

How old do you have to be?

Some apps, sites and games online have age restrictions. Getting to grips with all the different age ratings can be a nightmare. Here's our guide to the main ones.

Our top tip, though, is to check out the terms and conditions for sites your children are using or want to use.



OK for under-13s

Why 13? A lot of very popular sites and apps make 13 the minimum age for users. This is because the United States passed a law in 1998 that said that companies could not collect data from children under the age of 13 without their parents' permission. The expense and work involved led many companies to restrict their services to over-13s.

These are services that are either designed for children aged under 13, or are specifically designed to be used by under-13s providing they have parental consent:

Popjam This service is available for use by children aged under 13. Their terms explain that if a child is younger than 13, they need the consent of a parent or legal guardian before giving out any personal information when they register. In some countries (including the US), Popjam may also separately contact parents or legal guardians to get consent and verification before a child uses their services or provides personal information. They would not be required or expected to do this in the UK.

Club Penguin A site specifically for under-13s, with parental consent required.

Moshi Monsters A site specifically for under-13s, with parental consent required.

Over-13s only

Some of the best-known sites on the web are for over 13's only. As we have seen, this is because of American law, which specifies that anyone under 13 is a child, as far as collecting their data is concerned. (They must get their parents' permission). In the UK, under-13s registering for these sites aren't breaking UK law but they are breaching the terms and conditions of the website.

It's also worth remembering that because these sites are designed for over-13's, they won't necessarily have procedures in place to make them suitable places for younger children. These sites include:

Google To have a Google account and access all their main services including YouTube and Gmail you need to be over 13. That does not mean that an under-13

shouldn't watch videos on YouTube or use Google search, it just means they can't create an account and upload content.

Facebook You need to be 13 to have a Facebook account. It is a violation of their terms and conditions to create an account for someone under 13.

Twitter It's not easy to find how old you have to be to use Twitter. The information they provide for parents doesn't specify an age nor does the information for teens. However, in their privacy policy they say that their services are not directed to persons under 13.

Instagram You need to be over 13 to use Instagram.

Ask.fm This site requires users to have parental consent if they are under the age of majority which in the UK is 18. In any instance they require users to be over 13. It is important to be aware that when a child signs up for this service they simply have to affirm that they have parental consent if they are between the ages of 13 and 18. A child entering their age as under 13 won't be able to create an account.

Snapchat You need to be over 13 to have a Snapchat account. However, some features are limited to over-18s and to use those you have to affirm that you are either over 18 or have parental consent. At the moment, those features are only available in the US.

Vine This service is not for under-13's, a fact that is tucked away in their privacy policy.

Spotify You cannot use Spotify if you are under 13 and anyone between the ages of 13 and 18 is required to have parental consent (not something Spotify checks).

Over-16's only

Very few services set this as the age limit. Once again, the limit is not a legal requirement in the UK but is a matter of the site's terms and conditions.

WhatsApp This app requires all its users to be 16 and over..

Over-18's

Most of the sites that fall into this category are the ones that are obviously for age-restricted products or services, mainly gambling and adult content.

It isn't at all safe to assume that because a site is supposed to be for over 18 year olds that anyone will take proper steps to prevent under 18's using it. Many pornography sites are freely accessible to under-18's.

Amazon The terms and conditions for Amazon say that If you're under 18, you may use Amazon.co.uk only with the involvement of a parent or guardian.