

# **Dangerous Tech Toys Report 2022**



ParentsTogether

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# Introduction

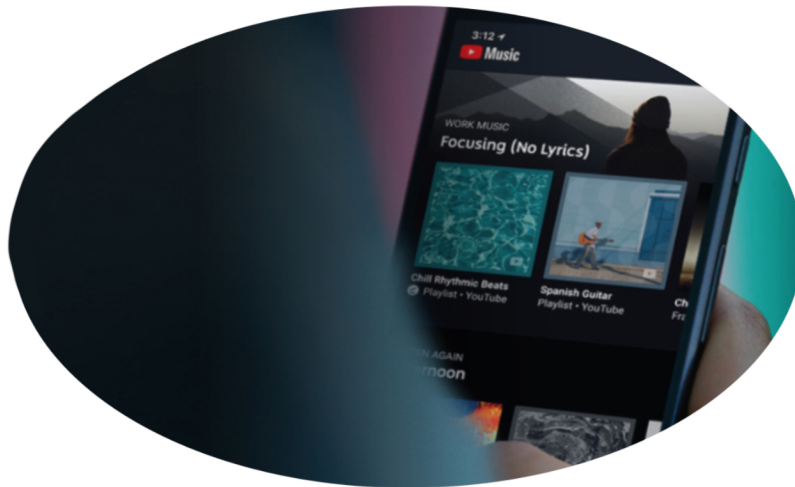
With the holidays fast approaching, gift lists are being slipped into envelopes for Santa and parents are once again looking for this year's most sought after presents. And with kids spending so much time online for school and play, it's no surprise tech toys that connect to Bluetooth, the internet, and social media are hot ticket items for kids of all ages.

Research has shown – and parents know firsthand – how dangerous the internet and social media can be for kids. It's linked to depression and anxiety and can expose children to child sexual predators, drugs and drug dealers, and even lead to death by suicide or a dangerous viral challenge.

That's why ParentsTogether is releasing our first ever Dangerous Tech Toys Report. This guide isn't a 'what not to buy' list. No toy or device that connects to the internet can be made completely safe because tech companies haven't designed their products with children's safety in mind. Instead, our goal is to help parents learn what dangers might be associated with certain toys and how to keep kids of all ages safer while they play.

We hope you and your family have a happy, safe holiday!

# All Ages



## YouTube Premium Subscription

**Manufacturer:** Google

**Target Ages:** All ages

**Risks:** Exposure to inappropriate content, Addictiveness

A lot of kids put YouTube Premium on their wish list. Costing \$11.99 per month, it removes all ads from videos and includes access to Google's music streaming service, and full access to YouTube Originals. Children under 13 require a linked parent account to use YouTube while older children can have their own accounts.

### Potential Dangers

- Some content on YouTube is age-restricted but it is easy for kids of all ages to easily find or stumble upon content with graphic language, violence, sexual content, and other disturbing content.
- YouTube's platform is designed to be addictive and without appropriate guard rails, young users are especially vulnerable. We were able to stream for over 30 hours on a child's YouTube account without any parental warnings or attempts by the platform to interrupt the binging.

### Tips to protect your child

- Use the available parental controls to set the level of content your child can view, disable autoplay, and review your child's watch history.
- Talk to your child about what they watch on YouTube, how marketing is used in videos, why some content is concerning, and what they should do when they come across inappropriate content.





## **Internet Connected Devices (Smart Phones, Tablets, Smart Watches, Computers)**

**Manufacturer:** Google

**Target Ages:** All ages

**Risks:** Exposure to inappropriate content, Addictiveness

A lot of kids put YouTube Premium on their wish list. Costing \$11.99 per month, it removes all ads from videos and includes access to Google's music streaming service, and full access to YouTube Originals. Children under 13 require a linked parent account to use YouTube while older children can have their own accounts.

### **Potential Dangers**

- Repeated and prolonged use of social media platforms by young people is linked to depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, disordered eating, and exposes children to harassment, bullying, sexual predators and illicit drugs.
- It is estimated that online advertising firms hold 72 million data points on the average child by the time they reach the age of 13, allowing marketers to target and exploit children's vulnerabilities with extreme precision for the rest of their lives.

### **Tips to protect your child**

- Limit younger children's access to social media; most social media platforms are intended for users 13 and older.
- Charge all devices at night in a space where your child does not have access to them.

# Teens



## Meta Quest VR Headset

**Manufacturer:** Meta

**Target Ages:** 13+

**Risks:** Privacy, Predators

This year's hottest tech toy for teens, The Meta Quest 2 VR Headset immerses children in a virtual world offering over 350 different games that allows them to play with and interact with people they don't know.

### Potential Dangers

- Players report frequent scary behaviors such as stalking, bullying, and even sexual assault of their avatars.
- Child accounts have been able to access virtual strip clubs where they were propositioned for sex acts and exposed to graphic language and sexual content.
- Predators can use the tech to directly access and groom victims. One case resulted in a real-life kidnapping.
- The headset is equipped with a camera and microphone that may capture the home environment and children's conversations and actions.

### Tips to protect your child

- Access parental controls on the Oculus app on their phone. You can block apps individually or choose to block content based on your teen's age, and choose how to receive notifications.
- Talk with your child about good online safety practices, including not giving out identifying information and alerting a trusted adult if something feels wrong.



## Hidrate Spark PRO Smart Water Bottle

**Manufacturer:** Hidrate Spark

**Target Ages:** 13+

**Risks:** Privacy

As seen on PopSugar's Best and Coolest Gifts for Teens list, the HidrateSpark PRO is a stainless steel insulated smart water bottle that tracks water intake and location by syncing via bluetooth to the HidrateSpark App. The LED smart sensor "puck" glows to remind you when it's time to drink with customizable glow colors and patterns. It comes with a rechargeable battery and has assorted size and lid options.

### Potential Dangers

- The water bottle syncs with an app that tracks location as well as other identifying information you provide, such as height, weight, age, and activity level. Hidrate Spark's privacy policy states that they will sell or give this information to third parties for marketing or other purposes.

### Tips to protect your child

- Access the app on a secure WiFi connection, with a unique password.
- Turn off Bluetooth connectivity in the app when not in use.





## HiMirror Slide Smart Face Mirror with LED Light, Skin Analyzer, & Video and Music Streaming

**Manufacturer:** HiMirror

**Target Ages:** 13+

**Risks:** Privacy, Exposure to Predators, Addictiveness, Health Concerns

The HiMirror Slide Smart Makeup Mirror is topping gift lists for teen girls in 2022. It comes with a skin analyzer, ambient makeup lighting, and other smart features including Amazon-Alexa compatibility, music streaming, social media connectivity, and video and voice chat. The built in skin analyzer requires the teen to upload photos and track wrinkles, fine lines, dark circles, dark spots, red spots, roughness, and pores over time. It also recommends products based on skin condition and local weather conditions.

### Potential Dangers:

- Augmented Reality features that apply to the face may have the same impact as social media filters, including poor body image and depression.
- The HiMirror requires the user to upload photos to track the progress of their beauty goals and asks for other personal information, like age, weight, hair and eye color, and health status. HiMirror's privacy policy says they will give or sell this information to third parties for marketing or other purposes.

### Tips to protect your child:

- This mirror connects directly to social media accounts and is enabled with voice and video chat on Google Duo. Enable all applicable parental controls on social media accounts your child uses on any device.
- Talk to your teen about safely taking and sharing images online, including the danger of images being used outside of their intended purpose.

# Elementary School Aged



## Amazon Fire HD Kids Pro Edition

**Manufacturer:** Amazon

**Target Ages:** 6-12

**Risks:** Privacy

The Amazon Fire HD Kids Pro Edition is a starter tablet that allows kids to read, listen to music, watch movies and download apps on a sturdy device that boasts a 2 year warranty. It comes with a 1-year subscription to Amazon Kids+ that unlocks over 20,000 apps, games, books, videos, songs, and Audible books. After 1 year, the subscription will automatically renew at \$4.99 per month.

### Potential Dangers:

- Amazon collects and stores a large amount of private information on users, including children, that the company uses to sell more products.
- The Fire HD Kids Pro is enabled with Alexa Skills. Alexa Skills can be designed by anyone, not just Amazon, and they're not required to have privacy policies so third parties can collect, use, and sell your child's data and voice interactions to third parties without you knowing.

### Tips to protect your child:

- Enable parental controls that allow in the Amazon parent dashboard to approve purchases and downloads.
- Talk to your child about what information needs to be kept private during play, including their birthdate, last name, location, and other identifying information.
- Regularly delete your child's data on the Parent Dashboard.





## **KidKraft Amazon Alexa 2-in-1 Kitchen & Market**

**Manufacturer:** KidKraft

**Target Ages:** 3-10

**Risks:** Privacy

KidKraft Alexa 2-in-1 Kitchen & Market utilizes the KidKraft Skill for Alexa—a series of 3rd party apps anyone can create to make Alexa do different things. Alexa skills are enabled on a compatible Echo device to facilitate play in both a kitchen and grocery store environment. The set includes 34 interactive food items and 24 recipe cards.

### **Potential Dangers:**

- The toy is enabled with Alexa Skills. Alexa Skills can be designed by anyone, not just Amazon, and they're not required to have privacy policies so third parties can collect, use, and sell your child's data and voice interactions to third parties without you knowing.

### **Tips to protect your child:**

- Review and delete voice recordings on your account through the Alexa app or through the Alexa privacy app.
- Talk to your child about what information needs to be kept private during play, including their birthdate, last name, location, and other identifying information.



## VTech KidiZoom Creator Cam

**Manufacturer:** VTech

**Target Ages:** 5+

**Risks:** Exposure to Predators, Health Concerns

The KidiZoom Creator Cam is an HD video camera with a built-in microphone and special effects like time-lapse video and more than 20 animated backgrounds. It comes with on-camera editing capabilities, a tabletop tripod, and a selfie stick. Video can be uploaded to a computer via the included USB cable at an adult's discretion.

### Potential Dangers:

- As the name implies, this toy is designed to teach kids how to create content for social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok, driving children's interest and propensity to use platforms that are not designed for, or safe for them.

### Tips to protect your child:

- Talk to your child about what is appropriate to film and about getting consent from playmates to appear on camera.
- Parents should limit younger kids' access to social media. While this toy is marketed towards young children, the minimum age for most social media platforms is 13 and even then, provides significant risks to teens. Social media use in children has been found to contribute to depression, disordered eating, and exposure to drug dealers and child predators.

# Preschool



## eKids Paw Patrol Walkie Talkies

**Manufacturer:** eKids

**Target Ages:** 3+

**Risks:** Privacy, Exposure to Predators

Paw Patrol Walkie Talkies are dog-shaped receivers that allow children to use them from up to 1000 feet apart. They are designed with one simple push button so younger children can use them and themed to look like your child's favorite Paw Patrol characters.

### Potential Dangers:

- Previous buyers have reported their children were in communication with adult strangers on the walkie talkies, including one parent who went to local police after an adult male asked her daughter to be friends on the device. Another told local news she found her daughter talking to a nearby trucker.

### Tips to protect your child:

- Use caution when operating in areas where your child could encounter other radio signals.
- Talk to your child about what information needs to be kept private during play, including their birthdate, last name, location, and other identifying information.
- Tell your child to stop using the device and come to you or a trusted adult immediately if they hear a stranger talking on the device.



## The Singing Machine Kids Karaoke Machine

**Manufacturer:** Singing Machine

**Target Ages:** 3+

**Risks:** Privacy, Exposure to Predators

The Singing Machine Kids Karaoke Machine is a boombox-style karaoke machine designed for younger children. It has a bluetooth connection which allows it to stream music and other media from any nearby device.

### Potential Dangers:

- Reviews of this product have raised concerns that anyone, including child predators, are able to connect with the device via Bluetooth and make contact with a child. While the child wouldn't be able to talk back, an adult, for instance, could ask them to come outside.
- Experts have also warned that bad actors could connect to the device, audibly order items on Alexa, and intercept the packages.

### Tips to protect your child:

- Only use the machine on a secure WiFi connection, with a unique password.
- Turn off Bluetooth connectivity when not in use.
- Tell your child to stop using the device and come to you or a trusted adult immediately if they hear a stranger talking on the device.