

We've published Christmas VR safety advice in response to public concerns about child safety in the metaverse

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With more parents more likely to buy their children VR headsets, we've developed a guide for parents to support families buying Virtual Reality (VR) headsets for Christmas.



YouGov research we commissioned has shown that two thirds of the UK public lack confidence that child safety is a priority in the Metaverse, with 71% of adults expressing doubt in tech companies prioritising children in the development of the metaverse¹.

What is the metaverse

The study also revealed over a fifth of adults would buy their child a VR headset if they could, despite these concerns.

We're encouraging parents to familiarise themselves with the risks young users can face in virtual worlds. Products such as Oculus are expected to be a festive favourite, but our child safety online experts are concerned about children being given unchecked access to such an unregulated online space.

This month we've published new straightforward advice for families on how to keep children safe when using virtual reality including utilising the device's safety features and supervising children's use as they navigate both the virtual risks and physical space around them.

Counsellors at Childline have also heard from young people with experiences of virtual reality and who are increasingly aware of the isolating nature of the headsets and the ease at which predators can take advantage of the anonymity this unregulated online platform offers.

A child of secondary school age who contacted Childline said:



"Nobody gives me that kind of affection in the real world.

I guess that's why I use VR, so I can look and be like someone I'm not and it makes me feel good about myself.

I think I like this guy, but I don't know if he just likes the character I play as online."

To help keep children and young people safe when delving into these unregulated spaces, we have published parental guidance with some simple steps to follow. Our parents' guide to VR headsets covers straightforward advice for families on how to keep children safe when using virtual reality, including to:

- make the headset a family activity, taking turns and playing with it together
- take some time to explore the headset before allowing a child to use it
- talk to children about how they use VR. Make sure they know that personal information should not be shared with people they don't know
- get to know the safety features the device offers. Make sure the location is set to private, use parental controls and check that privacy settings are switched on
- set healthy boundaries and manage your child's screen time.

[View the guide now](#)

Kate Edwards, Acting Associate Head for Child Safety Online at the NSPCC, said:

“Parents who may be thinking about purchasing a VR headset for their child this Christmas need to be aware of the risks young users currently face when given access to what, at this stage, is an unregulated world.

To highlight this and to help parents create a safer experience for their children the NSPCC has published some simple steps for them to take before and after handing over the present.

But this responsibility should not just be on parents. Tech companies must do more to ensure the safety of children on existing products as well as for ones they roll out in the future. And the Government needs to deliver a robust Online Safety Bill that accounts for advancements in technology and ensures new devices and platforms are created with child protection at their heart.”

NSPCC press office

Contact our national and regional press offices for enquiries about our work or to request interviews.

Contact our press office

References

1. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,031 adults. The survey was carried out online in November 2022.

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