



PARENT'S GUIDE TO

Google Search



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For more info, visit [ConnectSafely.org/parents-guide-to-google-search](https://connectsafely.org/parents-guide-to-google-search)

[GO](https://connectsafely.org/parents-guide-to-google-search)



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Note: This guide applies only to Google Search and not other search tools. If you or your children are using other sites, please familiarize yourselves with their settings and safety features.

How Google Search works

While performing a basic Google Search is very easy, there is a lot going on behind the scenes to bring you relevant results, along with optional tools and settings to customize how search works for you.

For families, the most important setting is “SafeSearch,” which limits the type of content your children can find using Google. But there are other tools you can use to help control or limit your searches to certain types of sites, including those operated by universities, government agencies, and nonprofits.

Google

How you'll help Junio manage his account

Junio's Google Account will be similar to your own. He'll use his Google Account to access Google's products and services.

Junio can sign in to iPads, iPhones, browsers & unsupervised platforms without your permission. If you want to be asked for permission every time Junio signs in, you can change this setting in Family Link. [Learn more](#)

What parents can manage

Until Junio reaches 13 (or applicable age in your country) and decides to manage his account on his own, you can do things like:

- **Update your child's account info & some settings**
Like his name and birthday.
- **Delete his account**
You can recover his account for a limited period of time after you delete it.
- **Manage his activity controls**
You can manage settings like how Google collects your child's Web & App Activity.

Family Link offers more parental controls and supervision features, but they only work on certain devices. Family Link's default settings will apply until you customize them. [Learn more](#)

Google Accounts for 13-17

Google enables anyone over 13 (or **applicable age in your country**) to set up their own Google Account. Users under 18 default into SafeSearch, which filters out explicit content as described below. Parents can set up a Google account for any age child and can manage that account via Family Link.

Parents help minors manage their Google accounts.

Google SafeSearch

By default, Google indexes content from across the open web, and this can include sites with sexual or other explicit content that are not suited for children and may be offensive to some adults or inappropriate in certain situations, like when you are at work or around other people. That's why Google created **SafeSearch**, which filters out content that may be unsuitable for children, teens, and some adults.

What SafeSearch can and can't do

SafeSearch is designed to filter out explicit content such as pornography, violence and gore, but, as Google states on its **SafeSearch page**, "SafeSearch isn't 100% accurate." Based on our testing, it's very good, but no filter is perfect, which is why — even with SafeSearch turned on — it's important for parents to monitor their children's use of connected technology and be available to talk with and support them if they come across anything they find disturbing.

While SafeSearch does a good job filtering out explicit content, it doesn't block websites that could be disturbing to some young children, including news reports and sites that discuss (but don't show or encourage) pornography, violent content, and other potentially disturbing topics. However, with the Family Link app, you can also enable SafeSites which blocks explicit websites and gives you options to block individual URLs.

Also, Google SafeSearch applies only to Google searches on accounts where it's turned on. It does not apply to other search engines or websites that might link to inappropriate content, it does not block the content if a person goes to the site



**Google
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directly, and it will not apply if you log out of the Google account where it's configured. By itself, SafeSearch won't prevent someone from accessing explicit content if they really want to find it, but it will help prevent accidentally stumbling on that type of content. There are other tools, including Google's Family Link as well as filtering programs, that parents can use to help block inappropriate content, as well as tools that can be used by employers and operators of public Wi-Fi systems to block explicit content.

SafeSearch can be turned on for web searches and searches conducted on smartphones, tablets or Google Assistant devices such as smart speakers and displays. (In fact, Google **recently announced** parental controls built into the smart speaker — including options to restrict results to only include kid-friendly answers.)

Controlling Google Search in Family Link

If your child uses an Android phone or tablet, parents can take advantage of Family Link to manage their child's experience. To take full advantage of Family Link, your child needs an Android or Chrome device. However, there are limited functions available on Apple devices and the web if your child is logged into their Google account.

If your child uses an Android device, Family Link lets parents manage the apps their kids and teens use, keep track of screen time and locate their child. Family Link also enables parents to **search their child's Google account**, including their search history, and to review and edit their search settings.



To take full advantage of Family Link, your child needs an Android or Chrome device.

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Family Link has other important features, including displaying today's usage time for each child, recently installed and most used apps, screen time limits and finding the child's location.

Parents manage their children's accounts via the Family Link app for **iOS** or **Android** or take advantage of limited tools available on the **Family Link webpage**.

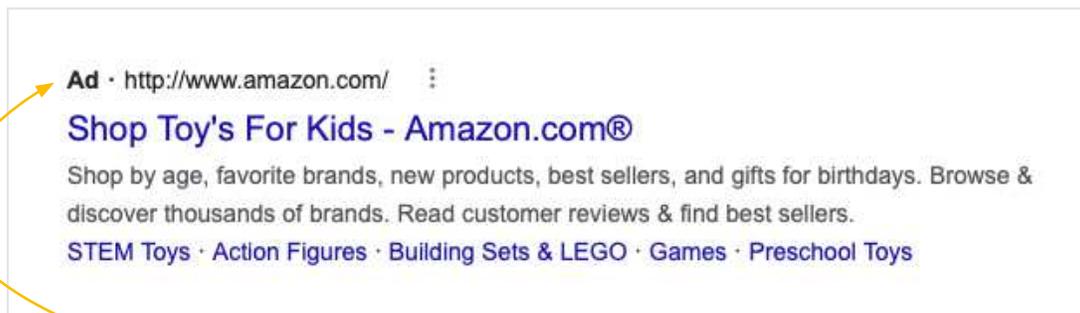
Device and third-party tools

In addition to using SafeSearch and Family Link, parents should familiarize themselves with controls built into the device operating system — Android, iOS, Windows, Mac, and ChromeOS that can provide additional protections, reporting, and filtering. Parents considering third-party filtering and/or monitoring software should check out **PCMag's annual reviews** and **ConnectSafely's Family Guide to Parental Controls**.

Search results vs. advertising

To remain a free service, Google makes its money through advertising, and it's important that all users — including children — can distinguish search results from ads. Google makes this clear by placing the word **Ad**, in bold, in front of the link. Ads are often presented first, but if you scroll down, you will get the actual results of the search, which are not influenced by advertising payments to Google.

Google blocks ad targeting based on the age, gender, or interests of people under 18.



Advertisements are labeled with the word Ad in bold.

False information and hate speech

Although Google’s search algorithms try to prioritize quality content, Google is not the arbiter of what is or isn’t true, civil, or decent, so it’s possible to find sites on Google that contain false information or hateful content. However, Google Search prioritizes surfacing **high-quality, authoritative information**.

Parents should talk with their kids about how to recognize misinformation (which is sometimes unintentionally false) and disinformation, which are typically deliberate lies.

False information can include potentially dangerous health information and advice as well as news reports that are clearly inaccurate, sometimes deliberately. Google Search also links to sites with all sorts of opinions on just about any subject.

You’ll find a lot of advice on how to recognize and talk with your children about false online information at ConnectSafely’s **Parent’s & Educator’s Guide to Media Literacy & False Information**.

Unfortunately, the web is also home to sites that contain content that is demeaning or hateful to certain groups, which, in some cases, are used to recruit people — including children and teens — into believing or spreading hate speech. You can find a lot more on this at ConnectSafely’s **Parent’s and Educator’s Guide to Combatting Hate Speech**.



**Google Search
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Removing your child's image from Google Search

Google enables minors under 18 and their parents and guardians to request that their images be removed from Google Search. Once removed, images and thumbnails will not appear on Google Search, however, being removed from Google Search does not remove them from the internet. For that, you will have to contact the site owner.

There are some conditions and limitations as to what can and cannot be removed, so be sure to visit Google's [instruction page](#) for information on what can be removed and how to begin the process.

If you are aware of any content that is sexually abusive towards children, you should report it to the [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#) or the [organizations affiliated with InHope](#) for reports outside the United States. Also, see this [Google page](#) about reporting inappropriate content or behavior.

Useful search options

Google has some useful options including the ability to limit your search to news sources as opposed to all websites or find videos, images or maps or, through the pull-down menu, books and other filters to narrow your search.

There are many more tools to refine your search, which you can learn about at [Refining Google Search with operators](#).



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How Google weighs your search results

There are many billions of web pages and — almost regardless of what words you’re searching for — there may be millions of pages that include those words. So, if the results came back unweighted, your search might be useless because you would be overwhelmed with options with no help finding the pages that are relevant to you. That’s why Google employs search algorithms.

Google says that its “search algorithms look at many factors and signals, including the words of your query, relevance, and usability of pages, expertise of sources, and your location and settings.” The weight applied to each factor varies depending on the nature of your query. For example, the freshness of the content plays a bigger role in answering queries about current news topics than it does about dictionary definitions.

Google says that its systems “also try to understand what type of information you are looking for,” as well as where you are located. If you search for “pizza,” for example, you get results about nearby pizza establishments.

You’ll find a lot more in this Google document, [Discover How Google Search Works](#).

Final thoughts for parents

The tools discussed in this guide will help ensure that your child or teen is using age-appropriate apps or settings when accessing YouTube or Google Search but no technology tools can substitute for parental involvement. Whatever settings you use,



The weight applied to each factor varies depending on the nature of your query.

Final thoughts for parents continued on page 10 >

talk with your children and teens about how they're using search, YouTube and other sites and apps to make sure they're accessing appropriate content and are using their devices in ways that protect their safety and privacy. It should be an ongoing conversation that you revisit from time to time, and it's important for your kids to understand any controls or tools, like FamilyLink, that you have put into place, so they know what you are doing to protect them. It's also important to revisit these tools. What's appropriate for a 5 year-old probably isn't for a 10-year old and certainly not for a teen.

As a reminder, no tool is 100% perfect, so parental involvement remains important and the tools discussed in this guide apply only to Google and YouTube so, if your child is using other apps or services, familiarize yourself with their safety features.

While Google has tools to help you restrict what your child can find on the web or view on YouTube, the end-goal should be to help your child make their own good decisions now and well into the future. And, like it or not, your kids will grow up and become independent so think about how you are teaching them critical thinking and media literacy skills, as well as values, that will be with them for life.

About ConnectSafely

ConnectSafely is a Silicon Valley, California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. We publish research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.

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