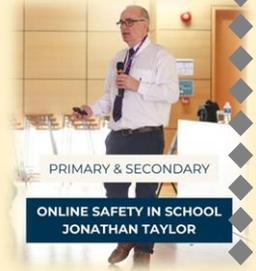




Online Safety for Schools



Main Dangers for Young Users Using VR Headsets

Exposure to Inappropriate Content

- VR environments can feel **far more realistic and immersive** than traditional screens.
- Children may be exposed to:
 - Sexual content
 - Graphic violence
 - Hate speech or extremist content
- Content warnings are often **inconsistent or user-generated**.

Risk escalation: What might feel “virtual” to adults can feel **real and emotionally intense** to children.

Grooming, Sexual Exploitation & Abuse

- Many VR platforms allow **live voice chat**, private rooms, and avatar interaction.
- Groomers can:
 - Pose as children
 - Encourage secrecy
 - Use role-play to normalise inappropriate behaviour
- The use of avatars can create **false trust and emotional bonding**.

Key concern: Grooming can happen **much faster** due to shared immersive experiences.

Harassment, Bullying & Sexualised Behaviour

- Verbal abuse, sexual comments, and threatening behaviour are common on some platforms.
- Some users experience:
 - Simulated groping
 - Following or cornering avatars
 - Intimidation through proximity

Impact: The brain may process these experiences similarly to real-world harassment.

Identity, Psychological & Emotional Harm

- Young users may:
 - Lose track of time



- Develop emotional dependence on virtual identities
- Experience anxiety, fear, or trauma after intense interactions
- Dissociation between real and virtual identity can be stronger in VR.

Physical & Health Risks

- Motion sickness, nausea, headaches
- Eye strain and visual development concerns
- Injury from:
 - Collisions with furniture
 - Falling or tripping
- Fatigue and disrupted sleep patterns

Data Privacy & Biometric Tracking

VR systems can collect:

- Eye movement
- Hand movement
- Voice recordings
- Physical reactions and spatial data

Risk: This data is highly personal and may be stored, analysed, or monetised.

Main Online Areas and Platforms Accessible via VR

Social VR Platforms (Highest Risk)

These allow real-time interaction with strangers.

Examples include:

- **VRChat**
- **Rec Room**
- **Meta Horizon Worlds**
- **Altspace-style social worlds**
- **Roblox VR modes**

Risks:

- Open voice chat
- Private rooms
- User-generated content
- Limited effective moderation



Multiplayer VR Games

- Shooters, role-play games, fantasy worlds
- Often include:
 - In-game voice chat
 - Competitive or aggressive behaviour
- Age ratings are often **ignored or poorly enforced**

Educational & Exploration VR

- Museums, science simulations, virtual classrooms
- Generally lower risk
- Risk increases if:
 - Social features are enabled
 - External links or user chat are allowed

Fitness & Lifestyle VR Apps

- Dance, boxing, sports simulations
- Usually safer, but:
 - May include public leaderboards
 - Voice chat features still pose risks

Do the Risks Include Haptic Gloves, Suits & Accessories?

Yes — and in some cases they increase safeguarding concerns.

What Are Haptic Devices?

- Gloves, vests, suits or controllers that simulate:
 - Touch
 - Pressure
 - Vibration
 - Impact
 - **Increased Risks with Haptic Technology**

a) Enhanced Sense of Touch

- Simulated touch can make inappropriate behaviour feel **physically real**
- Sexual harassment or violence may feel more intense and traumatic

b) Normalisation of Inappropriate Contact

- Repeated exposure can blur boundaries around:
 - Consent
 - Personal space



- Appropriate behaviour

c) Psychological Impact

- The brain may struggle to separate:
 - Simulated touch
 - Real touch
- Particularly concerning for:
 - Younger children
 - Neurodiverse users
 - Children with trauma histories

Safeguarding Implications

- Haptic devices significantly **raise the level of risk**
- Most safeguarding policies **do not yet account for simulated physical contact**
- Schools and parents should treat haptic VR as **higher-risk technology**

Key Safeguarding Messages for Schools & Parents

- VR is **not just gaming** – it is a social, immersive environment
- Age ratings **must be enforced**
- Open social VR platforms are **not suitable for unsupervised children**
- Voice chat and private rooms are major risk factors
- Haptic technology increases emotional and safeguarding risks
- Clear **time limits, supervision, and parental controls** are essential

Summary (Inspection-Ready)

Virtual Reality introduces unique safeguarding risks due to its immersive, social and sensory nature. These risks include exposure to harmful content, grooming, harassment, psychological harm, data privacy concerns, and physical safety issues. Social VR platforms present the highest level of risk, particularly where voice communication and user-generated content are present. The introduction of haptic devices further escalates safeguarding concerns by simulating physical contact, increasing emotional impact and the potential for harm. Robust policies, supervision, age restrictions and staff awareness are essential when considering VR use by children and young people.

QR CODE FOR DETAILS CURRENT ONLINE SAFETY WORKSHOPS





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