All I Want for Christmas is an… Xbox - Tips for Parents this Christmas

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Christmas is here and the increasingly technology-centred requests for presents. Whether it is the Xbox, the Playstation, a new smart phone, a tablet, or Call of Duty, Black Ops 3: they all come with questions that parents should have the answers to before they buy.

- Do the devices come with parental or family controls already installed?

- Is the game appropriate for my child?

- Is it an online game where they talk to other players?

- Why do they want to download all those apps and do they cost anything?

- Is it really true that all his friends play that game?

- How do I switch the webcam off?

These are some really basic questions which are all too easily ignored in the pressure to buy the latest technology, because "all my friends have got it!". It can be all too easy to give a device or game as a present and then see your child disappear into their bedroom for hours on end, which presents parents with the most important question of all: how long should a child spend online at any one time? A difficult question and one which not many children or young people will want to hear the answer to. There is no right or best answer; but growing up is surely a balance of activity; of healthy outdoor activity, of family activity, of activity with friends, face to face and online, of learning activity, of watching TV together, eating together, talking together, and, of course, time on a personal device; but the key word is balance.

It is really good to talk to your child about the device or game or app and to discuss how to use it sensibly and responsibly. There are a few good things that parents can do to ensure their child understands their own safety and responsibilities online:

- Ensure that when you buy any device or piece of technology you know how to set up Parental or Family controls. If you are not sure, ask the shop or store for advice or look online yourself for advice.

- When buying a game ensure you check the **PEGI rating** (Pan European Game Information). You can also check what the game is about at **Common Sense Media**, an American organisation which reviews all games, websites, apps, and videos that children and young people may want.

- Put ground rules in place about the amount of time spent on a device. Remember, that all of us need exercise and a variety of activities to keep us healthy and happy. Too much time spent sitting will lead to poor health, lack of sleep and lack of concentration in school. For younger children, bed time should be just that; don't allow your child to go to bed and then carry on playing on a device.

If you would like further advice and help there are plenty of places to find it:

- The **UK Safer Internet Centre** advice and guidance for parents resources.

- The **Internet Matters website** for general information about online safety