

BEYOND THE iCONS

Understanding my periodic table of dangerous apps

When most parents or carers talk about children's online safety, the focus usually falls on the big, familiar platforms: TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and Roblox. These dominate headlines and dinner-table conversations, and it is easy to assume they represent the whole picture. But the digital world our children inhabit is far broader, faster moving, and more complex than the handful of apps most adults recognise.

That is why I created the Periodic Table of Dangerous Apps: a visual way to show parents, carers, and childminders how many platforms children use, how varied these online spaces are, and why awareness, not panic, is what really protects young people. The purpose of the table is not to suggest you must memorise every app or stay ahead of every online trend. That is impossible.

Instead, the message is simple, if you see an app on a child's phone that you do not recognise, pause, research it, and use it as an opportunity for conversation. This proactive curiosity is far more powerful than trying to keep up with the entire digital world.



Curiosity beats control

Parents and childminders often say: 'There are so many apps. How can we keep up?' You do not need to keep up. You do not need to memorise the periodic table. What matters is staying interested in your child's digital life. When you see an unfamiliar icon, instead of assuming the worst, try looking it up together, asking what they use it for, and inviting them to show you how it works.

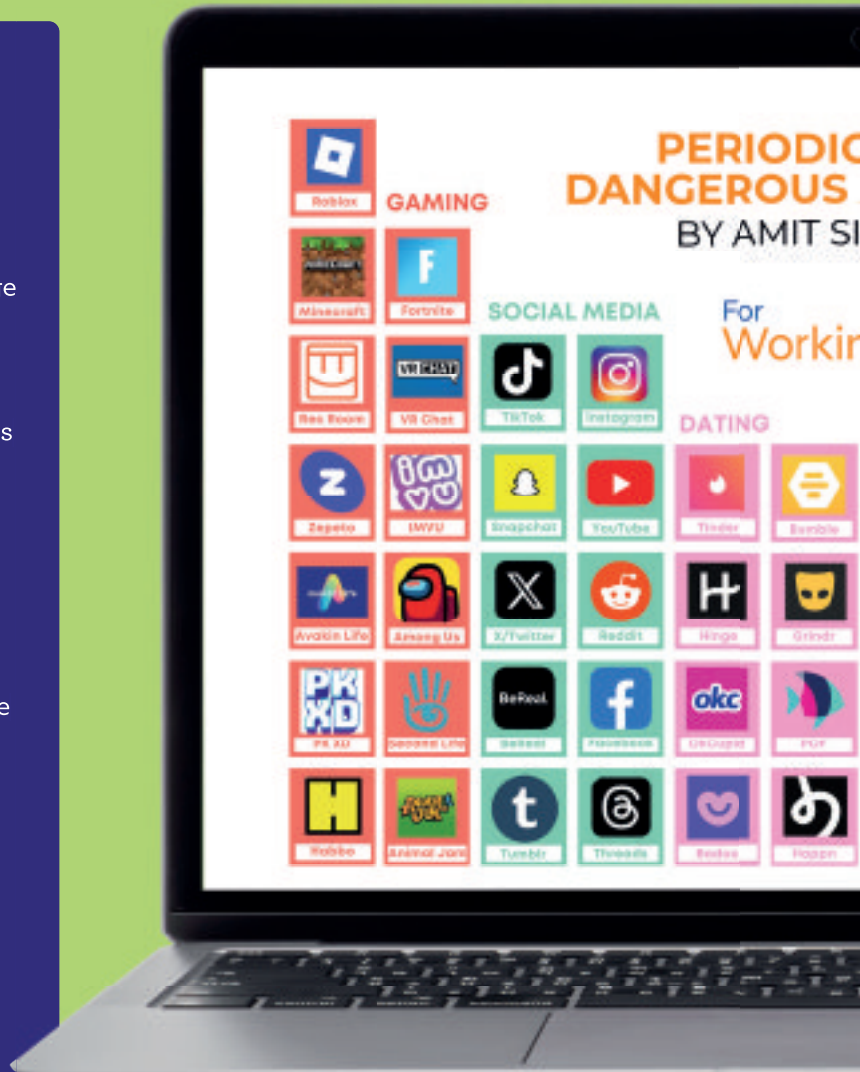
Children are far more likely to come to you when something goes wrong if you have built that openness long before there is a problem.

Lesser-known apps and the concerns

- Wizz** (anonymous or social discovery)
 A teen-oriented make-new-friends app often described as a mix of Snapchat and Tinder. Swipe-based interactions encourage children to connect with strangers, sometimes adults posing as teens.
- NGL** (anonymous questions)
 A tool that allows people to send comments anonymously. Children may enjoy the novelty, but anonymous messages can quickly slip into unkindness, bullying or inappropriate content.
- OmeTV** (live random video chats)
 Similar to Omegle, a child can be matched with a stranger anywhere in the world within seconds. There is no meaningful age verification and a high risk of exposure to inappropriate behaviour.
- Replika and Character AI** (AI chatbots)
 Many children use them for emotional companionship. These bots can mimic relationships, reinforce unhelpful thinking and blur boundaries between fantasy and reality.
- IMVU and Zepeto** (avatar-based social worlds)
 Children create virtual avatars and chat with strangers. These platforms often include private messaging, adult users and role-play that can become inappropriate.
- Whisper, Hushed, TextNow** (anonymous messaging)
 Similar to Omegle, a child can be matched Apps designed to hide communication or create temporary numbers make it harder for trusted adults to spot risks early.

These apps are not dangerous because the technology itself is dangerous. They are risky because children may not yet have the maturity to navigate them, some features encourage secrecy or quick interactions with strangers, and parents often do not recognise the icons.

As with my emoji periodic table, context is everything. The tools themselves are not the whole story. How children use them is what matters.



Replacing 'How was school today?' with four better questions

In most homes, the traditional after school question, 'How was school today?', rarely tells us anything. The answer is almost always fine.

Online life is now such a significant part of a child's day that we need better questions to check in.

These questions achieve several important things. They normalise conversations about the digital world. They remove judgement. Children are more likely to be honest when they know they will not be punished for telling the truth. They create emotional safety and a predictable moment to share concerns. They help adults spot problems early before they escalate.



A safe space matters more than a safe app

We cannot filter the entire internet. But we can create a culture of trust, ongoing conversations, curiosity rather than fear, and guidance rather than surveillance. This is what truly protects children. Whether a child is using Roblox or Replika, TikTok or Telegram, what keeps them safest is knowing they can talk to you without fear.

The digital world will continue to evolve. New apps will appear and old ones will reinvent themselves, but the fundamentals of online safety remain the same: connection, curiosity and conversation.

Here are the four questions I teach parents and carers to use:

1. How was your online world today?
2. Did you see anything online today that worried you?
3. Did you receive anything online today that you did not like?
4. Did you send anything to anybody online today that you should not have?

My Periodic Table of Dangerous Apps is not a checklist. It is an invitation to look a little closer, ask one more question and open the door to the conversations that really keep children safe. [CP](#)



Resources

- For Periodic Table of Dangerous Apps, Scan QR code or go to bit.ly/4alMwZI

