

Setting parental controls and monitoring your child's online activity.

Parental controls are a great tool to help protect your children online. There is plenty advice available to help you use them and it may not be as difficult as you first thought.

What do parental controls do?

These controls are designed to help parents and carers manage their child's online activities. There are various types, some of which are free, but others can be bought.

Nothing is totally foolproof however so they don't replace the need for adults to support and advise children when using the internet.

What can controls be used for?

Controls can be for a device like a mobile phone or for a network like your home broadband.

The way to access device controls can vary according to the manufacturer. They can offer varying types of protection from filtering out adult content from search engines to preventing your child from buying things when playing games. You can generally find instructions on the manufacturers website or use the **Internet Matters** website for help.

Broadband and network filters - these generally come free with your service. BT Broadband for example will allow you to restrict individual device's access to the internet for certain periods of time, allowing you to stop access on a phone or laptop after 9pm for example. They will also allow you to stop certain content such as horror or something sexually explicit being accessible via your home broadband. Instructions for accessing these filters can be found on the provider's web page you may find it at the bottom of the page under 'help' or 'security'.

Online controls - search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo allow users to filter out certain types of search results. This means you can reduce the risk of your child seeing adult content when searching online. On Google go to the Google web page and click

'settings' at the bottom of the page and go into 'search settings'. This will take you to a page where you can enable 'SafeSearch'. This can help you block inappropriate or explicit images from your Google Search results. Alternatively, search under 'Google/preferences' and this will take you to the same page.

Social media and other websites - as with search engines, social media and sites like Youtube have privacy and security settings. These can prevent your child from being contacted by strangers or seeing inappropriate material. It is important to know that filters cannot prevent other people from sending offensive or inappropriate messages to your child's account, so controlling who can contact your child is a key step.

Buying controls - it is possible to buy filter programmes. These can be solely for filtering purposes but some virus protection software also offer filtering options.

What Next?

Controls are not a single solution to staying safe online. Talking to your children and encouraging responsible behaviour is critical. Filters and controls however are a good first step in ensuring your child's safety online. Here are some simple things you can do to use them effectively:

- Set up home broadband parental controls and make use of controls on your home broadband.
- Set controls on your search engine - activate **and lock** safe search options in the settings menu.
- Make sure every device is protected. Controls and restrictions need to be activated for each phone, tablet and computer that they use.
- Make sure they use privacy settings on social media to prevent seeing unsuitable content or sharing too much with other people.
- Block pop ups. This can help stop your child accidentally clicking on adverts and accessing inappropriate content.
- Manage their use and access - smart phones now have the option to monitor and restrict screen time, restrict access to the internet and to prevent the use of selected apps and sites.