At National Online Safety we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one platform of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

The Nintendo Switch is a hybrid console released by popular video game company Nintendo in 2017. It's classed as a hybrid because it's designed to be played both at home on a television, like traditional consoles (think a PlayStation or an Xbox) or out and about like a portable console, such as a Game Boy. It uses two detachable and wireless 'Joy-Con' controllers on either side of the console's screen, which can be used by one or two players. The Switch can be played on the internet with the purchase of Nintendo Switch Online, in the living room together or on the go during long journeys, but bear in mind it needs to be charged just like anything else!

**What parents need to know about Nintendo Switch**

**NINTENDO SWITCH ONLINE**

Nintendo Switch Online is a paid service that allows the console to be played (you guessed it) online, by linking to other Switch consoles around the world. It can be purchased through the Nintendo eShop for a single account on the device, or with a family membership plan which covers 2 accounts. The purchase options come in three tiers: 1 month, 3 months and 12 months but be aware these auto-renew unless you specify otherwise.

**ONLINE DANGERS**

While online, your children will be able to play with and chat to people on compatible games, which will mostly be good-natured fun, but could potentially expose them to vulgar language, indecent images or worse. There are options to limit this though, which are detailed below. It's worth remembering that many games can be played offline, so while it's not essential to get Nintendo Switch Online, it is certainly something to consider.

**NINTENDO eSHOP**

The Nintendo eShop is where games can be purchased over the internet and downloaded directly onto the device. If you choose to enter your bank details (or PayPal account) onto the Switch, you can save them for easy access later on. Do note however that these can be viewed by anybody with access to the console, unless you specify otherwise. A child might accidentally purchase a game or item from the shop if these details are left improperly protected, which could leave you with a nasty surprise.

**NINTENDO'S VIDEO GAME SELECTION**

Nintendo as a company offers some of the most entertaining and safe video games on the market. Games featuring characters like Super Mario, Donkey Kong and Yoshi are always a safe bet for a child-friendly experience. It's always prudent to check each game before you buy it especially if the game hasn't been made by Nintendo but as a rule of thumb, anything official containing well-known names like these will be great for your children, giving you peace of mind while they enjoy them.

**PORTABLE GAMING**

Being able to take the Switch anywhere is a huge bonus when travelling. What's more is that almost every game can be enjoyed without the need to link your console with a television. Battery life on the Switch varies depending on what it's being used for, but typically it will last around 3 or 4 hours before needing to be recharged. When the time comes, any USB-C charger will be able to do the job, but it's best and quickest to return it to the dock, which requires a normal plug socket.

**Top Tips For Parents**

- **PARENTAL CONTROLS**
  - Nintendo released a free downloadable app that can be used in tandem with the Switch called Nintendo Switch Parental Controls. With the app installed on your mobile device, you can set up your Switch, allow or block access to games depending on their rating and more. You can also set up your own password to access the eShop to begin with, when any saved credit card information access is attempted, or when PayPal is accessed.

- **ONLINE RESTRICTIONS**
  - Another major inclusion in the app is the ability to block your child from accessing games that have age-restricted games. There's also an extremely helpful feature that restricts access to games that have free communication features between strangers on the internet. This includes things like private messages and unsolicited images. Should you be concerned that strangers might be using the games to talk to your child, a simple press of a button will disallow any access they might have.

- **PLAY WITH YOUR CHILD**
  - One of the wonderful things about the Switch is that there are an abundance of games you and your child can enjoy together and even with the whole family. Nintendo has a long history of making and supporting fun, family friendly games like Mario Kart and Mario Party, both of which can be played with two or more players using the Joy-Con controllers.

- **LIMITING PLAY TIME**
  - By linking the app with the Nintendo Switch, you can set time limits and reminders when you think enough time has been spent playing. It also lets you see if a game is still being played and gives you the option to automatically put the console into sleep mode if the message is ignored. This should only be used as a last resort though as it can cause some friction between you and your child.

- **SET PLAY TIMES**
  - Another handy feature is the ability to set different playtimes for days of the week, allowing you to tailor play time around your child's schedules. This is great for setting boundaries and stopping gaming as part of a healthy routine. It will also help your child organise with their friends when they can all be online.

- **SEE PLAY HISTORY**
  - The Nintendo Switch Parental Controls app can also send a report telling you how much time your child spends playing each game. This is a great way to spot their favourite or most played games and might be a nice way for you to find out about a little bit before talking to your child about it. It could also be used as a way to discover any potential trends around playtime before they arise.

**NINTENDO ESHOP SETTINGS**

In the Nintendo eShop you can set up a password to stop your child or somebody else from accessing any sensitive information, such as bank account details. The options here include entering a password to access the eShop to begin with, when any saved credit card information access is attempted, or when PayPal is accessed. Choosing which areas are password protected helps ensure you're deciding what level of access is given on the device. For example, if you're happy to have your child browse the shop for games they might want, you can allow access to the eShop but introduce the password before a purchase is made ensuring no mishaps occur.

**Portable Gaming**

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Meet our expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.