

# The Naughty List

Tech Toys that Spy,  
Steal, and Shock



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# Introduction:

As the holiday season approaches, parents are on the hunt for this year's most coveted gifts. And in this modern age, it's no longer just trains and dolls under the tree. Kids are spending more time online than ever so it's no surprise that tech toys that connect to Bluetooth, the internet, and social media are the sought-after items for children of all ages.

Extensive research – and parents' own experiences – have underscored the dangers of the internet and social media for kids. These platforms are linked to issues like depression, anxiety, exposure to child sexual predators, drugs and their dealers, and viral risky challenges that can lead to tragic outcomes.

That's why ParentsTogether is releasing our second annual guide to tech toys that are popping up on gift lists. This guide isn't a "what not to buy" list. It acknowledges that no internet-connected toy can be entirely child proof because tech companies have yet to prioritize children's safety in their designs. Our mission is to empower parents with knowledge about potential risks associated with specific toys and offer guidance on keeping children of all ages safer during playtime. Wishing you and your family a joyful and safe holiday season!

- ParentsTogether

# Amazon Echo Dot Kids



**Manufacturer:** Amazon

**Target Ages:** 3-12

**Risks:** Privacy, Exposure to inappropriate content, Spending

The Echo Dot Kids, Amazon's most popular smart speaker with Alexa, is designed specifically for children. It includes 1 year of Amazon Kids+, which allows access to content like music, stories, and the capability to make calls to friends and family.

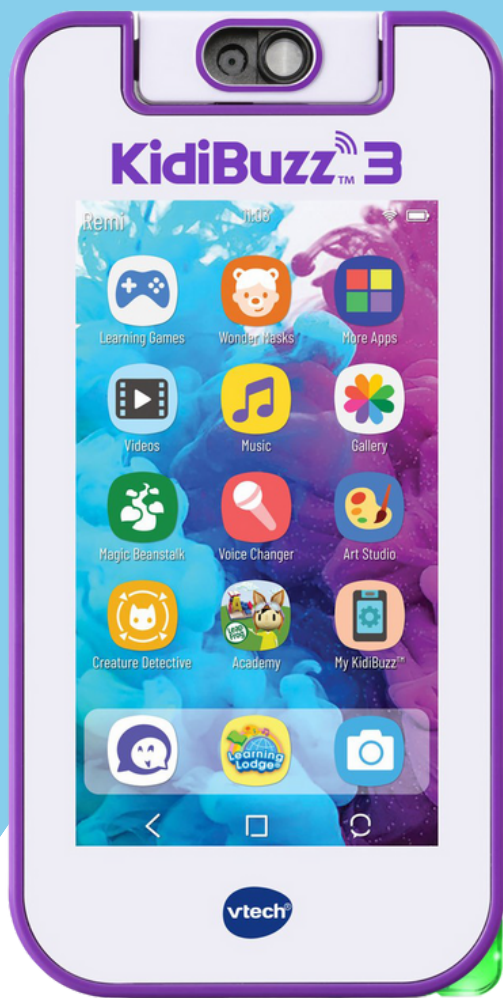
## Potential Dangers:

- The Department of Justice recently sued Amazon, at the request of the Federal Trade Commission, charging the company for misleading consumers about how long they can access children's data. This resulted in a \$25 million fine for Amazon.<sup>1</sup>
- This device collects information that can be stored and possibly shared or hacked without your knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Regularly review and delete voice recordings saved on the device.
- Establish a specific contact list that your child can communicate with.
- Keep the Echo Dot Kids in a common space where you can overhear the conversations between your child and the device.





# KidiBuzz™ 3 Smart Device

**Manufacturer:** VTech

**Target Ages:** 4-9

**Risks:** Privacy

The KidiBuzz 3 Smart Device allows kids to access many features one would expect with a regular phone, despite its marketing targeting kids 4-9. Kids can play games, connect with contacts to send texts, and share photos and video clips over wifi with other KidiBuzz devices and iPhone or Android smartphones with an accompanying app.

## Potential Dangers:

The Federal Trade Commission<sup>3</sup> has fined VTech, the manufacturer of the KidiBuzz, for collecting hundreds of thousands of kids' personal information without parental notice or consent. VTech left the collected data unencrypted, posing a risk for hackers and identity thieves,<sup>4</sup> which violates their own privacy policy.<sup>5</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Set parental controls to the most private settings available.
- Regularly monitor the device's contact list to ensure your child only messages and shares photos with approved contacts.



# Roblox Gift Cards for "Robux"

**Manufacturer:** Roblox

**Target Ages:** 9+

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

Roblox is the YouTube of video games – its a huge open platform that allows users to build games and play those created by other users, all while chatting with strangers. Roblox has their own currency known as Robux that can be purchased with real money, either in the game or via physical gift cards.

## Potential Dangers:

- When our staff signed up for a Roblox account we found that the default settings on that account are set to the least private option. Accounts for kids as young as 7 automatically permit strangers to engage in text chat with them, display content and experiences rated 13+, and have all parental approvals and controls deactivated.
- The chat feature may expose kids to sexual predators, scammers, and others seeking to exploit them.<sup>6</sup>
- Kids may be exposed to games with inappropriate content. Examples include games set in concentration camps where kids could play at being Nazis<sup>7</sup> and strip clubs where they could earn Robux for giving lap dances.<sup>8</sup>
- Roblox allows you to make real purchases in the app to receive accessories or tools within the game. Kids have accidentally spent thousands of dollars without their parents' knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Limit the amount of unsupervised gaming.
- Turn off, limit or password protect chat functions and friend requests and set parental controls to age appropriate settings.
- Talk to your child about good online safety practices, including not giving out identifying information and telling a trusted adult if something makes them uncomfortable.

# Sphero Mini

**Manufacturer:** Sphero

**Target Ages:** 10+

**Risks:** Privacy

The Sphero Mini is a compact robot marketed as being a fun introduction to coding. The manufacturer describes it as being “packed with tech” and those features have created several privacy concerns for users.



## Potential Dangers:

- Multiple security flaws reportedly existed in Sphero's infrastructure, allowing hackers to access sensitive information of Sphero device users.<sup>10</sup>
- The data breach could expose child users to the risk of identity theft that could follow them into their adult lives.<sup>11</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Use a strong password and secure email when creating your Sphero account.
- Regularly review your child's and your own Sphero accounts to spot suspicious activity.
- Immediately secure your account if you notice anything unusual.

# Meta Quest 3

**Manufacturer:** Meta

**Target Ages:** 10+

**Risks:** Privacy, Predators, Exposure to Inappropriate Content

Last year's hottest toy is back with an expanding universe of over 250 games that allow users to interact with people they don't know. Meta has recently announced its intention to reduce the recommended age for the Quest from 13 to 10 years old.



## Potential Dangers:

- Users report exposure to sexual content, hate speech, harassment, and bullying.<sup>12</sup>
- The chats, private rooms, and games within the platform expose children to adult content and interactions with potential predators.<sup>13</sup>
- The immersive nature of VR can lead your child to feel as if they are genuinely interacting with someone who resembles their avatar or belongs to a particular demographic (ie, a kid their age).<sup>14</sup>
- Facebook settled for \$650 million following accusations that the social media giant collected millions of facial photos without proper consent.<sup>15</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Use the feature that enables you to project what your child is seeing in the headset onto your TV screen or mobile device. This way, you can have a firsthand view of their experience and talk with them about what they are seeing.
- Talk to your child about the importance of not sharing information or communicating with strangers on the internet, even if those individuals seem to be of a similar age or are children themselves.



# Fortnite V-Bucks

**Manufacturer:** Epic Games

**Target Ages:** 13+

**Risks:** Privacy, Spending, Predators

Fortnite is an online video game where users compete for survival against other users across the world. One popular gift for young gamers are gift cards of Fortnite V-Bucks, a digital currency that users can buy with real money to acquire in-game accessories.



## Potential Dangers:

- A complaint was filed in federal court, alleging that Epic Games, the manufacturer of Fortnite, violated federal law by collecting personal information from children without obtaining their parents' consent.<sup>16</sup>
- Epic was also criticized for matching children and teenagers with strangers in Fortnite, exposing them to potential bullying, threats, and harassment during gameplay. Parents claim that the safety features designed to address this issue are challenging to locate.<sup>16</sup>
- Epic also allegedly deceived players into making unwanted purchases and allowed children to accumulate unauthorized charges without their parents' consent by using manipulative design, which led to a \$520 million fine for the company.<sup>17</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Set parental control locks on in-app purchases in the settings of your device your child is playing on to prevent unwanted purchases.
- Review the game's features with your child so they are aware of what they are permitted to do and what to do if they encounter prompts they don't understand.
- Set privacy protections to the highest level to protect your child's data.

# Ray-Ban Meta Smart Glasses



**Manufacturer:** Meta/Ray-Ban

**Target Ages:** 13+

**Risks:** Privacy, Addictiveness, Exposure to inappropriate content, Health concerns, Predators

The new Meta smart glasses in the Ray-Ban Meta collection look like regular glasses but have a camera and five-mic system for live streaming directly onto social media platforms, sending messages, making calls, using Meta's AI, and more.

## Potential Dangers:

- These look like regular glasses except for a small light on the rim that signals the device is recording or streaming.<sup>18</sup> Most people won't know what these lights mean and will be unaware they are being recorded and/or live streamed without permission.
- The glasses enable live streaming onto Facebook and Instagram using voice controls. If requested, the glasses will even read out comments and inform users of the number of people watching.<sup>19</sup>
- Unless disabled during setup, the Meta View has continuous location tracking and an always listening microphone.<sup>18</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- When initially linking the glasses to the Meta View app, review all permissions and decide what is best for your child.
- Make your household and guests aware of what the glasses look like when recording to prevent people from being recorded without their consent.
- Talk to your child about using the glasses responsibly, including obtaining consent before recording people and not using them where people expect privacy, like during class or in private conversations.

# Twitch Prime

**Manufacturer:** Amazon

**Target Ages:** 13+

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

Twitch is a video live streaming service that originally focused on video game live streaming but has expanded to all types of entertainment live streams. Twitch Prime comes with the Amazon Prime and Prime Video bundle and is also available for individual purchase, offering a free monthly channel subscription on Twitch as well as exclusive accessories.

## Tips to protect your child:

- Turn off the feature that allows your child to receive chats from strangers.
- Talk to your child about good online safety practices, including not giving out identifying information and to contact a trusted adult if something makes them uncomfortable.



## Potential Dangers:

- According to Bloomberg, alleged predators targeted a total of 279,016 children on Twitch between October 2020 and August 2022. They discovered that profanity, sexual content, derogatory terms, and much more were possible in both the on-screen text chat as well as through verbal communication by the streamer.<sup>20</sup>
- There are no parental controls or other safety settings in place that stop children and young people from accessing channels or chats that contain inappropriate content.<sup>21</sup>
- Pornographic content has been found on Twitch with links to adult websites like OnlyFans.<sup>21</sup>

# Kindle Unlimited



**Manufacturer:** Amazon

**Target Ages:** 12-17

**Risks:** Exposure to inappropriate content

Kindle Unlimited is a monthly subscription that costs \$9.99 per month and grants members access to over 4 million digital books, along with thousands of audiobooks, comics, and magazines.

## Potential Dangers:

- The Kindle Unlimited catalog includes self-published works, some of which contain pornographic images, explicit language, and other content inappropriate for kids.<sup>22</sup>
- The subscription service does not provide an itemized list of the items in the library or downloads. Instead, it appears as a single charge, making it impossible for parents to view downloaded works on their end.
- There are no parental controls currently available for the Kindle Unlimited Subscription.<sup>22</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Establish a shared family reading account to see what kids are downloading.
- Have open conversations about age appropriate reading material and tell kids what to do if they see something that makes them uncomfortable.

# YouTube Premium



**Manufacturer:** Google

**Target Ages:** All ages

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

At \$13.99 a month, YouTube Premium removes all ads from videos, allows users to download videos to watch offline, and plays videos in the background while you use other apps. Children under 13 require a linked parent account 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 find or stumble upon content with graphic language, violence, sexual content, and other inappropriate content.<sup>23</sup>
- The autoplay feature can automatically play inappropriate videos on your child's device without them actually selecting the video themselves.<sup>24</sup>
- YouTube is designed to be addictive and, without appropriate guardrails, young users are especially vulnerable.<sup>25</sup>

## 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 if they come across inappropriate content.





# Internet Connected Devices

(Smart Phones, Tablets, Smart Watches, and Computers)

**Manufacturer:** All

**Target Ages:** All ages

**Risks:** Exposure to inappropriate content, Addictiveness, Predators, Privacy, Health Concerns, Spending

Many kids will be asking for a new phone, computer, tablet, or smartwatch this holiday season. These devices all expose kids to a very dangerous product: social media.

## Potential Dangers:

- According to the Surgeon General, social media use in kids and teens has been linked to anxiety, depression, sleep deprivation and disordered eating and exposure to harassment, bullying, sexual predators, and illicit drugs.<sup>26</sup>
- 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 young people's vulnerabilities with extreme precision.<sup>27</sup>
- 1 in 3 parents say their kids have seen inappropriate sexual content on social media; 43% were under 13.<sup>28</sup>

## Tips to protect your child:

- Limit younger children's access to social media; most platforms are intended for users 13 and older.
- Charge all devices at night in a common space where your child does not have access to them.
- Talk to your child about good online safety practices, like not giving out identifying information and telling a trusted adult if something makes them uncomfortable.

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