCBpbmRlcm5ldCBzYWZldHkgcm9ibG94>

YouTube -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6odst87Tbo&pp=ygU0Z292ZXJubWVudCBpbmRlcm5ldCBzYWZldHkgW91dHVlZSBwYXJlbnRhbCBjb250cm9scw%3D%3D>

We have also included attached to this letter a copy of posters previously sent out with what Parents/Carers need to know about Roblox and YouTube.

Conclusion

We understand the challenges of navigating the digital world and the importance of keeping our children safe online. By working together and staying vigilant, we can create a safer online environment for our children. If you have any further concerns or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs E. J. Pickford (Headteacher) & Team

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At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. Formerly delivered by National Online Safety, these guides now address wider topics and themes. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit nationalcollege.com.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

ROBLOX

Roblox is one of the most popular video games among children. In 2020, the game's developers claimed that more than half of the USA's children had played it. As a 'sandbox' title, the game lets players create their own gaming experiences with Roblox Studio to build custom levels, which can then be shared online.



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

Roblox encourages players to interact online (including a group chat function), which could expose children to various risks. Scammers often attempt to trick young Roblox fans into exchanging their paid-for items for something which turns out to be of much lesser value – or something they never even receive. The in-game chat has some filters, but it isn't perfect: players can still send unpleasant messages, while predators can reach out to children directly.

ONLINE DATERS

These are also called 'ODers' and are quite common in Roblox. An ODer is an individual who joins a game with the intention of finding someone to date online – and eventually meet in person. Such online dating is against the Roblox community guidelines, but this doesn't usually deter such people. Some player-built Roblox levels have even been designed with online dating specifically in mind, and this will not always be obvious.

PUBLIC SERVERS

Roblox has private or VIP servers which allow people to play exclusively with their friends, but this costs money – usually a one-off payment. Most Roblox players will instead be on public servers that anyone can join. Servers can host games which focus on all kinds of aspects, including direct player interaction. Some lobbies, therefore, will put children at greater risk of contact from strangers than others.

IN-APP PURCHASES

Roblox is free to download and play, but bear in mind that there are some extra costs. These are usually indicated with the symbol for 'Robux' (the in-game currency). Players are encouraged to make purchases in the game using real money. People can also buy extra Robux to spend on cosmetic items in the game, and it's also possible to purchase a private or VIP server.

Advice for Parents & Educators

SET PARENTAL CONTROLS

Roblox comes with several parental control options, which are explained well on the game's official website. It's essential to enter the correct date of birth for younger players, as that allows Roblox to automatically apply appropriate chat filters. The game also allows parents and carers to set monthly spending restrictions and monitor their child's account.

DISABLE PRIVATE MESSAGING

Roblox's private messaging function raises the risk of children being contacted by people they may not want to speak with – potentially leading to bullying, harassment, toxicity and scam attempts. Keep in mind that the game allows you to disable messages from anyone who hasn't been added as a friend on your account.

PRIVATE SERVERS

If a child has friends to play Roblox with, paying for a private or VIP server decreases the risk of contact from strangers. Even then, however, the player who owns the server could invite other people – who might not be child friendly – to join them. Additionally, private servers can be set up in such a way that any player on the host's friends list can join, so it's important to discuss who children are playing with.

MONITOR SPENDING

If they don't understand they're using real money, it's easy for children to accidentally spend a sizeable amount in the game. Using parental controls to place limits on their spending will help avoid any nasty financial surprises. Ensuring that two-factor authentication is enabled on any payment accounts also makes it harder for children to spend money inadvertently.

DEALING WITH STRANGERS

At some point in their development, children must learn how to deal with strangers online. Show them how to block and report any users who are upsetting them or asking uncomfortable questions. Talking to them about what's okay to discuss – and what they should never tell a stranger – can help them understand how to communicate more safely with other people online.

Meet Our Expert

Clare Godwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2015, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

▶ YOUTUBE ▶

Almost anyone with an internet connection knows YouTube. The Google-owned site lets anyone upload videos to be shared around the world, and as a result, it's an incredible resource with instant free access to material covering every conceivable topic. But with over 500 hours of video uploaded every minute, not all of it will be appropriate for young eyes.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

YouTube is free and can be accessed via numerous devices, even without creating a YouTube account. Some content is flagged as 'age-restricted' (requiring the user to be logged into an account with a verified age of 18), but children can still view some mildly inappropriate content. This can include profanity and violence, which some young users may find upsetting.

CONNECT WITH STRANGERS

YouTube recommends videos related to what the user has previously watched on their account, aiming to provide content that will interest them. This is intended to be helpful but it can also lead to binge-watching and screen addiction – especially if 'auto-play' is active. Users without an account are shown popular videos from the last 24 hours, which might not always be suitable for children.

RADICALISATION

YouTube's algorithm tends to promote content that's getting the most traffic – a lot of which can be quite extreme. This can be fine for harmless topics, but YouTube isn't regulated like television, and that means that conspiracy theories, fake news and hateful ideologies can occasionally surface to warp impressionable minds all too easily. Remember – the more they watch, the more they'll be recommended.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

YouTube is a social media platform which allows people to interact with other (usually unknown) users. Account holders can leave comments on any video they have access to, as well as message other users directly. Connecting with strangers online can potentially lead to children being exposed to adult language, cyberbullying and – in the worst cases – online predators. If a child is creating content themselves, this can increase the likelihood of them becoming a target.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

YouTube is teeming with trends and challenges, some of which are fun to watch and join in with. Children often find these immensely entertaining and might want to try them out. Most challenges tend to be safe, but many others may cause physical or emotional harm children who watch or copy them. The painful 'salt and ice challenge' – where people use these two ingredients to burn their skin – is just one of many examples.

SNEAKY SCAMMERS

The comments sections of popular content creators regularly have scammers posing as that influencer, attempting to lure users into clicking on their phishing links. Scammers impersonate YouTubers by adopting their names and profile images, and often offer cash gifts or 'get rich quick' schemes. Children may not realise that these users aren't who they claim to be.

Advice for Parents & Educators

APPLY RESTRICTED MODE

For older children, Restricted Mode is an optional setting that prevents YouTube from showing inappropriate material (such as drug and alcohol abuse, graphic violence, and sexual content) to underage viewers. To prevent children from changing across age-inappropriate content on the platform, we would recommend enabling Restricted Mode on each device that they use to access YouTube. It's worth also turning the auto-play feature off, to prevent YouTube's algorithm automatically recommending something inappropriate.



TRY GOOGLE FAMILY

Creating a Google Family account allows parents and carers to monitor what their child is watching, uploading, and sharing with other users. It will also display their recently watched videos, searches, and recommended videos. In general, a Google Family account gives a parent or carer oversight of how their child uses sites like YouTube and helps to ensure that they are only accessing appropriate content.



MONITOR ENGAGEMENT

YouTube is the online viewing platform of choice for billions of people, many of them under 18. Younger children will watch different content to older ones, of course. You may want to keep an eye on how children interact with this material – and, if applicable, with content creators – to understand what they're interested in. Remember that creators often share content outside of YouTube, so don't ignore their web presence elsewhere!



CONSIDER YOUTUBE KIDS

It's possible to sidestep most inappropriate content completely via Google's own YouTube Kids app for Android handsets and iPhone. This lets you filter content by "preschool" (4 and under), "younger" (ages 5 to 8) and "older" (ages 9 to 12). This isn't a perfect substitute for personal supervision, as the app's filtering system is automated, and Google can't manually review all videos.

CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

YouTube gives users the option of uploading videos as 'private' or 'unlisted' – so they could be shared exclusively with family and friends, for example. Comments on videos can also be disabled and channels that a child is subscribed to can be hidden. If the child is only uploading videos set as 'private', they are far less likely to receive direct messages from strangers.



LIMIT SPENDING

Although YouTube is free, it does offer some in-app purchases. For example, users can rent and buy TV shows and movies to watch. If you like to avoid children purchasing content online, limit their access to online payment methods. Many parents have discovered the hard way that a child happily consuming a paid-for series quickly leads to an unexpected bill!



Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, Tom's Guide, The Evening Standard and The New Statesman.

