Digital Parenting

A guide to help your family live a happy and safe digital life by **vodafone**

Helen Lamprell
General Counsel &
External Affairs Director

Our digital lives have never been more important than they are right now. Inextricably linked to everything we do, our phones, computers and tablets have been our lifeline since the pandemic struck. Like so many parents, I have gone from worrying about my teenagers' screen time and preoccupation with social media to wondering whether, perhaps, they were not spending enough of each day using their tech to stay linked to what really matters.

Over the past year, digital technology has enabled us to keep in touch with grandparents and friends through quarantine, to pursue education from the kitchen table, and to work from home in ways we might never have thought possible. As lockdowns around the world saw a rise in domestic violence and depression due to isolation, social media helped people in the most difficult of circumstances to connect and ask for help. Throughout this unprecedented time, technology has opened the door to a world of hope – from life-saving medical studies, to community building, to learning beyond the classroom.

The COVID-19 crisis has driven home just how crucial it is to spend our time wisely. There's never been a more important time to use technology to connect with the ones we love. We've seen our own relationships grow stronger, as our relationship with tech adapts to the world around us. This year's Digital Parenting magazine will help you get the most out of life today – whether it's finding an app that connects your family to the stars, or one that helps your child explore the skills they might need for a career in tech. Read on for ideas on how to have fun, stay safe and learn together.

We hope you find this guide useful. Let us know what you think by tweeting **@VodafoneUK**.

Welcome

to **Digital Parenting:** Vodafone's guide to help your family live a **happy** and **safe digital life**.

What are kids talking about?
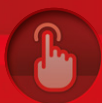
At our wellbeing organisation, Digital Awareness UK, we speak to thousands of young people and parents every month about how to survive and thrive online.

As you might imagine, these conversations have shifted over the past year. The pandemic and resulting lockdowns have irreversibly changed everyone's relationship with technology.

There's still much uncertainty around what 2021 will bring, but one thing we do know is how important it is for parents to feel on top of the latest online trends.

▶ Video dominates in social media

Apps that allow young people to make, share and view short videos are growing in popularity among tweens and teens.

Many of you will be well aware of the lip-syncing, dancing, anything-goes phenomenon that is TikTok. But when TikTok (along with Instagram and Snapchat) had to move aside for new video-sharing app Triller to top UK app charts in summer 2020, video made its mark as a truly dominant force and continues to do so in 2021. You can find some great advice on how video-sharing apps like TikTok can be used safely, and how to have the right conversations with your children on Vodafone's Digital Families website **vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting.**

🧠 Video calls boost mental health

Many parents have been in a bit of a panic over the past few years about the negative impact technology might have on young people's mental health.

So it was promising to see in a survey carried out by mental health charity Young Minds that 72% of young people said video calls with friends helped to improve their mental health during the pandemic.

If you notice your child (whatever their age) is feeling isolated or needs a bit of a boost, it may be that a video call with a friendly face is the perfect antidote.

> **" 72% OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAID VIDEO CALLS WITH FRIENDS HELPED TO IMPROVE THEIR MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC. "**

⧖ Mindful screen time helps with tech overload

It was no surprise during lockdown and beyond that for many families 'screen time' soon became 'scream time', as they understandably struggled to manage tech overload during the pandemic.

Now more than ever, we have been encouraging families to protect those critical points throughout the day — like sleeping, eating, going for walks or reading bedtime stories. Try your best to make these tech-free times, but don't beat yourself up if you feel like it's an ongoing battle and you need to reach for the 'iPad nanny' once in a while. No parent is perfect when it comes to screen-time management (digital wellness experts included).

EMMA ROBERTSON is Director and Co-Founder of online safety agency Digital Awareness UK

5 terms every parent should know

01.

Deepfakes

AI-generated fake videos or images that allow people's faces or bodies to be swapped or digitally altered – commonly seen in celebrity pornographic videos, fake news and on face-swapping apps.

02.

Cancel Culture

On social media, this often refers to the withdrawal of support for public figures – e.g. Instagrammers – or companies we disagree with.

03.

Misinformation

False information that hasn't necessarily been created to intentionally mislead people – e.g. sharing a COVID-19 "miracle cure" without knowing if it's genuinely effective or not.

04.

Disinformation

False information that is intended to deliberately mislead people – e.g. writing a blog post that intentionally contains inaccurate news.

05.

Digital Activism

Using digital platforms – like social media – to encourage social or political change, as seen during the US election and Black Lives Matter movement.

Beyond the headlines:

Real children, extraordinary times

If anything important happens, we'll soon hear about it.

We might be on holiday, off the beaten track, but somehow news of tragedies, political resignations and celebrity scandals follow us wherever we go. Now we are living with a relatively new and dangerous phenomenon: **fake news.**

NICKY COX MBE is Editor-in-Chief of First News, Executive Producer of Sky News' FYI, and was part of the all-party parliamentary select committee on children's literacy and fake news.

As adults, we have the experience to question what we read – checking the source and its reliability. But children are not so savvy and there is much evidence (from the NSPCC and other bodies) that their mental health is being affected.

That's why my children's newspaper, First News, and my Sky News' children's programme, FYI, are more important now than ever – children need reliable sources of news they can trust.

All of the evidence suggests that children are growing more invested in and engaged with what is going on in the world around them.

Children need to be protected because stories never disappear from the web. Clicks can represent big money to advertisers; if there is a juicy story, people will click and read. The news – true or false – is almost irrelevant. Even more confusingly, there are stories with a kernel of truth but which have biased reporting.

First News and FYI are not afraid to tackle any headline that is in the news – however worrying – because we know that children are hearing about it anyway. They deliver the facts truthfully to our young readers and viewers but without any of the sensationalist spin or bias of adult newspapers, or the internet.

TEACH CHILDREN TO ASK THEMSELVES THESE QUESTIONS:

- Does the story sound believable?

- Do other sites have the same facts and figures?

- Has it been reported on the radio, TV and in more than one reputable newspaper?

- Does the photo or video look normal?

- Does the website look professional or does it use poor quality graphics?

- Is some of the text written in caps – usually a sign of sensationalism – or feature lots of exclamation marks?

- Does the website have an About Us or a Contact section?

- Does it have a standard address such as .org, .co.uk or .com?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'no', encourage your child to check the story again before spreading the word.

First News is read by more than 2.6 million children aged 7-14, and subscribed to by families and nearly half of all schools. FYI can be seen every weekend on Sky News, Sky Kids, and all week at **first.news/fyi**.

ELLA
FYI PRESENTER, 14

I think it's really important that kids have an understanding of what's happening in the world, so they can empathise and grow up with a global awareness and open-minded attitude. In my opinion, balanced news helps shape a person's view of the world and broadens their mindset.

JESS
FIRST NEWS REPORTER, 13

It's important for a child to know what is going on in the world so they feel included and know what's happening. My main interest is the environment. If I hadn't learnt so much, I might still be using plastic. I watch programmes about the environment – I think David Attenborough is brilliant.

BRAYDON
FYI PRESENTER, 11

Kids' news is very important, as it helps us understand what is happening in the world, but in a way that is much clearer than the usual adult news channels. I particularly enjoy the wildlife and natural world news that we report on, as well as 'fake news or fact?'.

RAAGHAV
FIRST NEWS READER, 13

I am passionate about technology and politics. It is no longer an option for young people like me not to engage with either – the two things are fundamentally linked! We have witnessed the power of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Google influencing the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US election.

Five superhero digital resources that boost mental health

This year more than ever before, we all appreciate the crucial role the digital world can play in protecting mental wellbeing. Last year, when many physical options for connection closed to us, online apps and tools became a lifeline, says Andrea Chatten, Child Emotional & Behavioural Psychologist at unravelsupport.co.uk.

"We've all learned how important online connection can be," she says. "Apps and games have brought people closer together over lockdown and brought real benefits."

"Whatever the future brings, the benefits of these digital tools should not be forgotten", she says. "They can be used to improve the mental and physical health of the whole family, from children to the elderly."

The tools opposite are five of the very best.

For tween workouts: Sworkit Kids

Fitness app Sworkit requires a subscription if you want adult fitness content, but the good news is that the children's workouts on the app are totally free and offer strength, agility, flexibility and balance workouts to boost mental and physical health. You can select the length of the workout and the focus, and schedule a time for it too, so that the children are sent a notification. The app links with Spotify so tweens can work out to their favourite playlist.

app.sworkit.com

For building resilience: Mind Moose

Used by schools and parents worldwide, Mind Moose takes 7-12 year olds on a journey through their own minds, developing resilience and coping skills along the way. As parents, you get feedback as your children complete Moose Missions relating to their wellbeing, giving you an insight into what's worrying them and how to tackle it. Particularly useful during the transition to secondary school, Mind Moose comes at a cost – £55 a year.

mindmoose.co.uk
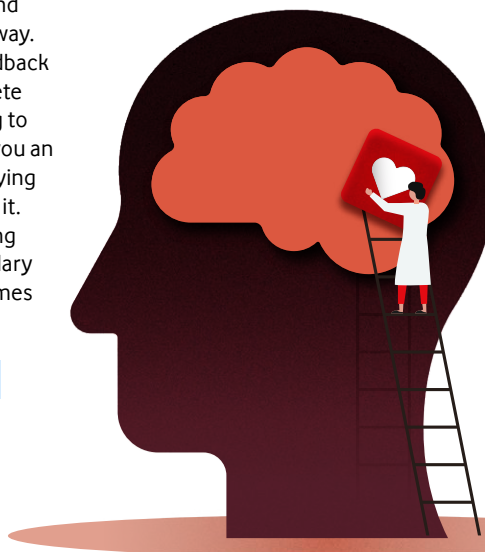
For junior mindfulness: Smiling Kids

Aussie not-for-profit Smiling Kids helps everyone improve their mental health with this free app, which excels in specific meditations for kids and youth, with specific content for young people from the age of 3 and up. Whether it's a sleep meditation you need or ten minutes to consider your emotions, you can choose a meditation for your child or one suitable for the whole family.

smilingmind.com.au

For anyone struggling: Shout

24/7 text helpline Shout, launched by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in May 2019, is free on all major networks. By texting the word SHOUT to 85258, anyone in crisis can be put in touch with a trained volunteer who will chat to them in a series of texts. Shout is partnered with the mental health charity Young Minds, and texting YM to 85258 will connect to the service.

giveusashout.org

For senior fitness: Keep On Keep Up

Downloadable on the iPad, the new Keep On Keep Up app is one to share with elderly parents if you are worried about their sedentary lifestyle. The app was developed by the University of Manchester and gamifies the need to improve strength and balance to avoid falls. By increasing physical health, the app improves mental health, too, reducing the chances of isolation and withdrawal from society.

kokuhealth.com

Safety by numbers

We all worry about keeping our children safe online.

They grow up fast and the digital world changes even more quickly than they do, so getting the balance between giving them necessary online freedom and appropriate restrictions changes depending on age.

For toddlers

While some young children may have their own tablet (the most recent Ofcom survey suggests that a quarter of 3-4 year olds do), many others will be using a parent's phone or other device.

Activating safety features at every level is appropriate for this very young age group, starting with the safety settings on your broadband. It may be easiest to set up a separate profile for your child on shared devices, complete with apps and bookmarks that are age-appropriate, and a child-friendly search site such as Kiddle or Swiggle that will protect them from seeing anything inappropriate.

In a pinch, simply enable airplane mode on any device that you hand to your toddler so he or she can play safely offline, uncontactable by strangers.

For primary school children

Parental safety features are vital on devices for primary aged children, with apps such as Google Family Link and the iPhone privacy settings giving a large measure of control, backed up with broadband safety settings.

You should also disable in-app purchasing and geo-location on all apps.

Older primary school children are likely to request games that can be played socially, such as Roblox and Fortnite.

Check the PEGI rating (like a film rating for games) as well as the recommended age range. Add a parental PIN and lock-down the chat settings so they can only chat with known friends.

Make sure they know how to mute, block and report players if things do go wrong.

For tweens

Music and video-sharing apps are fun for hyper-connected tweens. But they can be a headache for parents, who must decide whether to allow children to defy the 13-plus age restrictions on many popular sites.

Safety stipulations should include ensuring accounts are private and accessible only to friends, so that no contact can be made with strangers and they can't be tagged.

Place time restrictions on individual apps and sites as well as restricting overall screen time for this age group.

Digital tools are no substitute for keeping the channels of communication open. Regularly stress that you are available to listen if your tweens experience anything that worries them and check their browser history and messages regularly.

For teens

The whole digital world opens up for teenagers, but that doesn't mean they don't need protecting.

Private, rather than public, social media accounts are appropriate for those aged 13-plus, while understanding the pitfalls around digital reputation is key. Searching for their name regularly to check in on their digital footprint will help them to maintain good habits, while you should also check their browser history.

Regulator Ofcom says that parents of teens find it hard to control their children's screen time, but by discussing the subject of digital wellbeing and agreeing daily limits on individual apps before enforcing them on phones and tablets, your teenagers can enjoy their digital freedom healthily.

Skills lab

Here are the lessons tech-savvy parents are teaching their kids

Have you felt a little at sea when teaching your children how to navigate the digital world? Have you realised that some of your children's peers can programme robots, but you aren't quite sure how to help your kids navigate their way around the latest, age-appropriate tech tools? Welcome to Vodafone's skills lab.

We're all aware of how important tech is. Debates over the positives and pitfalls of screen time for kids can be confusing: while more time on screens is linked to lower language development, high-quality educational screen content is actually associated with better language skills. Meanwhile, a professor at NYU has developed three games proven to boost cognitive skills. "We want to show that… these kinds of technologies can improve your cognitive function and can improve your learning," said Jan L. Plass.

But how do you choose the right ways to play? Apple's App Store alone features over 75,000 apps marked as 'educational'. How is a busy parent supposed to shift the 'need to knows' from the 'nice to haves'?

Help is at hand. We've drawn up a list of the apps and programmes you need for each stage of your child's development. These are things they'll not only love, but also ways to play that will also teach them the digital skills essential for their futures. This is the way to ensure that your child doesn't just play video games, use memes, and watch music videos, but that they become expert creators of them, too.

AGE 1
Caribu

One of Time Magazine's 'best inventions of 2019', this app allows families to select a book to share over a Caribu call. Kids see Granny's face as she reads and the pages of the picture book too.

caribu.com

Free app with in-app purchases

AGE 2
Augmented Reality

Does your child want a life-sized horse to join them in the sitting room? Click, learn and laugh as you amass a menagerie in your home.

arvr.google.com/ar

Free Google search application

AGE 3
Dream Learners

Inspired by research demonstrating that learning is most effective in the 90-minutes before sleep, and developed with Robert Winston, Professor of Science and Society at Imperial College London, this clever app contains animated bedtime stories to support the curriculum for 3-9-year-olds.

dreamlearners.com

Free app with in-app purchases

> **The positives and pitfalls of screen time for kids can be confusing.**

AGE 4
Loopimal

Create your own music using the sounds and cute animated creatures in the app's building kit while learning about computer sequencing and music composition too!

yatatoy.com/loopimal

£3.99 app

AGE 5
Scratch Jr

Small children can make characters move, jump, dance, and sing through this app's colourful and visual programming language, meaning they can become master coders before they've even mastered reading.

scratchjr.org

Free app

AGE 6
Toontastic 3D

Got a mini Michelangelo on your hands? This Google app allows kids to draw, animate and narrate their own 3D cartoon.

toontastic.withgoogle.com

Free app

AGE 7
Stop Motion Studio

Group sequential photos together to produce your own stop frame. Enlist toys as actors, friends to supply voice overs or soundtracks, and suddenly you have hours of self-directed fun.

cateater.com

Free app with in-app purchases

AGE 8
Minecraft: Education Edition

Last Spring, Minecraft created a new Education category in the Minecraft Marketplace. Tour the International Space Station or even the inside of a human eye. Even better, most of these worlds are entirely free.

minecraft.net/en-us/ marketplace/education

Free app with most worlds free

AGE 9
Scribble

Banish boredom for good with this story-writing and illustrating app. Over 300 drawing tools, backgrounds, stickers, stamps and music, plus 35 'fill-in-the-blank' story starters are guaranteed to spark creativity.

app.scribblepress.com

£4.69 app

> **High-quality educational screen content is actually associated with better language skills.**

AGE 10
Google Cardboard

Google's cardboard viewer is the perfect, affordable gateway into virtual reality. Download the free Cardboard app, slip your phone into the viewer, and immerse yourself in landscapes from the Arctic to Paris.

arvr.google.com/cardboard

Google Cardboard Viewer: £12.30. Cardboard app: free.

AGE 11
Inshot

Perfect for mini movie-makers, this simple, colourful video editor enables kids to shoot and edit their own films, adding animated stickers and text, music and sound effects.

inshot.com
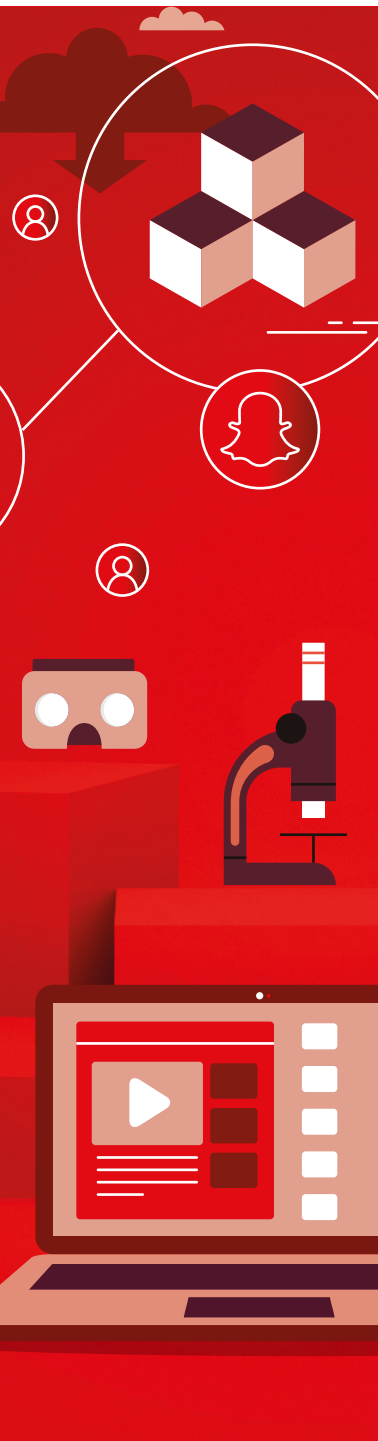
Free app with in-app purchases

AGE 12
Edu

Not content to just view VR? How about building your own? CoSpaces' kid-friendly tools make it possible to build a 360-degree immersive environment, game or even interactive story. Sounds intimidating, but actually it's all drag-and-drop and there are tutorials on YouTube.

cospaces.io/edu

Free app with in-app purchases

AGE 13
Ninja Jamm

This music-making app is simple and has a serious cool factor, since it was launched by the Ninja Tune label. Remix or create new tunes using drum, bass, vocal and melody samples from artists like Bonobo and Mr Scruff.

ninjajamm.com

Free app with in-app purchases

AGE 14
UL Xplorlabs

Think science is boring? Think again. Xplorlabs is designed to get young teens inventing solutions to real-world problems. In the 'Fire Lab' module, teens work with real scientists through videos and interactive tools, to investigate the cause of a blaze.

ulxplorlabs.org/all-modules

Free online platform

AGE 15
Vidcode

Designed to appeal to teens, and especially teen girls, Vidcode gets them to code the things they love most (memes, Snapchat filters and music videos) using the tools they love most (their own photos and videos).

vidcode.com

Free online platform

AGE 16
Touchcast Studio

A wannabe TV presenter or YouTuber's dream, this app gives you a TV studio on your iPad. Get to grips with green screen technology, virtual sets, teleprompters and more.

touchcast.com/studio

Free app

AGE 17
Codea for iPad

Some successful and popular video games have already been developed using this slick, iPad-specific coding app which employs the Lua programming language. Tutorials and sample programmes help to get the ball rolling.

codea.io

App, £14.99
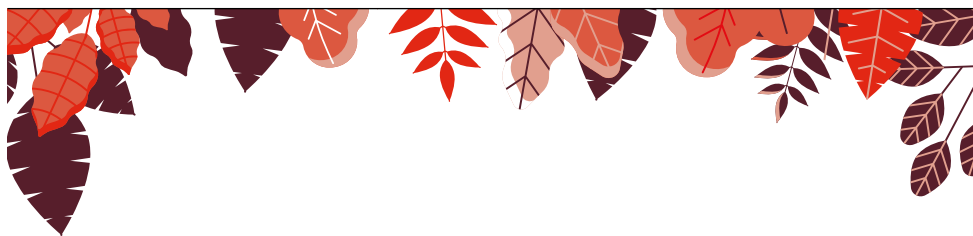
AGE 18
MIT App Inventor

Launched by the venerable Massachusetts Institute of Technology, there's everything here you need to build your own sophisticated and world-altering app in less than 30-minutes. No excuses, now...

appinventor.mit.edu

Free, cloud-based tool

Can't tell a **hemlock** from an **oak**?

Photo: Clifford Mervil

Here's how
tech can help

Think of how your grandparents could identify any tree, and you're a bit fuzzy on the differences. What about your children? Lucy Jones, author of *Losing Eden* and mother of two young children, writes about our nature knowledge loss and how to fix it.

Our disconnection from the natural world is at an unprecedented level. We spend between one to five per cent of our time outside. Three-quarters of children (aged 5-12) spend less leisure time outdoors than prison inmates. Fewer than one in ten children regularly play in wild spaces now and children don't walk to school as much or as freely as they did in previous generations.

This alienation from the rest of the living world means that we are losing knowledge that has been part of the human experience for millennia. Almost four in five children can't recognise a bumblebee or an oak leaf. Many of us can see

this pattern of the 'extinction of experience' in our families. My grandmothers had an inherent lexicon of the natural world and how it operates. My parents knew about birds, flowers and plants; names, timings and behaviours. I know maybe ten per cent of what they know, although I'm trying to rectify this knowledge gap.

As natural environments are destroyed and species decline, the cycle is set to continue. As fewer children connect with nature, it will follow that if they become parents, their children will have an even more tenuous connection with the natural world.

Almost four in five children can't recognise a bumblebee or an oak leaf.

There are three key reasons why this is dangerous. First, there are a myriad of proven mental and physical health benefits of connecting and feeling engaged with nature. As children are enclosed indoors and given fewer opportunities to know the living world, their chances for stress recovery, restoration, cognitive development and simply experiencing the awe of the earth are also constrained. From the iridescent shells of a beetle to the fun of blowing a dandelion clock, the wonder of an acorn turning into an oak tree to the excitement of finding frog spawn nature gives countless opportunities for joy and learning.

Second, research shows that a connection with nature in childhood leads to a connection with nature in adulthood. If a child is introduced to the natural world before the age of twelve, the chances are they'll continue the relationship and its benefits through life.

Third, and perhaps most importantly in a climate emergency, if our children don't know or can't name the living beings around us – the plants that sustain us, the processes that form our living support systems – how will they protect and restore the natural world?

The good news? It's never too late to head out for a walk and start a relationship with the living world. It's free, you don't need any specialist kit, and the more you look, the more you will find.

Expert help and advice

Tonnes of tips and resources, regularly updated to keep up with the trends

Digital Awareness UK

Views and advice from our expert partners on how to improve your digital wellbeing

Visit us online to join the conversation throughout the year.

vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting

Support for schools

Find out more about our work in schools to help parents and young people get more out of their lives online

Digital Family Pledge

To help your family set some house rules on using tech and behaving online

Parent controls and filtering advice

So you can manage what your kids see and do online for better peace of mind

For further help and support

Digital Parenting website
→ **vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting**

Internet Matters
→ **internetmatters.org**

The Mix
→ **themix.org.uk**

Digital Awareness UK
→ **digitalawarenessuk.com**

Think U Know
→ **thinkuknow.co.uk**

Child Net
→ **childnet.com**