

# First Connections Guide

Helping keep your  
family safe online



Together we can



Deciding when to give young people their first connected device is a big moment for any family.

In recent months, I've visited stores across the country and heard from colleagues who say parents and guardians often come in not just to buy a phone, but to ask: when is the right time?

At Vodafone Ireland, we understand that this decision is about more than a device. It's about trust, readiness, and what feels right for your family.

Whether it's a basic phone, smartwatch or smartphone, our role is to support parents in making an informed choice they feel confident about.

That's why we've created this guide – not to tell families what to do, but to support and help parents and guardians make the choice that feels right, regardless of their mobile provider.

Part of our new First Connections Programme, this guide is designed to give families the knowledge and tools to navigate the digital landscape safely.

We're proud to continue our long-standing partnership with the ISPCC in our shared mission to support families in Ireland. Together, we've made online safety tools more accessible - from parental controls and screen time management to resources available in-store and online.

We're also proud of Vodafone Foundation's Tozi app, our free wellbeing tool developed in partnership with DCU's Anti-Bullying Centre. Tozi helps young people stay safe online by building resilience, digital confidence, and awareness. It's free, available to everyone, and a small step that can make a meaningful difference.

We've developed a strong programme of support and, together with our colleagues across our 80 stores, we are committed to helping families make the choice that's right for them.

We hope First Connections supports you and your family on this journey.



**Sabrina Casalta**  
CEO, Vodafone Ireland







Technology is a part of everyday life, and it can open-up exciting opportunities for young people to learn, connect, and grow. At ISPCC, we believe in supporting teens as they explore the digital world with confidence, while helping parents and guardians guide them safely through it.

That's why we welcome this valuable resource from Vodafone, designed to empower families with practical tools and insights for navigating the online world together.

Even the most digitally confident parents can find it challenging to keep up with the pace of change. At ISPCC, we encourage open, honest conversations between parents and young people about their online experiences—what they enjoy, what worries them, and how to handle tricky situations.

Rather than focusing solely on when a young person might start their digital journey, we believe the more important question is: "How can I help my teenager build the skills and resilience they need to thrive online?"

Young people should feel supported in speaking up about their digital lives. The most effective way to keep them safe is to keep the conversation going—staying curious, staying connected, and staying involved.

Every young person deserves the chance to participate meaningfully in the digital world—and to do so safely. ISPCC is proud to partner with the Vodafone Foundation to help families create positive, secure online experiences for young people and teenagers.



**John Church**  
CEO, ISPCC









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# deciding

## if and when your teenager is ready for a phone

If you've been asked, "When can I get a phone?", you're not alone. It's a common conversation in households everywhere these days. We've put together a few tips below that can help you think through the decision in a way that suits your teenager and your family.





## SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- **Why does my child need a phone?**  
Is it for a real need, such as contacting you for safety, or is it more about “everyone else has one”?
- **Can they handle the responsibility?**  
Will they remember to look after it, not lose or damage it, and use it within agreed limits for screen time?
- **Have you talked about what comes with having a phone?**  
Discuss the positives, like independence and staying in touch, but also the risks, such as their digital footprint, privacy, exposure to inappropriate content, and the possibility of cyberbullying. More on that later.

## OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

There's no single 'right first phone', it depends on your teenager and your family's needs. Here are a few options to think about, each with its own benefits and challenges.

### 1. Smartwatch

Good for basic calls and location tracking without full internet access.

### 2. Basic phone

Useful for calls and texts only, limiting distractions and social media pressure.

### 3. Smartphone

Offers full access to apps and the internet, but comes with higher risks and may require more supervision.

If and when the time is right for your older child to move on from a basic device to a smartphone, it's really important to set them up for a safe and positive digital experience. Because unlike the other options, a smartphone means they'll be online, and that comes with new opportunities and new responsibilities too.

It's worth remembering that devices often used for gaming and streaming can have similar risks. While these can be fun and creative, they need similar guidance on time limits and online interactions.

# letting

**your teenager know they can talk to you**







## ENCOURAGE AN OPEN CONVERSATION AROUND PHONE USAGE

- Talk with your teenager about how they can stay safe online.
- Explain parental controls as protection, not something that feels like punishment.
- Agree on clear rules for when, where and how the phone is used.
- Decide what apps can be installed and who they can connect with.
- Keep the conversation going and check in regularly about what they're doing and how they're feeling. In short, keep talking.
- Encourage them to speak up if anything makes them uncomfortable online.
- Remember to review privacy settings and app use often.
- Keep an eye out for changes in behaviour, mood or sleep patterns.

## PREPARE YOUR TEENAGER

Let's look at some conversation starters to help guide this conversation:

- Ask them what they like doing online as well as things they don't enjoy or find upsetting.

**Tip:** Approach the conversation positively, take a real interest and listen as much as possible without interruption. You want them talking as much as possible.

- Ask them what you could be doing as a family to improve the time they spend online.

**Tip:** Think about your own solutions and ideas ahead of time, and take this opportunity to praise what they are already doing well. Keep it positive.

- Ask your older child what games they play, streamers they follow, or the videos they watch.

**Tip:** Taking an interest in these helps them feel supported, helps them feel comfortable discussing their online world and makes it easier for you to spot any concerns down the line.

# supporting

**them to develop healthy habits around phone usage**

## **WORK OUT BOUNDARIES WITH THEM**

- Agree on device rules together (time, place, purpose).
- Involve your teenager when setting limits to build trust and create a sense of responsibility from the beginning.
- Ask guiding questions:
  - Why are you going online? (Helps to focus them and avoid endless hours scrolling.)
  - How do you know when it's time to put the phone down?
  - How do you feel when you spend too much time in front of a screen?







### Give them reasons to spend less time online

- Encourage fresh air, playing outside, exercise, and good sleep.
- Support real-life interactions to balance screen time.

### Build up their digital resilience from day one

- Give them the ability to recover from upsetting online experiences.
- Help them cope with negative digital interactions.

### Remember to keep communication open

- Reassure your teenager that they can come to you without fear.
- Stay calm and non-judgmental during conversations. Keep them talking.
- Discuss the real risks of sharing photos or personal content online.
- Remind them that content online is hard to fully delete, no matter what platform or app it is they're using.

### Tools like Tozi can really help

The Vodafone Foundation, along with Dublin City University's Anti-Bullying Centre and the ISPCC, launched Tozi, a free app designed to support young people aged 11–14.

Tozi supports young people as they navigate the digital world by offering:

- Trusted content: Articles, videos and podcasts on online safety, privacy, and emotional wellbeing.
- Personal reflection tools: A private space to track feelings, journal experiences, and build self-awareness.
- Direct 24/7 support: Access to a Live Chat with Childline for confidential help when it's needed most.

It's available to download on the Google Play Store and Apple App Store.

Scan here to download  
the Tozi app:



# setting

## up their new phone

### HOW TO KEEP THEM SAFE ONLINE FROM THE GET-GO

Did you know that there are really simple tools that can help you feel more confident about your older child's time online?

Both Apple and Android devices have built-in features and trusted apps that make it easier to guide screen time, set healthy boundaries, and support their safety.



### Apple Devices (iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch)

Apple has built-in tools that make it easier for parents to guide their teen's phone use. We've put together a list of some of the most useful ones below.

#### Apple Screen Time (Built-in)

- Set daily time limits for apps or app categories.
- Schedule "Downtime" (e.g. bedtime) when only essential apps work.
- Get full activity reports so you can see how much time is spent on each app.
- Restrict adult content in Safari and App Store purchases.

#### Family Sharing & Parental Controls

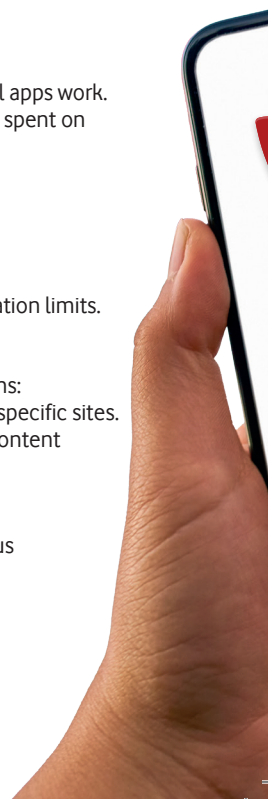
- Create child accounts linked to yours.
- Approve or deny download requests.
- Control location sharing, app purchases, and communication limits.

#### Safe Browsing in Safari

- In Settings > Screen Time > Content & Privacy Restrictions:
  - Enable 'Limit Adult Websites' or allow access only to specific sites.
  - Or select Web Content, then prevent access to web content deemed unsafe or inappropriate.

#### Other Apps for iOS

- FamiSafe: Location tracking, app usage reports, suspicious text alerts.
- FamilyTime: App blocking, screen time scheduling, SOS/panic button.







## Android Devices (Phones & Tablets)

If your teenager has an Android device, Google offers handy tools to help set limits and keep track of usage. These can be great starting points for setting boundaries together.

### Google Family Link (Official Google App)

- Manage app downloads and screen time remotely.
- Set daily limits and device bedtime.
- View app activity reports.
- Lock the device remotely during family time or study.

### Family Link Manager

- Companion app for parents to control multiple teenager accounts.
- Supports linking devices across Android and even iOS.

### Safe Browsing Settings

- In Google Chrome > Settings > Privacy & Security, enable:
  - SafeSearch: Filters out explicit content in Google searches.
  - Use Google Play parental controls to restrict downloads and purchases by age rating.

### Other Apps for Android

- Kids360: Real-time location tracking, device lock features, screen time control.
- FamiSafe and FamilyTime are also available on Android with similar features to iOS.

## Consider adding extra online security and parental controls like Secure Net, from Vodafone

**Secure Net** from Vodafone is a clever and innovative all-in-one digital security service that protects your devices on the Vodafone network. It offers a whole range of parental controls and digital security features to help you manage your teen's device usage, and help create a safer online experience for everyone. It's free to download with a monthly subscription fee.

- **Do it as soon as you can:**
  - Install when setting up your teenager's device.
- Available on Google Play Store & App Store.
- **Network protection:**
  - Blocks viruses, harmful websites, and unsafe files.
  - Works on Vodafone mobile and broadband networks.
  - Sends SMS alerts for blocked downloads.
- **Parental control features:**
  - Content Filtering – Restrict access to inappropriate sites.
  - Pause Wi-Fi – Temporarily disable internet access.
  - Bedtime – Set times when internet access is off.
  - Focus Time – Limit distractions during homework or study.



# social media

## overview and tips to getting started

Social media is a big part of young people's lives, and it can feel like a lot to keep up with as a parent. This overview will give you a clear picture of the most popular apps and some simple ways to help your teenager use them safely and positively.



### TikTok

A short video app for music, comedy and trends. Ages 13+.



### Snapchat

A photo/video messaging app with disappearing messages. Ages 13+.

#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Link accounts:** Go to Settings > Family Pairing > Scan QR code to link.
2. **Limit screen time:** Set a time limit in Family Pairing > Screen Time.
3. **Manage messages:** Turn off or limit DMs in Family Pairing > Direct Messages.
4. **Enable Restricted Mode:** Blocks mature content under Content Preferences.
5. **Set to Private:** Go to Settings > Privacy > turn on Private Account.

#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Set who can contact them:** Settings > Privacy Controls > Contact Me > choose "My Friends."
2. **Disable location:** Settings > Snap Map > Ghost Mode ON.
3. **Discuss screenshot risks:** Explain that content can still be saved.
4. **Turn off Quick Add:** Stops random friend suggestions.







### Instagram

A photo/video sharing app with stories, reels, and messaging. Ages 13+.

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#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Set account to private:** Go to Profile > Settings > Privacy > Private Account ON.
2. **Limit messages/comments:** Control who can DM and comment under Privacy settings.
3. **Use time limits:** Use device Screen Time or Instagram's Activity Dashboard.
4. **Hide offensive content:** Settings > Privacy > Hidden Words or Sensitive Content Control.



### WhatsApp

A text, voice and group chat app. Ages 13+.

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#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Set profile privacy:** Settings > Privacy > restrict who sees profile photo, status, etc.
2. **Turn off group adds:** Settings > Privacy > Groups > "My Contacts" or "My Contacts Except..."
3. **Use block/report:** Show your teen how to block/report unknown or unwanted contacts.
4. **Talk about forwarded messages:** Warn about misinformation and stranger contact.



# social media

## overview and tips to getting started



### YouTube

A video platform with all types of content. Ages 13+ (YouTube Kids available for younger users).

#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Enable Restricted Mode:** Scroll to the bottom of any page > toggle ON.
2. **Use Supervised Accounts:** Choose content levels (Explore, Explore More, Most of YouTube).
3. **Download YouTube Kids:** Safer version with filtered content.
4. **Set time limits:** Use device settings or an app timer.



### Kik

An anonymous chat app with limited controls. Ages 17+ (13+ with consent).

#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Avoid usage:** Not recommended due to anonymity and risk.
2. **Block app:** Use third-party parental control tools to prevent downloads.
3. **If used:** Talk openly about risks and unsafe contact.





### BeReal

A photo-sharing app that prompts daily “real” selfies. Ages 13+.

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#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Turn off location:** Phone Settings > App Permissions > Location OFF.
2. **Set account to private:** App Settings > Only Friends can see posts.
3. **Talk about oversharing:** Remind kids not to share personal info.



### Discord

A group chat app with text, voice, and video. Popular with gamers. Ages 13+.

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#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Use Family Center:** Set up through your own Discord account to monitor activity.
2. **Block unknown DMs:** Settings > Privacy & Safety > “Who can DM me” = Friends only.
3. **Filter explicit content:** Enable “Keep me safe” in Privacy & Safety.
4. **Review server activity:** Ask about the servers they join.



### Twitch

Live-streaming platform for gaming and more. Ages 13+ with parental permission.

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#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:

1. **Enable chat filters:** Block profanity and harmful content in Chat Settings.
2. **Set content filters:** Use moderation tools or block mature streams.
3. **Talk about streaming risks:** Emphasise not sharing personal info in chat.
4. **Use account restrictions:** Limit who can follow or message.



### HOLLA

Random live video chat app. Ages 18+ only.

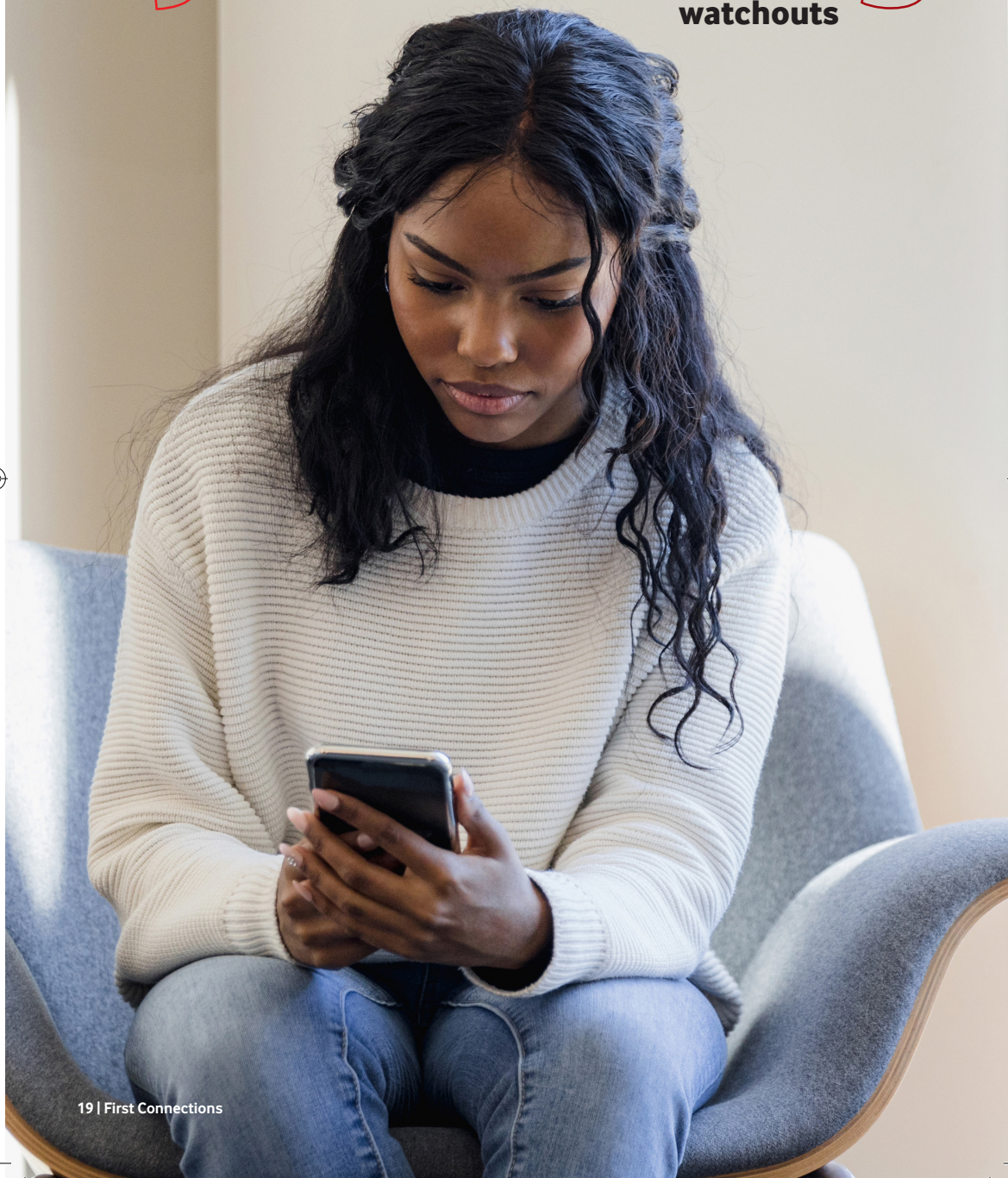
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#### Ideas for a safer, more positive online experience:




1. **Block access:** Use parental control software to prevent downloads.
2. **Talk openly:** Explain the risks of random video chats and why it's not safe.
3. **Check devices:** Regularly review installed apps.

# cyberbulling

**watchouts**







We know that no parent wants to think that their child could ever be bullied online, but it's so important to know the signs and risks, just in case.

### **PEER PRESSURE**

- Publicly pressuring someone into actions they're uncomfortable with (e.g. online challenges, sharing private info).

### **SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

- Leaving someone out of group chats (e.g. WhatsApp).
- Creating private groups to talk about them or share mean comments.
- Posting group photos intentionally excluding them to cause hurt.

### **DIRECT MESSAGES (DMs)**

- Hurtful messages may be hidden in private chats.
- Some Apps auto-delete messages, making it harder to detect.

### **IMAGE-BASED BULLYING**

- Sharing embarrassing or compromising images "for fun" can seriously harm self-esteem.
- It's illegal to share intimate images without consent, which is punishable by fines or up to 7 years in prison.
- Regardless of consequences for the sender, the victim in the image still suffers.

### **FAKE ACCOUNTS**

- Bullies may create fake profiles to send unkind messages or spread lies.
- Of course, these profiles can be blocked and reported, but bullies often create new ones and even multiple profiles easily.
- Sadly, few safeguards currently exist to fully prevent this behaviour.

### **TROLLING**

- Intentionally provokes or upsets individuals or groups online.
- May involve challenging opinions or encouraging others to pile on.
- Naturally, this can cause victims to withdraw from social media altogether.

# What you can do if your older child is a victim of cyberbullying

## STAY CALM

- It may be hard to do but stay composed and listen carefully to your teen.
- Let your teen express how they feel and what they want to happen next.
- Avoid immediately taking away their device. To your older child, this may feel like an undeserved punishment and turn them away from opening up to you in the future.

## USE SUPPORTS AVAILABLE

- ISPCC Parent Support Line: Call 01 522 4300 (Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm) for advice from a therapeutic support worker.
- Tozi App: Offers digital safety tools and emotional support for young people (see page 12).

## SAVE EVIDENCE

- Record and save messages including names, dates, and times of incidents.
- This information is crucial if Gardai (police) need to be involved. They will need as much information as you can give them.

## DELETE THE APP (IF NEEDED)

- In some cases, not all, it may help to delete the app where the bullying occurred.
- Before doing that, remember to involve your teenager and make them feel part of that decision to maintain trust and control.

## ADVISE YOUR TEENAGER NOT TO RETALIATE

- Bullies want a reaction, so teach them to block and report instead.
- All platforms offer blocking/reporting tools. Don't be afraid to use them.

## CONTACT AN GARDÁ SÍOCHÁNA

- For serious or threatening abuse, report it to your local Garda station.
- Use Hotline.ie to report suspected illegal content anonymously.


## UPDATE YOUR TEENAGER'S SCHOOL

- Inform the school and other trusted adults (e.g. coaches, youth leaders) so they can provide extra support and monitor behaviour when your teen is with them.

## EXPLORE THESE OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

- [ISPCC.ie](https://www.ispcc.ie)
- [Childline.ie](https://www.childline.ie)
- [CyberSafeKids.ie](https://www.cybersafekids.ie)
- [UNICEF.org](https://www.unicef.org)
- [www.webwise.ie](https://www.webwise.ie)





We know raising teenagers in a digital world can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone. With the right tools, open conversations, and steady support systems, you can help your teenager grow up safe, confident, and balanced online. What matters most is not being perfect, but being present. Every parent faces these challenges. And if there's one message to hold onto from everything we've said here, it's this:

**keep talking and listening to your  
child about their time online**

Together we can

