

Nintendo Switch: a parent's guide



From its fun and colourful roster of games to its unique design, the Nintendo Switch is often seen as the family-friendly console.

Are you thinking about ordering one online? Is your child playing the new Animal Crossing game during lockdown?

Here's what you need to know.

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What is the Nintendo Switch?

The Switch is the latest console from the Japanese video game giant Nintendo.

Released worldwide in 2017, the versatility of the Switch has helped it to remain incredibly popular and outsell all competitors in 2019. Consisting of a portable tablet and two detachable controllers (also known as Joy-Cons), the console can be connected to a TV but it doesn't have to be – it's designed to be played both at home and on the go. Each Joy-Con can be used by itself, making it easy for gamers to play together.

Unlike most consoles, Switch games come on cards rather than discs. These cards – similar to the ones used for Nintendo's DS and 3DS – are **deliberately coated** with a bitter but non-toxic chemical called denatonium benzoate to discourage young children from putting them in their mouths. You can also buy and download games through the Nintendo eShop.

Although the Switch connects to the internet, it does not support streaming apps – such as Netflix or Amazon Prime – like it's main competitors, nor can it play Blu-Rays or DVDs.

In September 2019, Nintendo launched the Lite version of the Switch, which is an entirely handheld device but otherwise works just like the standard version.

Is it family-friendly?

Nintendo has a reputation for producing family-friendly consoles and games – and the Switch is no different.

Although it's not groundbreaking in terms of technical specs or graphics, the Switch is very easy to set up and the menus are clean and simple to navigate. It's also considered the most age-inclusive console on the market, as a majority of games are suitable for younger players (PEGI 3-7). Many of Nintendo's own titles for the Switch have extensive multiplayer options which can appeal to both children and adults.

Joining your child for a round of Super Smash Bros. or asking them to show you around their island on Animal Crossing can be a great way to get insight into their world – and the kind of content they're exposed to. Taking an interest in your child's hobbies will let them know that they can come to you if they come across anything that concerns or upsets them.

Here are some great games for different age groups:

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Young children (3-8)	Pre-teens (9-12)	Teens (13-18)
 Yoshi's Crafted World	 The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild	 The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
 Nintendo Labo	 Super Mario Odyssey	 Overwatch
 Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze	 Pokemon Sword and Shield	 Xenoblade Chronicles 2

Do I need to worry about loot boxes?

There are many online games available on the Switch. Some of them, like Fortnite and Overwatch, give players the option to buy loot boxes – virtual 'treasure chests' containing mystery items that may or may not be of value for the player.

Because the player doesn't usually know what they're going to get, they might be tempted to keep buying loot boxes until they get what they want. As a result, there are concerns that loot boxes can introduce children to **gambling-like behaviours**.

Nintendo has also taken a pretty hard stance and will demand that all **games disclose 'drop rates'** – the probability that a loot box will yield a specific reward – by the end of 2020. Regardless, the Switch gives parents control over their child's spending. You can either set up limits or turn off spending completely in the Nintendo eShop.

Are there any parental controls?

Parental controls don't eliminate risk completely. Like you would with any piece of tech, ensuring your child can recognise and respond to challenges is the best way of helping them flourish while they're gaming.

However, parental controls can be a useful tool for families who are looking to prevent accidental spending or stop their child from being able to access inappropriate content.

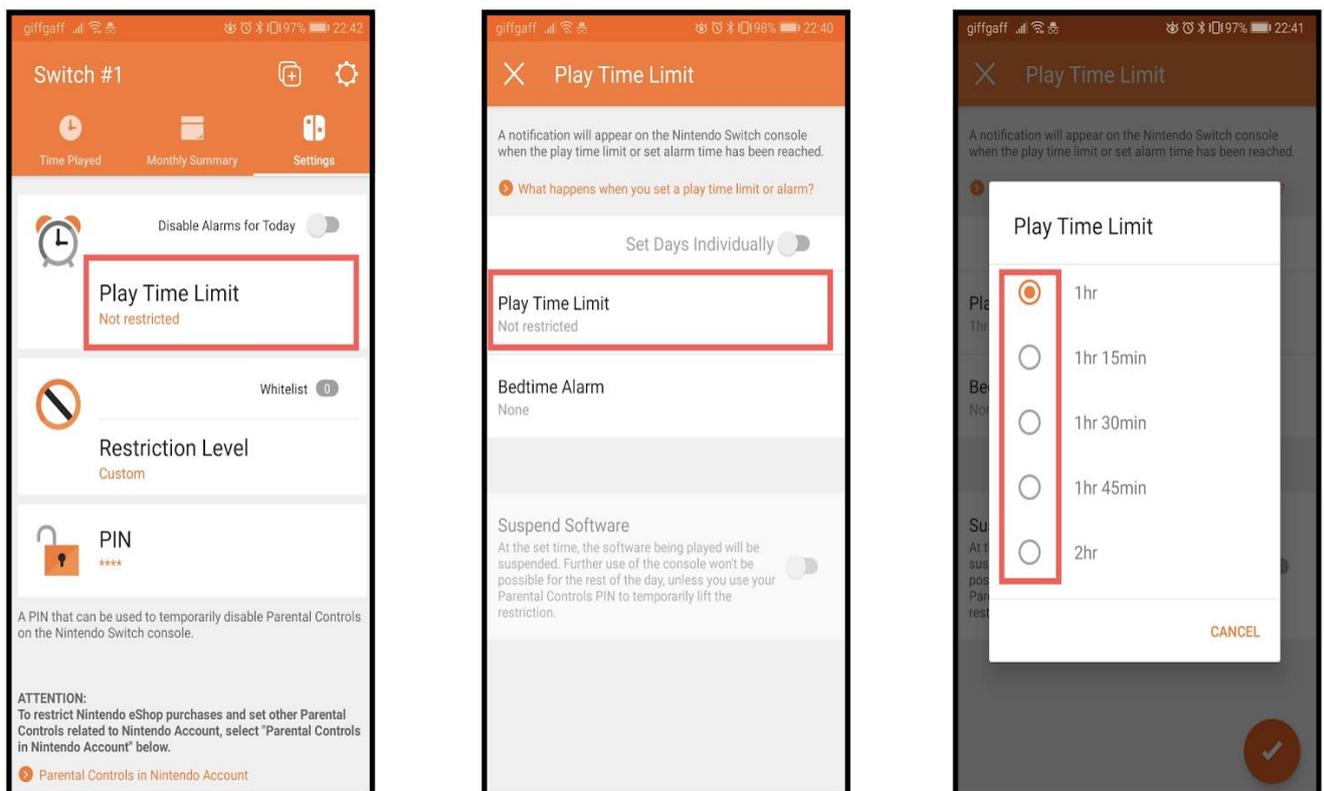
For the Switch, all you have to do is to create a parent/guardian account on your child's console and download Nintendo's parental controls app from the App Store or Google Play Store. Some of the main features of this app include:

Time limits:

Research from the Oxford Internet Institute suggests that what children do on screens is more important than the amount of time they spend – but that doesn't mean you can't choose to set limits.

Through the app, you can set up daily quotas for your child. When their time is almost up, they will receive a notification which encourages them to finish what they're doing. You can also enable a feature called 'Suspend software' which will automatically quit the game and turn the console off when the time is up.

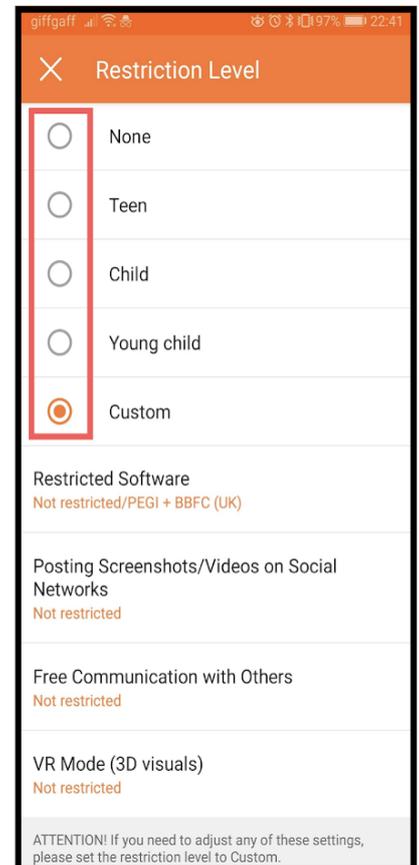
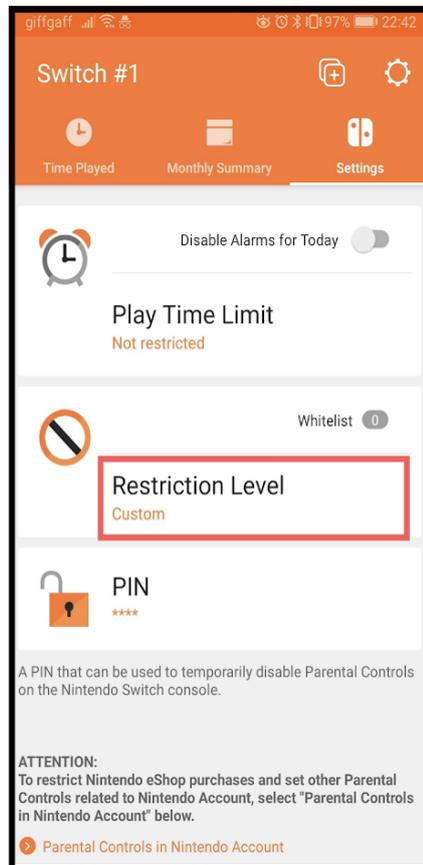
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Setting age limits:

The app gives you the option to select which PEGI ratings you're comfortable with your child playing. If you'd like to find out more about PEGI ratings, you can read our [parent guide](#).

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Communication with strangers:

If you don't want your child to be able to contact or be contacted by strangers, you can toggle the communication settings included in the app. For example, you can stop your child from sending or receiving messages and pictures outside of their 'Friends' list. To learn more about in-game chat, check out our [parent guide](#).

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