

Twitch – A parent’s guide to Twitch

Is Twitch safe for children? Here's everything you need to know about this massively popular gaming and livestreaming platform.

What is Twitch?

Twitch is a livestreaming platform primarily used by gamers. You can view streams for free but you get extra benefits, including the ability to broadcast your own channel, by signing up for a free account. Though gaming streams, especially of hot titles such as Fortnite and League of Legends, dominate the site, you can choose to follow non-gaming channels such as Art, Talk Shows & Podcasts, and Food & Drink.

Is Twitch safe for children?

Like all livestreaming platforms, Twitch can be risky for children and teens. Although Twitch has moderators and strict rules around sexually suggestive or explicit content, it doesn't offer filters or age gates for specific categories and games, which include mature, violent titles like Grand Theft Auto V and Crysis 3. Twitch broadcasters also actively solicit donations and paid subscriptions (more on that below), and some will push the boundaries (such as wearing skimpy clothing or giving out exclusive content) to encourage viewers to send money. Search filters for categories like Educational and Family Friendly block some of the mature content, but the broadcasters themselves are responsible for adding those tags, and using them produces inconsistent results.

How old should children be to use Twitch?

Twitch requires that users be at least 13 years old to use their platform, but CCHSG recommends Twitch for teens 15+. This is mainly due to the unpredictable nature of livestreaming, open chat, and easy access to mature content. If your child wants to watch someone play a specific game, research the game and find out what the age recommendation is.

Can my child chat with strangers on Twitch?

Twitch has a chat feature that runs alongside all streams. Sometimes chats are restricted to certain users, such as followers or subscribers of the specific streamer. But even when you can't participate, you can see what others are posting. The chat feed itself is hard for newcomers (and parents) to understand, as it's filled with its own memes and emoticons that Twitch enthusiasts use to communicate. You can hide chat, but you can't turn it off. Users can also send Whispers (direct messages) to other viewers, although you can limit who can contact you.

Is Twitch just for gaming?

Although gaming is still the primary focus on Twitch, the platform has broadened its offerings to include just about every subject under the sun. Some of the non-gaming categories are Music & Performing Arts, Sports & Fitness, ASMR, and Just Chatting, a section for podcasts, vlogging, and Q&As. Some streamers have multiple channels aimed at different interests. Most also tend to use a variety of platforms, including Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and Discord to promote themselves, so children will get exposed to a variety of content if they follow a streamer on all their social channels.

What kinds of content will my child see on Twitch?

There's no telling exactly what your child will see on Twitch. They might see a woman dancing to Dance Dance Revolution. They might see someone eating fried chicken. They'll definitely see, and hear, lots of gamers swearing and playing mature games. While Twitch doesn't allow threatening language or sexually explicit content, it does allow games with violence and/or nudity. And while it's less common, hate speech, derogatory comments, and cyberbullying (though more likely in the comments than in the streams themselves) crop up. Some channels have moderators that try to rein in extreme comments.

Is there any way to block inappropriate content on Twitch?

Twitch doesn't offer parental controls or any methods to block streams. Logged-in users can set chat filters to block discrimination, sexually explicit language, hostility, and/or profanity, but the settings aren't foolproof.

Can I limit how much time my child spends on Twitch?

As of now, you can't set time limits on Twitch.

How much does Twitch cost?

Twitch is free (with ads), but there are definitely costs associated with it. The Twitch economy includes several ways to spend money, including Bits, donations, and subscriptions. Here's a quick guide:

Bits: Twitch's in-platform currency that viewers can use to Cheer, or show support for, the streamer they're watching through the chat function. They're sold in bundles with savings the more you buy, and streamers earn £0.01 per Bit.

Donations: Although Bits function like micro-donations, streamers also accept and solicit direct donations via buttons on their user page.

Subscriptions: For a monthly fee starting at £4.99, viewers can subscribe to their favourite streamers to gain access to special privileges, like private chats and user badges.

What is TwitchCon?

TwitchCon is an annual event where streamers and viewers come together for discussion panels, meet and greets, and much more. It's well attended and discussed on most of the popular streams, so children will likely want to go if they're really into specific streamers.

How does Twitch compare to YouTube?

Both platforms have a lot in common from a viewer standpoint since the quality and age-appropriateness (or lack thereof) of content are pretty much the same. YouTube has a wider range of topics, including unboxing videos and makeup tutorials, and YouTube streamers such as Markiplier have an established following on that platform. Twitch has the edge with hard-core gamers (even though some popular streamers like Ninja have signed exclusive deals with other platforms). Plus it has more engagement features such as chat emotes (pictures, memes, and emojis) that help viewers and creators feel like they're part of the same club. That said, a rule of thumb for viewers is that Twitch is more popular for livestreams, but it's harder to rewind or rewatch later. YouTube's wide variety of content and superior search make it easier to find new stuff, but its suggested videos might be more extreme or have off-topic content. However, Twitch also stands out for its community engagement features, especially in chat.

What is Twitch Prime?

Twitch Prime is a premium offering exclusive to Amazon Prime account holders. Amazon Prime subscribers can connect their Amazon and Twitch accounts to get ad-free viewing and bonus content, including free games, exclusive in-game items, and a channel subscription every month within Twitch.

What if my child wants to livestream on Twitch?

It's fairly common on Twitch for viewers to become streamers, even if they only have a modest following (or none at all). But broadcasting can be risky, especially for younger children. Discuss your child's reasoning behind wanting to livestream, and consider the risks involved. If you and your child agree to go live, set some ground rules together to help establish a safe, rewarding way for your child to share their passion.

Information on this page has been adapted from:

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