SAFE and SMART

Keeping Children Safe Online

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What is:

Skin Gambling?

It can be hard to keep up with technology and how it is being used, and this is probably the most common conversation I have whether speaking to school staff or speaking to parents.

This concern over the fast-paced nature of technology is understandable, but at times it is also a smokescreen.

In the vast majority of cases, what we're talking about is real-world behaviours enacted online via the use of technology. For example cyberbullying is bullying, online abuse is abuse.

But there are variations, and one of those is skin gambling (sometimes called skin betting), which is gambling, using skins.

What is a Skin?

A skin is something that is created online, predominantly in a game, for example the design of an avatar or character, a design (graphics, colour etc.) of a particular weapon in a game.

Essentially you can apply a skin to an object to personalise it and make it look good. Quite often you have to purchase these skins via an in-app or in-game purchase. The rarer the skin, the more it is worth financially (in real world monetary terms) and potentially for gambling for other items.

Although gaming sites say they do not condone gambling, there are a completely unknown number of online sites that are geared up to do just this and they're largely unregulated.

What is the history of Skin Gambling?

The history of skin gambling goes back a few years to 2012. A company called Valve were the creators of a game called Counter Strike back in 2000, and in September 2003 launched an online platform called Steam.

Steam is an online platform to distribute PC games and is hugely popular with young
people. Moving forward to 2012, Counter Strike evolved to what is now called Counter-Strike:Global Offensive (CS:GO); the big new feature was that players can decorate their weapons with new 'skins' that they either purchase from within t h e game, or find throughout the game. These skins are then stored within the users' Steam account.

What this means is that when a user signs into a skin gambling website, they do so with their Steam credentials, so that site now has visibility or access to the users' inventory of skins and other virtual purchases, meaning that skins can be gambled casino-style (e.g. roulette).

Is there any research?

Yes, but it's limited. This is one of those areas that doesn't get spoken about a lot.

The UK Gambling Commission have looked into this issue and found that the number of children and young people who are aware of gambling in games is fairly low, with the numbers of those who have actually gambled even lower. In short they found:

• Boys are more likely to purchase in-game items with real money or virtual currency than girls (45% vs 25%).
• Boys are more likely to pay for opening loot boxes, packs or chests to get in-game items than girls (31% vs 10%).
• And the skin gambling one - boys are more likely to bet with in-game items on websites outside of the game compared to girls (4% vs 1%).

If you would like to know a little more there is a really good explainer video on YouTube which you can see **HERE** and the UK Gambling Commission statistics are **HERE**.

What is:
SUPERVISED EXPERIENCE?

YouTube is an incredible free service, but when you take into account that over 500 hours of video content is uploaded every 60 seconds it gives an idea of the huge amount of video content that is available. The large majority of this is fun, informative, educational and more, but we all know there is lots of content not suitable for children.

Historically YouTube has been quite poor when it comes to features available to parents for their children/teens on YouTube but for a while there have been a few new features added, one of these is 'Supervised Experience'.

What is it?

Supervised Experience is mainly for pre-teens, it's a way of parents being able to manage content settings, change features that children can use and the ads they see. The content settings is an important one because prior to Supervised Experience parents only had 'Restricted Mode' which was never effective, now you have:

- Explore - generally for children 9+.

- Explore more - generally for children 13+.

- Most of YouTube - All videos on YouTube except those that have been flagged as 18+/

Supervised Experience requires parents to link their own Google account to their child's Google account. It's important your child has their own Google account otherwise Supervised Experience won't work, so if you would like to set up a pre-teen Google account for your child see **HERE.**

Once you both have Google accounts, you can then link those accounts via the free Google Family Link app which you can download via the Apple or Google app stores and then take a look HERE for all the information you need about Supervised Experience.

What is:

The Online Safety Act (UK)

The Online Safety Act became law on 26 October 2023, after several years of campaigning by children's charities, MPs and bereaved parents who wanted tougher rules for social-media and search services. Ofcom – the same body that already regulates TV and radio – was appointed to police the new rules.

The Act has been years in the making, it is highly complex and although parts of the Act are already in force there is much more to come. In this article we have cut through the complexity and jargon to give you some information which we hope you will find useful.

How the new rules are being rolled out

Because the Act covers so much ground, Ofcom is introducing it in stages, each with its own "codes of practice" which are basically step-by-step rulebooks for tech firms. Think of the codes as safety check-lists that platforms must tick off – and they can be fined up to 10 % of global turnover if they don't. For some of the biggest companies, that's going to be in the hundreds of millions!

Phase 1 – Tackling the worst illegal harms (in force now)

- **What it covers:** content linked to child sexual abuse, terrorism, fraud, hate crime and encouragement of suicide.

- **Timeline:** Ofcom published the first draft codes on 16 December 2024; companies had to finish risk assessments by 16 March 2025, and the rules became fully enforceable on 17 March 2025.

- **What this means:** Social-media sites should now have quicker takedowns, better reporting buttons and trained moderators for the most serious harms. If you spot illegal content lingering, you can complain directly to Ofcom in addition to the platform.

Phase 2 – Putting Children First

Age checks for online pornography (live since 17 January 2025, compliance deadline 25 July 2025)

Since 17 January 2025 every site or app that publishes pornographic content must stop under-18s from getting in, using "highly effective" age-verification such as credit-card checks or facial-age AI. Ofcom's guidance, published the same day, gives platforms six months to finish rolling out the tech, so by **25 July 2025** the new age gates should be up and running across these adult sites, social-media and search services alike.

Protection of Children Codes (enforceable from 25 July 2025)

These detailed rulebooks spell out how every service "likely to be accessed by children" must behave. Companies have until **24 July 2025** to complete a fresh children's risk assessment. From **25 July** they must: filter out self-harm, violent, sexual and other harmful material from children's feeds; switch default settings to private or "friends-only"; provide easy, child-friendly reporting tools backed by trained humans; and put a named senior manager in charge of children's safety. Breaches can trigger fines of up to 10 % of global turnover.

Guidance on protecting women and girls online (drafted 25 February 2025 – final due late 2025)

Alongside the child-safety rules, Ofcom has published draft guidance tackling misogynistic abuse, online stalking and intimate-image offences. While voluntary for now, the final version—expected before the end of 2025—will offer parents another yardstick for judging whether a platform is doing enough to keep young women and girls safe.

What's next? (Phase 3 and beyond)

- **Summer 2025:** Ofcom will publish a public register of "categorised services" (the largest and riskiest platforms). Those services will face extra transparency duties – for example, having to publish annual safety reports parents can actually read and understand.

- **Early 2026:** Draft rules on further obligations for these big players (things like independent audits and researcher access) are due.

- **End of 2025 onward:** Final guidance for women and girls, plus regular reviews of the existing codes, mean the Act will keep evolving – expect yearly tweaks as new apps and risks emerge.
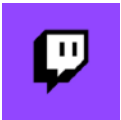
Practical take-aways

1. **Talk timelines:** Let children know big changes land this summer – they may notice stricter age gates or settings suddenly switching to "private."

2. **Use the tools:** If a platform fails to remove illegal material now, report it to Ofcom via its new online form.

3. **Stay curious:** Follow Ofcom's parents' hub (launching later this year) for plain-English updates on each new code, so you can keep the conversation with your child going.

Common Apps

This is not an exhaustive list, but tends to be the more popular apps used by children and young people.

Age requirements are set within the terms and conditions of the app provider, don't be confused by ratings in the app stores which can be

App	Age	Comments
	13	**Discord** - is a voice, video and text chat app that's used by tens of millions of people aged 13+ to tap and hang out with communities or their friends. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**Instagram** - is a photo and video sharing app where people can upload photos, videos and messages to share with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**Snapchat** - is a very popular app that lets users swop pictures and videos (Snaps) with others which are meant to disappear after they are viewed. There is also a messaging feature. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**TikTok** - is a social media app that allows users to create, watch and share short videos shot on mobile devices or webcams. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**Twitch -** is where people come together to chat and interact live. Think YouTube, but it is live rather then pre-recorded. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**WhatsApp -** is a messaging app which uses text, images, video and voice record features to connect with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**
	18	**Reddit** - is a network of communities (called subreddits) where people can share information, their interests and hobbies. Reddit is an 18+ app, there are no parental controls.