Virtual reality

Parent Guide ●——— What you need to know about virtual reality tech.

What is virtual reality?

'Virtual reality' (or **'VR'**) refers to **computer-generated 3D experiences,** enabled by **technology** like headsets, or motion-sensor gloves.

VR tech can be used for **gaming** purposes, to **explore** digitised environments, to **socialise** with others, or even for **training simulations.**

Although VR places a lot of emphasis on **visuals,** it can also involve **audio** and **'haptic'** (touch-based) sensations, too.

VR differs from **'augmented reality'** in that it creates entirely new and complete environments, rather than modifying or 'augmenting' things you can already see in **real life.**

What are the risks?

VR experiences are by their nature **immersive:** sounds, sights, and other sensations can be highly realistic. This means VR **gaming scenarios** can become more vivid – or **scarier** – than usual.

Social interactions can also be **intensified.** Being able to see, hear, and interact so realistically with other VR users can mean that **cyberbullying, sexual harassment,** or **offensive language** comes across as more **intimidating** and **upsetting.**

VR tech can also be used to watch **VR pornography** – adult content which is viewed (and appears **more real**) through the use of equipment like headsets. If your child has VR tech and internet access then be aware of this potential use.

It's also worth bearing in mind that using some VR tech requires the user to **move around while wearing it,** which can bring with it the chance of **injury** and **property damage.**

What are the safety features?

Companies that produce VR tech or host VR platforms usually have their own **safety and privacy settings,** as well as **reporting functions** to limit things like abuse, harassment, or contact from strangers. Similarly, most games will be accompanied by **age-ratings.**

Shop around and do some **research** if you're thinking of investing in VR tech for your child. Identify games or platforms that are **age-appropriate,** as well as investigating the privacy and **support functions** they provide.

What else should I know?

VR isn't a staple in most homes yet, but it's likely that we'll get more familiar with VR tech as it becomes **more affordable** and **accessible,** and if it plays more of a role – as it's predicted to – as **'the metaverse'** develops.

And while it's natural to have questions and worries about new tech, it's equally important to keep an **open mind.**

If your child wants to start using VR then engage with them, find out how they've heard about it and **what they want to use it for.** Explore some of the **options available** – and voice to them any **concerns you have.**