

# Internet safety and the dangers of digital piracy

Understanding the risks for children

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# Introduction

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Internet safety was once a concern that parents may have only had when their children were going online and accessing websites on a PC or laptop. We have become increasingly aware of the risks of apps and social media sites on mobile phones and tablets, but now our TVs can also connect to the internet and pose the same dangers. Whether it's via a connected TV, a plug in streaming box, or other devices that have software added to access content, parents should be aware that the once- safe TV screen now comes with its own risks especially when used with some 'preloaded' streaming devices.

Whilst children and adults alike might be tempted to stream or download their favourite TV shows, movies or music online, if it is not done through legitimate services, an innocent click can put them at risk of seeing inappropriate content or accidentally installing malware on their device, putting personal and financial information at risk.

Unfortunately, if your children stream illegal content online, also known as digital piracy, it can expose them and you to cyber threats, disturbing pop-ups and unexpected harmful content. The risks typically associated with digital piracy can take place on dodgy websites and preloaded streaming devices, sometimes known as Kodi boxes, but they can also occur through any number of illegitimate apps on mobiles, tablets or smart TVs.

If you are concerned about your child accidentally, or even intentionally, accessing illegal or inappropriate content then you're not alone. Together with Mumsnet, we asked parents about their experiences of the risks they see with digital piracy. This report will share these risks along with advice and practical tips to keep your child safe when watching TV through internet connected devices.

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# Key parental concerns and risks



*"I'm well aware of the inappropriate content attached to completely unrelated things"*

Mumsnet user

*"I do worry about the pop ups and unsuitable content"*

Mumsnet user

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# The risk of inappropriate material



## Exposure to adult content

If your child is illegally streaming online, it's an unrestricted and unmoderated area of the internet. This means it's very likely that they will come across things which are inappropriate for their age. Inappropriate content includes information or images that may upset your child, material that's directed at adults, inaccurate information or information that might lead or tempt them into unlawful or dangerous behaviour.



## No safety net for children

Parents of children of all ages say access to age-inappropriate content is their top concern. Illegal streaming comes with no parental controls, which means there is no way to protect your family from exposure to inappropriate and unsavoury adult content. Explicit adverts may pop up and there's no standard organisation of age-restricted content, meaning 18+ films like Fifty Shades can sit right next to U-rated content such as Finding Nemo.



## Explicit apps and content

Fully-loaded streaming devices, can also come installed with porn apps. If children are watching these alone, without the guidance of parents, there is no way to tell what they are being exposed to or how explicit the content might be.

*"You could easily download viruses or malware from a dodgy streaming site"*

Mumsnet user

*"Our laptop picked up so many viruses that it no longer works. I felt watching a film on a pirate site took the enjoyment out of it for us as it always has poor sound and picture quality."*

Mumsnet user

## Risks to your personal security and devices



**Illegal pirating sites are the most common source of malware infection on the internet, and streaming pirated material puts your devices at direct risk.**

Most of the criminal gangs behind online piracy make their money by installing spam ads, viruses and "malware" (malicious software that causes harm through obtaining personal information). What's more, paying these criminals to illegally access content further heightens the risk of identity theft and fraud.

In fact, research from the **Industry Trust** into children's awareness of malware and its consequences showed that nearly one in ten children have been affected by malware.



**At the moment, six out of ten 11-15 year-olds don't know that downloading or streaming from illegal sites can result in malware ending up on their devices.**



**Adele Bannister**  
Online Safety Expert  
**smoothwall**

**Adele Bannister**, an Online Safety Expert at Smoothwall, providing online safety technology for kids up and down the country said the following:

*“Similarly to how free apps rely on capturing and selling user data for revenue, services that illegally offer free access to premium movies, TV or sport are often funded by the malware or malvertising codes embedded within them.*”

*The illegal add-ons used in “fully loaded” streaming devices including kodi boxes or Amazon Fire TV sticks also do not allow for proper parental controls.*

*Users will often find inappropriate material listed right next to children’s TV shows or displayed without warning in the form of pop-up adverts. As ever, if it seems too good to be true it probably is!”*



# What are the legal risks?

*“Personally I wouldn’t take the risk of inappropriate content and the knowledge that [piracy] is generally linked to organised crime puts me off too.”*

Mumsnet user

## Who is breaking the law?

It’s important to know, when it comes to streaming unauthorised copyrighted content; the viewer, the person sharing the stream, and anyone providing links to it are all breaking the law.

## Understanding what is legal

The sale and use of streaming devices without illegal software installed on them is fine. But as soon as they’re sold or used with pre-loaded apps that allow users to stream content that should normally be paid for, it is illegal.

## Risk of prosecution

Whilst families haven’t yet been the target of police investigations, the consequences of watching pirated content should be considered, both from a legal stand point and the inappropriate content children could be exposed to. For example, a man was recently hit with an £85,000 demand for sharing his stream of a pay-to-view boxing match on Facebook with over 4,250 people.

# Top three tips to protect your child





“Trying to keep the kids safe online does feel like a constant moving goalpost. Just when you think you have read up on something and ‘got it’ along comes the next big risk.”

Mumsnet user



The internet is an exciting and resourceful place that connects children to the things they love to watch, learn and do. However, with everything in the digital world, it is important to consider the risks to your children when they access content on streaming boxes, tablets, TVs and other devices that are connected to the internet.

Here are three ways you can keep your children safe:

## 1. Parental controls

Like computers, your connected television should have the ability to restrict access to internet browsing. The instructions will vary from manufacturer to manufacturer so make sure you check the manual if you need to set them up.

The ability to filter or manage the content you see through illegal streaming devices or websites is significantly reduced as there are no parental controls and no guarantee that you can prevent your children from seeing inappropriate content.

*“Keep talking about what they are doing online. Ask about what they are told at school. Be around when they are online”*

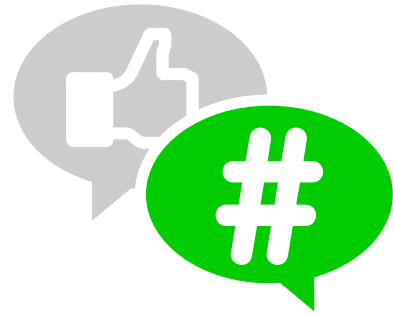
Mumsnet user

*“Parents [should] take responsibility for teaching their children about stealing (which is what this is) and set a good example by not illegally streaming video.”*

Mumsnet user

*“Parental locks and supervised internet access are key”*

Mumsnet user



## 2. Understand the services you are using when streaming online or through steaming devices

The risks to your children when they stream content online can be minimised if it is done safely. Stick to legitimate services on your TV and on the web as these should be appropriately age rated.

Streaming devices can be a safe place for children if you download applications that you trust such as the free BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, 4oD and Demand 5. Subscription services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Now TV also have apps that can be downloaded onto your devices. For both paid and free services, ensure you have adjusted the settings to make sure your children can't view inappropriate content.

However, streaming devices and apps that are pre-loaded with illegally pirated content can put your child at risk of seeing inappropriate material. Children should be aware that using these devices can expose them to things you would prefer they didn't see as well as put their devices at risk of viruses and malware. Explain these risks to your children and show them where they can watch content legally.

## 3. Set online boundaries

Help your children understand that sometimes they may come across things that you would prefer they didn't see. Try to have these conversations regularly to help them understand that whilst the internet is an amazing space, they can come across content that is upsetting, untrue or even harmful.

Find out what kind of things your child likes to do online and agree which websites and apps are best for them to use. Review these sites as they get older and let your child know they can talk to you if they come across anything that upsets them online.

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