

The Best Parental Control Software of 2018

Parenting styles run the gamut, and so do the features in parental control and monitoring utilities. We've tested the top products to help you choose the right one for your family.

Product	Qustodio	ContentWatch Net Nanny 7	Kaspersky Safe Kids	Symantec Norton Family Premier	Circle With Disney	Clean Router	Mobicip	OpenDNS Home VIP	uKnowKids Premier	SafeDNS
Lowest Price	\$49.95 Qustodio	\$39.99 ContentWatch	\$14.99 Kaspersky Lab	\$49.99 Norton	\$99.00 Amazon	\$29.99 Amazon	\$39.99 Mobicip	\$19.95 MSRP	\$100.00 MSRP	\$19.95 Amazon
Editors' Rating	●●●●● EDITORS' CHOICE	●●●●● EDITORS' CHOICE	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●○○
Limit on Children / Devices	5 / 5	10 / None	None	None	None	None	5 / None	None	4 / 8	None
Per-User Settings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	✓	—
Content Filtering	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
Filter HTTPS Sites	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—
Access Scheduling	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	—	—	✓
Social Network Monitoring	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	—
Remote Management	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓	—	✓	—

Parenting in the Digital Age

Modern kids have never known a time when they couldn't connect to the entire world via the internet. In fact, they probably spend more time online than anyone else—certainly more than their parents. If you are a parent, this presents a problem, as there are explicit, disturbing, and illegal sites on the web that you don't want your kids to encounter. Furthermore, with the ever-increasing number of devices that kids use to connect, you simply can't supervise every moment they're online on your own. That's where parental control services can help. This software gives you the ability to block unwanted web content, limit screen time, restrict the use of risky applications, and more. Basically, these services are a way to help keep your kids safer on their computers and mobile devices.

That said, parental control software is no substitute for good communication. If you don't want your kids to visit unsafe, unsavory, or inappropriate sites, talk to them about your concerns. We recommend that you also take the time to convince your older kids that you'll respect their privacy while still monitoring their online actions, a promise you should strive to uphold. We prefer software that embraces this kind of collaborative approach, rather than apps that covertly spy on kids. If your kids see you as big brother, it's a safe bet that they'll find ways to outsmart you and evade even the most sophisticated systems.

Monitor Your Child's Devices

Long gone are the days when a single parental control utility on the family PC was sufficient for keeping your kids safe and productive. Modern kids use all kinds of internet-connected devices, and modern parental control systems must keep up.

Before settling on a particular parental control utility, you need to make sure that it supports all the device types in your household. While all the products in the chart above support Windows and Android, compatibility with macOS and iOS varies. Check, too, that any limits on the number of child profiles or devices won't be a problem. Large families, for example, will appreciate that Norton Family works on an unlimited number of devices. Most parental control software operates as a subscription service, so pricing tiers tend to align with device limits, though some offer free versions for basic protection on a limited number of devices. If your kids are strictly smartphone users, take a look at our roundup of mobile parental control apps.

If getting parental control coverage installed on each of your family's devices starts to seem too difficult, consider a whole-network solution, such as Circle With Disney or Open DNS. These systems perform content filtering at the router level, so your settings affect every device on the network. Naturally, you don't get the same fine level of control and detailed monitoring that you get with a local agent on each device, but this is a much broader solution.

Web Filters, Time Limits, and Apps

At the very least, a good parental control tool features content filtering—the ability to block access to websites matching categories such as hate, violence, and porn. This type of filtering only really works if it's browser-independent and works with secure (HTTPS) sites. With no HTTPS filtering, a smart teen could bypass the system using a secure anonymizing proxy website or even a different web browser in some cases. Most also have the option to permanently enable SafeSearch. Of course, the most capable solutions also keep a detailed log of your child's web activity.

Access scheduling is another very common feature. Some applications let parents set a weekly schedule for device usage, some control internet use in general, and others offer a combination of the two. A daily or weekly cap on internet usage can also be handy, especially if it applies to all your kids' devices.

The best services apply these two ideas to individual desktop and mobile applications as well. Qustodio, for example, can block apps entirely and set time usage limits. This is particularly useful for children who have a habit of **playing games** or using social media apps when they should be doing homework.

Messaging and Social Media

As kids get older, content filtering may start to seem pointless. Hey, you let them watch *Game of Thrones*, right? At some point, you start to worry more about their interaction with the wider world. Sure, if their friends come over in person, you can at least meet them, but what about friends on social media and other contacts your child never mentions? Who are they, really, and what are your kids discussing with them? Although some supervision is acceptable, you still need to respect your child's basic right to privacy and encourage open discussion, rather than using parental control software as spyware.

Many services let you monitor contacts and messages and keep an eye out for potentially dangerous or unsanctioned situations. You can even block new contacts or view message content with some parental control software. Keep in mind that this primarily applies to SMS texts; messaging apps such as WhatsApp or **Snapchat** typically do not fall under the same scope. Social media tracking can also provide a glimpse into your child's social life, though many services now only monitor Facebook. This kind of oversight usually requires that you either know your child's login credentials or convince them to log in and install the tracker's app. Disabling this kind of data collection is a snap for the child, so here, more than ever, you need to be on the same page.

Remote Notification and Management

Most kids are on mobile devices at least some of the time, and many are almost exclusively accessing the internet on their phones. Fortunately, many parental control services offer a companion app that lets you view your child's activity, set basic rules, and view notifications as they arrive—NetNanny is a particularly noteworthy example. This kind of companion app is particularly useful for responding to access or time-extension requests on the go. Otherwise, you manage everything online, where you have fine control over activity reports and restrictions. Any changes you make should propagate to your children's devices when they connect to the internet. When your child tries to visit a blocked site, makes a post using iffy language, or otherwise bends the rules it sends you a notification to your preferred channel, such as via the app, web, email, text, or some combination of those options.

Advanced Features

When you get beyond the basics, parental control systems start to diverge, with many advanced features to help them stand out from the crowd. Among these standout features are the ability to track your child's YouTube and [Hulu](#) viewing history, check your child's location, or even remotely lock down a device to force them to divert their attention. You'll also find advanced versions of standard features. For example, the best content filters don't just use a database of categories. They analyze page content in real time so that, for example, they can allow access to a short-story site but block the erotica.

In order to make an informed choice for your own family, check out our full reviews of these parental control solutions. If you have any suggestions for software to try or just want to sound off about a particularly positive or negative experience, please add your comments and join the discussion.