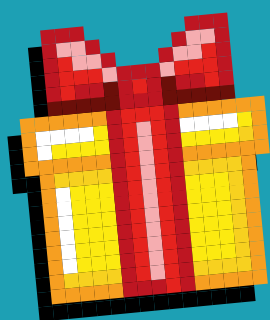




CYBERSAFE KIDS

**GADGET
GIFT
GUIDE**



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SO...ANOTHER 'GADGET GIFT GUIDE'?



Well, yes. The digital world hasn't gone away. If anything there's an even dizzier array of developments and things to distract our attention. Although Christmas might still be one of the most popular times to buy gifts for many, with birthdays, confirmations and other celebrations, let's face it, it's an all year round pursuit, so feel free to use this handy guide anytime of the year!

Our research shows us that in Ireland, smart device ownership is almost 100% by the age of 13 years old*, so it is also crucial to think about minimising the number of devices in your household. The fewer categories of smart devices you need to monitor (e.g. only tablets and wearables, but no smart speakers or connected toys), the easier it can be to maintain oversight, reduce vulnerabilities, and simplify your healthy digital household rules.

It is also worth remembering that managing Apple devices from Android (and vice versa) through parental control portals is particularly challenging. Think carefully also about which brand of devices you buy. Many kids push for Apple as the brand to have (many wouldn't be seen dead with Android!), while you may want to opt for Android because it often is the better and cheaper option. Prepare for pushback, and remember who is paying for the devices. We hope this guide helps you make the best choice for your child. Take a little time to research before buying a smart device — your future self will thank you!

Alex Cooney, CEO, CyberSafeKids

*Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics are taken from [A Life Behind the Screens, CyberSafeKids 2024–25](#)

TABLETS

DID YOU KNOW THAT 62% OF IRISH 8–12 YEAR OLDS OWN A TABLET, MAKING IT THE MOST POPULAR SMART DEVICE WITH THAT AGE GROUP?

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

Watching a video or playing a game on a tablet – like an iPad, Amazon Fire or Samsung Galaxy – can certainly be a great way to keep fidgety hands busy in a noisy restaurant or to kill time in an airport and give yourself a little peace and quiet! There are so many fabulous games and apps available for education and entertainment, and with the mobility tablets have over desktop PCs or TVs, they can be a great asset for families on the move. If your tablet is connected to the internet, however, your child is potentially at risk of encountering harmful content or harmful contact.

WHAT ARE THE AGE REQUIREMENTS?

There are no age requirements for a tablet, but it's worth remembering that if you're buying one for your child (or just lending them a family device), you should continue to monitor and supervise its use at all times.

WILL MY CHILD BE SAFE?

The answer to that question lies with you! While tablets may not have the exact same functionality as a phone, the online environments they provide – messaging apps, video sharing platforms like YouTube, and gaming platforms like Roblox – come with the exact same risks of harmful content and contact as smartphones. Following the advice below will minimise these risks.

- If you are using video streaming apps, use child-friendly versions like YouTubeKids or a 'clean profile' set up with an appropriate maturity rating (e.g. on Netflix, Disney+) – remember that the algorithm will suggest content based on what you have been previously watching so switch profiles when sharing devices
- If kids are gaming, start them off playing against the computer first; once they begin to play with others, monitor chat boxes and who they interact with (friend lists).
- Agree clear time and content restrictions
- Think about **quality over quantity** of screentime; it's more about what they're doing, not just for 'how long'
- Check browser history and homescreen regularly for new or unfamiliar apps
- Encourage headphone-free usage in shared family spaces so you can intervene quickly if required
- Don't allow tablets into bedrooms at night: charge them in communal areas
- Use parental control platforms such as [Google Families](#) or Apple's [Family Sharing](#), allowing you to control downloads, set time limits, and much more

For more advice, check out our [Better Digital Parenting booklet](#)



GAMING CONSOLES

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE ROBLOX GAMING PLATFORM IS THE MOST POPULAR DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT ON WHICH IRISH 8–12 YEAR OLDS SPEND THEIR TIME ONLINE?

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

Gaming consoles are just one of many smart devices you could have in your home, and as such, the risks are similar to those present on other smart devices like tablets.

The good news is that children can learn a lot of important skills through the games they play, as well as having fun of course! Games can present opportunities to be creative, problem solve, develop strategic thinking skills, hone decision-making and fine motor skills, and work and collaborate virtually with others. They could also, however, be exposed to harmful or mature content through the games that they play, especially with the current generation of consoles, where there is an almost movie-like realism in action adventure and role-play games. 20% of 8-12 year olds have already played a game with a rating of 18+, a rating that only the most extreme games are assigned!

Games consoles also offer more than just gaming: many include online chat, web browsers, video sharing platforms like YouTube and Twitch, and access to user-generated content — not all of which is age-appropriate.

Online gaming can also be the first opportunity a child has to chat with others online. Sometimes this is combined with 3rd party communication apps like Discord (13+). This can present a steep learning curve for children, who can be exposed to scams, grooming and cyberbullying.

Memberships and subscriptions can make great gifts, but they can also be confusing, and a child with access to a digital store and in-game purchases may sign up or pay up without fully understanding the consequences. It is very easy for children to become overwhelmed with advertisements or offers and lose track of spending, especially when dealing with virtual currencies or randomised purchases (aka 'loot boxes', where you do not know what you are getting until after you have purchased them).

WHAT ARE THE AGE REQUIREMENTS?

While games consoles themselves do not have age ratings, you should consider the age appropriateness of the games your children are playing, as well as the interactions they may be having with others as they embrace and enjoy 'all things game'.

GAMING CONSOLES

DID YOU KNOW THAT 53% OF 8-12 YEAR OLDS IN IRELAND HAVE THEIR OWN GAMING CONSOLE?

WILL MY CHILD BE SAFE?

Well, it really depends! There are real risks. Thankfully though, there are also steps you can take to reduce the chance of those risks becoming actual harms.

Use parental controls on gaming consoles

Using parental controls, you can set time limits and spending limits, filter content, and restrict contact with others. Use the links to find out more;

[Playstation](#) | [XBox](#) | [Switch](#)

Although it's not a console, [Steam](#) has parental controls for PC (computer) gamers out there

Assess game suitability before beginning

If you are buying a console, take these 3 simple steps before deciding on games:

1. Check a game's official [age rating](#), which provides more than a recommended age but also content descriptors and warnings you need to know about e.g., bad language, fear, and violence
2. Read [reviews](#) of the game
3. Watch pre-recorded or live streamed gameplay on [YouTube](#) or [Twitch](#) to see firsthand what your child will experience

Agree communication rules for being online

1. Game with friends or against the computer, never with strangers
2. Be kind, be inclusive and report bad behaviour to the service (and to you!)
3. Understand contact dangers on online services that often accompany gaming, e.g., Twitch, Discord

Understand memberships and control purchasing behaviour

1. Memberships like [Playstation Plus](#), [XBox Game Pass](#), and [Nintendo Switch Online Membership](#) can make a great gift but make sure you understand what you are signing up for before committing to regular or automated payments
2. Set spending limits for your child via parental controls or remove your payment details
3. [Gift cards](#) can be used to track and manage spending and make a great gift on special occasions like Christmas: always buy these from trusted retailers

Set up consoles in communal areas, not bedrooms, to reduce risks like late-night use, disrupted sleep, and access to unsupervised content.

For more advice, check out our [Better Digital Parenting booklet](#)



SMARTPHONES

DID YOU KNOW THAT SMARTPHONE OWNERSHIP JUMPS FROM BEING THE THIRD MOST POPULAR DEVICE (39%) AMONGST 8–12 YEAR OLDS* TO MOST POPULAR AMONGST 12–14 YEAR OLDS (96%)

*in primary schools

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

Giving your child a smartphone has in many ways become a 'rite of passage', and during the transition between primary and secondary school, smartphone ownership jumps dramatically. There are of course safety benefits in being able to contact your child at all times, particularly if they are travelling distances to school or clubs. Having said that, many of the risks covered in the Tablets and Gaming Console sections are further increased by smartphones and the mobility they provide. It means that your children have access to the online world at any time, which in turn also means the online world potentially has access to your child. It can be very easy to make contact with others (including strangers), and also to send photos or videos from the phone directly in impulsive moments, which can have serious short and long-term consequences.

WHAT ARE THE AGE REQUIREMENTS?

There are no age requirements for a smartphone, but it's worth remembering that if you're paying for the phone and paying the bill, you should continue to monitor and supervise its use at all times! There is no 'optimal' age at which to give a child a smartphone either, but as late as possible is better – ideally wait until your child is at least 13. It should always be a decision you make as a family, based on your child's maturity and your relationship with them. Don't succumb to peer pressure: getting a smartphone should be seen as a major responsibility and privilege, not a right.

WILL MY CHILD BE SAFE?

If you are actively involved in your child's online life, agree on clear rules and restrictions, and continue to monitor and supervise regularly, you can dramatically minimise the risks presented by smartphones. Following the steps below can make a huge difference.

- **Use parental control platforms** such as [Google Families](#) or Apple's [Family Sharing](#)
- **Agree clear time and content restrictions:** our research shows us that less supervision and restrictions lead to increased risk of encountering upsetting content and cyberbullying
- If rules are broken, **apply fair consequences** (not always taking device/access away) — but ensure your child feels safe coming to you when mistakes happen.
- **Check browser history** and homescreen regularly for new or unfamiliar apps
- **Follow all recommended age restrictions** on gaming and social media platforms. Remember that the digital age of consent is 16 in Ireland, so ongoing monitoring and discussion with your child about their online life — in an atmosphere of trust — is absolutely vital
- **Don't allow phones into bedrooms at night:** charge them in communal areas

For more advice, check out our [Better Digital Parenting booklet](#)



SMARTPHONE ALTERNATIVES

**DID YOU KNOW THERE ARE OTHER OPTIONS THAN SIMPLY BUYING
THE TOP OF THE RANGE iPhone OR ANDROID FOR YOUR CHILD?**

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

If you're concerned about security when your child is out of the house and moving around independently, or indeed you don't want them to be potentially isolated from peer groups that have smartphones already, there are alternative options. To differing extents, these can bridge the gap between a fully fledged smartphone with all the connectivity that brings, and being completely disconnected.

PHYSICAL DEVICE LOCK

You might consider a tap-to-unlock solution, like *BRICK* (an NFC tag and app for iPhone and Android), which lets you lock certain apps that can only be accessed using a physical digital key.

For more information on brands and models of smartphone alternatives, visit [Smartphone-Free Childhood Ireland](#) and [Smartphone-Free Childhood](#).

PHONES FOR YOUNGER KIDS

There are lots of options for phones that are more about keeping in contact, some of which may even remind you of your youth...Anyone for a game of *Snake*? Options include old school Nokia, 'call-only' phones or pager-like devices such as *Karri*.

PHONES FOR THE OLDER ONES

Most older teens will be more than ready to graduate to a fully-fledged device, but you can still exercise restraint and maintain parental control and supervision with your choices. While these may look like smartphones, less functionality reduces the pressure or harm that can come from using social media and web browsers.

Among your options are Phone+, Light Phone and Balance Phone and Pinwheel.



WEARABLES

DID YOU KNOW THAT 22% OF 8–12 YEAR OLDS WEAR A SMARTWATCH?

Wearable technology is any device you can wear on your body that is collecting real-time data. This includes some tracking devices. We will focus on the most likely purchase for your child – smartwatches.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

Parents will enjoy the obvious benefit of being able to track their child's location and keep in contact with them, without having to go down the smartphone route. Some devices also include learning apps or games, which may be an added bonus.

However, not all smartwatches are the same: full-feature models like the Apple Watch or Samsung Galaxy Watch allow internet access, app downloads, and browsing. Others — like the Xplora, Imoo or Fitbit Ace LTE — are designed for children, with limited features, no web access, and stronger parental controls. So choose carefully, considering how much screen time these devices could add. 50% of 8-12 year olds already feel that they spend too much time online. Even a smartwatch could become a source of distraction, especially during school hours, if it includes games or sends frequent notifications.

Many wearables also track health and fitness data. These features are designed for adults, so their advice may not be accurate or safe for kids. Fitness trackers can also affect self-esteem if children become too focused on steps, calories, or adult-focused goals.

Wearables with companion apps often collect personal information like your child's name and date of birth. If they're under 16 (the digital age of consent in Ireland), you'll need to give permission. Be aware that data may be shared or accessed by third parties if not securely stored. If the device allows online communication, there are also safety risks — limit interactions with people they don't know and be cautious of fitness communities that share tracking data.

TRACKING DEVICES

If it's something you're comfortable with, one other option to remove the risks of unsupervised screen time, while having some peace of mind, is to buy a Bluetooth tracker (for nearby alerts) or GPS tracker (for full location monitoring).

For more information on options for trackers, visit [Smartphone-Free Childhood Ireland](#).

WHAT ARE THE AGE REQUIREMENTS?

Most wearables are designed for adults but it is possible to find ones designed for children. The manufacturers will provide a recommended age, e.g. Google's Fitbit Ace is recommended for ages 8+.

WILL MY CHILD BE SAFE?

Smartwatches can provide peace of mind for many parents but you need to choose the right device and take time to set it up too. Always:

- Try to get a device designed for children and take time to read some [reviews](#) and [recommendations](#)
- Consider what you want to get from this device — both you and your child. If your child wants a fitness tracker then take some time to chat about why
- Make sure you look into what data the device collects and how it may be used, shared and secured. Limit the amount of sharing with third parties
- Use parental controls to manage privacy, access to apps, contact risks and secure devices by using strong passwords. Also keep track of the device so it doesn't fall into the wrong hands!
- Use the school time setting where available ([Apple Smartwatch](#), [Google Fitbit Ace](#))

HEADSETS, EARPHONE & DRONES

DID YOU KNOW THE WHO & ITU RECOMMEND CHILDREN LISTEN TO DEVICES AT NO HIGHER THAN 75 DECIBELS? MANY PRODUCTS MARKETING AS 'KID SAFE' DO NOT LIMIT THE VOLUME TO THIS LEVEL.*

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

Use of headsets can make it harder to monitor content and contact concerns. While children like the privacy and parents might enjoy the peace and quiet, there is a risk that even when they are in the same room as you, you aren't able to keep an ear on what is happening when your child is using a headset to stream content or chat with others. Use of in-ear buds and earphones should be discouraged for younger users. Even headsets can lead to sensitive young ears becoming damaged if the volume is too high. For children, the [WHO-ITU standard](#) is an exposure limit of 75 decibels for 40 hours per week. Prolonged usage also has a part to play in hearing damage.

WHAT ARE THE AGE REQUIREMENTS?

There are no specific age requirements but be aware of the fact that your child's ears are still developing, so find a headset that is both durable and designed for younger ears.

WILL MY CHILD BE SAFE?

Remember that they do limit your ability to monitor their interactions and consumption of potentially upsetting or harmful content. Ensure the headset is paired with devices that you control and monitor. Find a child-friendly headset that is durable, comfortable to wear, adjustable and has volume limitations. You should also set clear time restrictions for when they are used, and for how long. It is also worth checking online for [recommendations](#).



A NOTE ON DRONES

Drones have become increasingly popular and accessible and these devices – essentially remote-control toy helicopters with fitted cameras – are very manoeuvrable and can be great fun. As with any smart devices, however, they can store an owner's personal and financial information, and although simpler versions for younger children are available, most drones have a recommended age of 12+.

It's essential to teach your child how to fly them responsibly and they should have sufficient maturity and training to do so before being allowed to fly alone. Children should understand the importance of not violating others' privacy and remember that there are strict restrictions on where and when drones can be used safely. Use an app like [Open Sky](#) to better map where these areas are.

*75 decibels is approximately the noise of a vacuum cleaner, dishwasher, or hair dryer.



IMMERSIVE TECH

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE MOST COMMON IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR CHILDREN TO OWN IS A VR HEADSET, WITH 12% OWNERSHIP AMONGST IRISH 8–12 YEAR OLDS?

While immersive technologies can include ‘Augmented Reality’ (AR) with its blend of real and virtual, or fully immersive ‘Virtual Reality’ (VR), which replaces a user’s surroundings with a 3D digital environment or haptics that extend to other senses, we will focus on your most likely purchase here – a VR headset.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

The opportunities VR presents for learning and having fun are endless, but children already find it hard to switch off games/apps and using this immersive technology may make it harder to switch off and re-engage in the physical world. Remember that children and young people are still developing their impulse control!

There are also concerns about prolonged usage in younger children affecting eyesight and coordination during key stages of their development. Even older users sometimes report dizziness and other physical symptoms. Some users wear headsets for long periods – to stream content like movies and videos to their device for private consumption – and that can also make it difficult for parents to monitor what kinds of things they may be exposed to.

Social interactions like gaming or attending concerts and events can be truly amazing in an immersive environment, particularly if it is impossible to do so in-person. However the near-reality presented makes any harm experienced more impactful, especially if you consider that a child could possibly interact with an online predator, experience cyberbullying or even be virtually assaulted in a 3D immersive world.

WHAT ARE THE AGE REQUIREMENTS?

Age guidance is provided by some manufacturers. For example, [Meta Quest](#) headsets are not recommended for those under 10 years old and there are additional parental controls for users under 13. Age guidance needs to encompass more than the device itself but what it is being used for, i.e. what apps or games are being accessed and what communication will be allowed, and the accompanying risks.

WILL MY CHILD BE SAFE?

As with all other devices, you need to establish clear, pre-agreed rules in your home and continue to regularly monitor and supervise your child’s use.

- Keep in mind both physical and online safety when using VR. Set up a safe play space at home.
- Follow manufacturer setup and safety guidelines (e.g. [PS VR](#), [Meta Quest](#), [Valve Index](#)).
- Limit prolonged exposure by setting time limits based on your child’s age and development.
- Find settings to protect privacy and reduce contact with strangers.
- Check games and apps for age-appropriate content.
- Ensure there’s no unwanted physical interaction with your child’s avatar. Some platforms like Horizon Worlds include safety features (e.g. Personal Boundaries to block avatar touching).



SMART TOYS

DID YOU KNOW ANY TOY WITH CAMERAS OR MICROPHONES OR DATA STORAGE CAN BE A PRIVACY RISK?

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RISKS?

Smart toys like robots, voice-activated dolls, and AR-enabled devices use sensors, cameras, microphones, and internet connectivity to make play more interactive. The right ones can support learning, helping children develop skills like reading, coding, and critical thinking. However, interest may fade quickly, especially if the toy controls the interaction more than the child does.

Importantly, these toys are not substitutes for human interaction. For young children in particular, overuse may slow social development and reduce opportunities for parents to engage as primary teachers.

An increasing number of toys now include artificial intelligence (AI) to enable more advanced, responsive play. For example, [Grem](#), an AI-powered chatbot toy, can hold ongoing conversations, answer questions, and even remember details about a child over time. This can make play feel more personalized—but also raises concerns around privacy and the emotional bonds children may form with AI, as explored in this [review](#).

Both smart and AI toys can collect sensitive data, such as your child's name, voice, location, habits, or even health-related information. Some manufacturers may share or sell this data, or fail to store it securely. Weak encryption and unsecured connections can leave toys vulnerable to hacking or remote access, potentially putting your child or home at risk. In the case of AI toys, collected data may also be used to train the underlying model.

These toys can also make it harder for children to disconnect. Our research shows that 27% of 8–12-year-olds already struggle to switch off from games and apps. Highly engaging AI toys may further reduce face-to-face interaction with family and peers and introduce an overreliance on AI.

WHAT ARE THE AGE REQUIREMENTS?

This obviously differs vastly from toy to toy, and manufacturers will usually indicate a minimum recommended age for use – with 3+ normally the lowest age indicated for a smart toy – given basic safety concerns.

WILL MY CHILD BE SAFE?

It's wise to research a smart toy before buying. Check its features, make sure it's age-appropriate, and read user reviews.

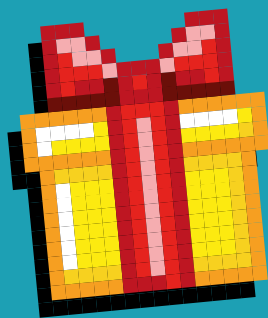
You should also:

- Read the privacy policy. Find out what data is collected, how it's stored, and whether it may be shared or used for other purposes. In Ireland, the digital age of consent is 16, so you must authorise data collection for under-16s. Learn [more](#) about your child's rights.
- Review security settings. Set strong passwords, disable location tracking where possible, and discuss safety with your child. Use parental controls to boost privacy and monitor usage.
- Keep software up to date. Enable automatic updates to ensure the toy stays secure.
- Use in shared spaces only. Toys with cameras or microphones should not be used in private areas like bedrooms.
- Limit screen time. Encourage regular person-to-person play and offline learning.
- Talk about AI. Explain that AI toys may seem lifelike but are not real friends. This helps reduce overattachment and supports healthy boundaries.



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