Keeping your under 5 safe online

Statistics released by Ofcom show that over 50% of children aged 3-4 go online for nearly 8 hours a week, and 1 in 5 children aged 3-4 have their own tablet.
This may be surprising, but research has shown that families are spending more on technology for a number of reasons:
To further their children's education,
to maintain connections with family and friends,
and to facilitate and enjoy daily life.

How young is too young to start talking to my child about online safety?
It's never too early to start taking action to keep your child safe online.
As soon as your child starts talking about or exploring the online world, you should start conversations with them about their online activity and put support in place.
Research has found that children form 'digital habits' during early development (such as using devices after bedtime). Therefore it is important for parents to support children to develop positive – and lasting – digital habits from an early age.

What are the benefits of my under 5 using technology?
There are many benefits of children engaging with technology from an early age. The internet provides children with opportunities to learn, connect with family, develop creativity, as well as have fun. Apps, games and websites designed for under 5s help children to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and supports them to develop their fine-motor skills (such as their ability to move fingers independently by pointing and pushing buttons, and improving hand-eye coordination).
A number of families use video chat and messaging services as a way to connect with family and friends, which allows young children to maintain relationships with relatives.
There are lots of child friendly sites you can explore with your child, such as Cbeebies, where children can watch videos, play games, learn and be entertained.

What can I do to support my under 5?
There are lots of things you can do to support your under 5. This is not a complete list, but a range of strategies you can use to improve your child's online experience:

1. Explore together: Explore your child's favourite apps and websites with them. This can be a fantastic way to find out what your child enjoys doing online, as well as having fun and learning together.

2. Talk to your child about their online experiences: Start and continue regular conversations with your under 5 about what they enjoy doing online, introducing online safety messages. These conversations can be a great way to reinforce the message that if your child sees anything online which makes them feel worried, they can tell you or another adult they trust.

3. Supervise your under 5 while they're online: Keep the devices your child uses in communal areas of the house such as in the living room or kitchen where an adult can supervise. Children under 5 **should not** access the internet unsupervised in private spaces, such as alone in their bedroom or bathroom.

4. Parental controls: Make use of the parental controls available on your home broadband and any internet enabled device in your home . You can find out more about how to use parental controls by visiting your broadband provider's website, or by viewing advice/step-by-step guides available on the *internet matters site*. If you need any help setting up parental controls, you can also call up the NSPCC/O2 Helpline or visit an O2 store.

5. SafeSearch: The use of 'SafeSearch' is recommended for use with young children. Most web search engines will have a 'SafeSearch' function, which allows you to limit the material your child can see when they're online. Look out for the 'Settings' button on your web browser homepage, which is often shaped like a small cog. It is important to understand that no 'SafeSearch' function is 100% effective, and this cannot be used alone to protect your child from being exposed to age inappropriate material.

6. Set boundaries: As a family you can agree a set of rules, such as locations in the house where devices can be used, times of day your child can use devices, or which age appropriate apps or websites they can access. On devices you do not wish your under 5 to access, use passwords and keep these out of reach of your child.

7. Lead by example: Modelling the digital habits you expect from your child (for example, no tablets during meal-times) can be an effective way of supporting young children to develop their own positive digital behaviours from an early age.
By following the advice in this article, you will be improving your child's online experience as well as helping to keep them safer online.

This advice and other similar material can be found at https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk