

The FOSI Guide to YouTube

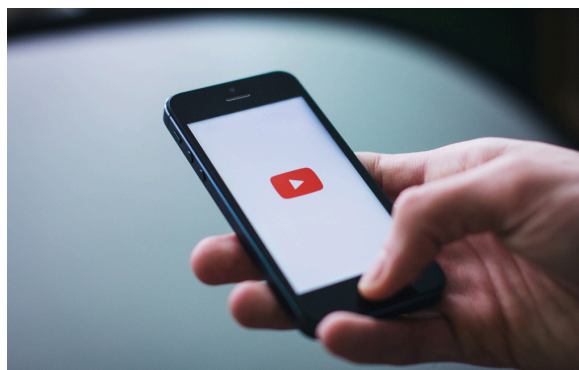
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What is YouTube?

YouTube is a video sharing platform that allows users to watch, create, and share content on a vast array of interests and topics. From thousands of hours of educational tutorials to livestream recordings to game reviews, YouTube offers something for everyone, but sticks out as a clear favorite among young people.

According to a **2024 Pew Research Center report**, nine in ten U.S. teens use YouTube. Not only is YouTube the most widely used social media platform for teens, but it's also the most widely visited, with 73% saying they visit the site daily and 15% even saying they use it almost constantly.

YouTube was originally founded in 2005 and has undergone several major changes since. In 2006, Google bought YouTube, and they still own it today. YouTube is free to use. However, features like ad-free videos, background play, and offline downloads are available through a monthly subscription to YouTube Premium.



YouTube's Parental Controls

YouTube has a variety of **parental controls** available to help caregivers guide their kids' online experience. This includes the **YouTube Kids** platform, a standalone app specifically designed for children under 13. Within YouTube Kids, content is curated based on age group. Additionally, parents have the option to set watch time limits, block specific videos or channels, and view watch history.

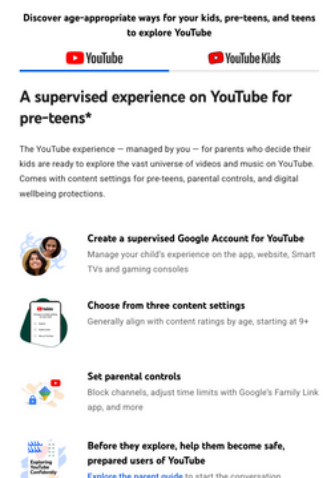
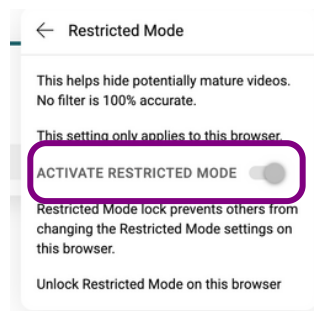
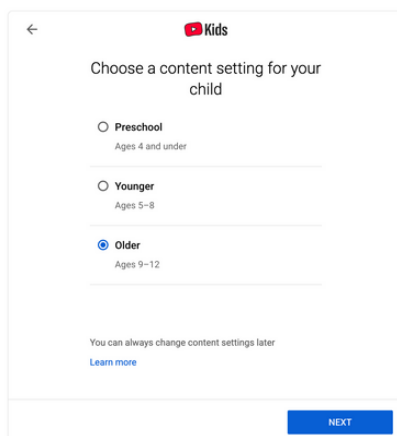
Parents can also create and maintain supervised accounts for tweens and teens on the main YouTube app. They can choose between three tiers: Explore (ages 9+), Explore More (ages 13+), and Most of YouTube (broader content, but with restrictions).

The standard YouTube platform includes a password-protected Restricted Mode setting specific to each browser and device, designed to filter out mature content unsuitable for children. For example, you can enable Restricted Mode on your child's device while having it off for YouTube on your own device. Meaning, your viewing experience will have no effect on your child's viewing experience, and vice versa.

To ensure their experience is curated for them to enjoy safely, set up your child's YouTube account with them. While you are helping them set up their account, make sure your child is honest about their age. With any of these controls, it is important to note that the filters and restrictions are not 100% foolproof, and vary by device and region.

YouTube is also included in **Google's Family Link** service, which helps parents manage screen time, app permissions and more.

For more information on how to set up these safeguards, you can visit [YouTube's page on family permissions](#).



What are the benefits of YouTube?

- **Educational growth and exploration.** YouTube allows kids to access thousands of topic breakdowns, mini-lessons, and demos that bring classroom learning into their everyday lives. Educational content on YouTube is often free, engaging, helpful, and available 24/7, even when a teacher or peer may not be. Additionally, YouTube can help kids easily pick up hands-on skills and passions that can lead to careers in coding, animation, baking, and more.
- **Creativity.** From making music videos to designing thumbnails, YouTube encourages kids to explore the depths of their imagination. Even if they never upload content, watching creators experiment with art, storytelling, humor, and personal style can inspire kids to try expressing their own identities more comfortably.
- **Media literacy.** YouTube gives young people an opportunity to observe and interact with paid digital content, learn about algorithms that determine what they see, and observe how their favorite creators earn a living. Navigating YouTube encourages content and algorithm awareness, essential skills to develop in an increasingly online world. Want to learn more about media literacy? Check out YouTube videos like [Media Literacy \(Explained in 3 Minutes\)](#) and the [Media Literacy Crash Course playlist](#).
- **Community and belonging.** As part of a fandom or through bonding over shared interests, kids can find communities on YouTube of like-minded individuals. These spaces can help kids feel less alone and both more socially confident and secure in their interests and identities.



How do kids use YouTube?

There are endless ways kids and teens engage with YouTube, and the site is ever-evolving with their interests and preferences. Here are some of the most common ways kids use YouTube today:

- ***To immerse themselves in and engage with video content.*** Kids can watch videos on YouTube that feature just about any subject or interest. Many kids develop a routine around watching their favorite content or creators, tuning in often. Popular content for younger kids includes toy unboxings, sing-alongs, animated stories, and educational videos. Older kids and teens are drawn to vlogs, gaming streams, and TV clips/music videos. Regardless of age, kids often build a strong sense of trust and admiration for their favorite creators, videos, or YouTube communities.
- ***For creative expression and aspiring creators.*** Though the majority of YouTube users primarily consume content, the site facilitates a platform for many kids to express themselves creatively through content creation. This could be in the form of starting their own channel to post content that fits their interests. Outside of posting videos, kids can find that YouTube's editing tools offer them a creative outlet through activities like editing clips, designing video visuals, and writing scripts. Without YouTube, kids might not be able to learn skills like this until high school or even college. If your child is interested in creating content, they should do so with proper parental guidance to ensure they are staying safe.
- ***To interact and connect with others.*** YouTube does not allow direct messaging. However, many users still use this platform as a means to connect with one another. Commenting on videos, participating in live streams, and contributing to community polls and Q&As are some of the many ways YouTube allows for social connection on the platform. Many kids and teens are part of YouTube fandoms for a specific creator or video series, which can foster digital community and connection. For supervised accounts and accounts for kids under 13, features like comments, likes, and chats can be restricted or turned off completely.
- ***To learn and explore interests.*** YouTube is full of opportunities to learn. Popular educational channels like [Khan Academy](#) or [Crash Course](#) provide students with tools to support academic learning or dive into personal intellectual interests. Educational videos on YouTube include math and science breakdowns, book reviews and read-alouds, computer tutorials, art and music lessons, and more. Kids can also learn more about their hobbies and interests with channels like the [Art for Kids Hub](#) and [SciShow Kids](#).

What should parents look out for as their kids explore and use YouTube?

- **Age-inappropriate content.** Even with Restricted Mode or supervised accounts, some videos shown may contain violence, profanity, suggestive themes, or clickbait thumbnails. Mature videos might not be age-gated, and misleading titles or thumbnails can lure younger viewers into inappropriate content. To mitigate this, parents can make sure to only allow their children to use YouTube Kids or browse on a supervised account.
- **Algorithm exposure & autoplay spirals.** YouTube's recommendation system is designed to keep users scrolling and watching content, often leading users down rabbit holes of content they were not originally seeking out. There have been cases in the past of seemingly innocuous searches on YouTube eventually leading to auto-suggested videos that are not suitable for children. To help avoid this, parents can ensure that Autoplay is turned off and specify content that is and is not approved. Additionally, with features like autoplay and Shorts, YouTube can lead to long periods of passive watching. While screen time can be alright in controlled amounts, balance is key. Set limits, take breaks, and help your child build healthy online habits.
- **Influencer marketing.** What looks like an obvious ad to an adult might not be so clear to a child. When creators promote products without clear disclaimers (or weave sponsorships into casual content), it can be hard for kids to tell the difference between a paid promotion and a genuine recommendation. If you know your child enjoys watching sponsored content, it's worth having a conversation about how creators make money, how brand deals work, and how to spot an ad. It is important to note that YouTube collects data on users' viewing habits to recommend videos and serve ads. For users under 13, stricter privacy rules apply, but parents should still be aware of what information is being gathered.
- **Comment section and live chat.** On YouTube, unrestricted comment sections may expose kids to bullying, profanity, or otherwise inappropriate messages. Live chats, hosted by creators on stream, may not always be adequately moderated to filter for content unsuitable for children. Many of these features are not available on YouTube Kids. It is important to check in with your child and be aware of the interactions they are having online, and explain how they can report or block any content or users they find inappropriate.



Want to learn more about YouTube?

Watch your child's favorite videos or creators alongside them, and have them explain what they like about the content, how they're feeling, and why they enjoy the platform as a whole. **Remember to have frequent, open conversations with your kid about their online world to ensure they feel safe and happy when they log on to YouTube and beyond.**

To learn more about FOSI and our work promoting a culture of responsibility online and encouraging a sense of digital citizenship for all, be sure to check out our [YouTube channel](#).

