

SMARTDAILY

From Spacetalk to Moochies: How to choose the best smartwatch for your child

From broadcasting your location to playing games, it's safe to say watches ain't what they used to be. And when choosing a smart one for your child, some are better than others.

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Once upon a time, only cartoon detectives could make phone calls from their wrists.

Now kids as young as five years old are summoning parents from their smartwatches, sending emojis to friends, playing games, and broadcasting their location to family members.

Smartwatch technology is also being designed with more safeguards than before, but experts say parents should carefully consider their options — and ignore cheaper, riskier models — before choosing technology for their young charges.

Cyber safety educator Leonie Smith says smartwatches are now a popular item in primary school classrooms after they began creeping on to students' wrists a few years ago.

“Before schools started to shut down, I saw a lot of smartwatches in schools,” she says. “Some children even have Apple Watches, which could be hand-me-downs, but there are others designed just for kids.”



Kathrine Peereboom has two smartwatches she gives to her son Oliver, 7, to keep him occupied, calm, and on schedule. Picture: Nigel Hallett

Ms Smith says the devices are most commonly used to give parents another way to communicate with their kids, letting them send mum or dad a text message when they've reached public transport, for example.

But she says children use smartwatches very differently to their grown-up counterparts, using full-sized apps on their small screens and installing games.


Models designed for children include the Australian made Spacetalk Kids, which features a "school mode" to limit classroom distractions, the Movetime Family Watch from TCL that comes with a 4G connection and camera, and the more basic VTech Kidizoom watch with games.

Australians snapped up 1.2 million smart devices for their wrists in the last half of 2019, according to Telsyte, and managing director Foad Fadaghi says some made it to the youngest members of households.

Major manufacturers like Apple and Samsung have yet to tap into the kids' market though, he says, as they still require their smartwatches connect to a phone, making it "a very expensive endeavour for parents".

But Ms Smith says there are a growing number of child-friendly smartwatches with built-in connections, models that limit who kids can contact, and that offer restrictions on when they can use the technology.



 Cyber safety educator Leonie Smith says smartwatches are now a popular item in primary school classrooms. Picture: Supplied

She also recommends parents look past cheap, knock-offs that look they come from big-name phone brands but don't work as promised.

"Some of them have location features that don't work very well, and others won't keep your data safe," she says.

Charity founder and mother-of-three Kathrine Peereboom says she bought two smartwatches for her seven-year-old son Oliver who is on the autistic spectrum.

An Apple Watch has alarms the family uses to remind him of daily tasks, she says, while his VTech Kidizoom watch offers games to help him to stay calm in noisy, overwhelming environments.

“The VTech watch is really age-appropriate for Oliver. He’s got memory and educational games he can play with, he can take photographs or little videos of himself, and he can look at photos of the family,” she says. “And it means we don’t have to carry around a clunky iPad.”


But Ms Peereboom says the right smartwatch will be different for each child, depending on their age and needs, and parents should consider what features will be helpful for their family.

“You really have to know what you want out of it and do your homework,” she says. “You could buy a \$200 or a \$1500 device but you have to understand what you want to achieve with it.”

SPACETALK KIDS SMARTWATCH

\$299, spacetalkwatch.com



 Spacetalk kid's smartwatch.


Designed in Australia, the Spacetalk smartwatch not only meets local standards but is thoughtfully designed for users aged between five and 12 years. Kids can’t access social media or cameras on this gadget, but they can make phone calls and send text messages from their wrist using a built-in mobile connection. Parents can also disable the watch during class hours, and set up safe zones for after-school play and travel.

TCL MOVETIME FAMILY WATCH

\$199, bigw.com.au






 TCL MoveTime smart watch. Picture: Supplied

A new entrant to the kids' smartwatch market, the TCL Movetime packs in a lot of features. This watch features its own 4G connection, a camera and a 1.3-inch screen, all of which it uses to deliver video calls with parents and friends. The Movetime's use can also be restricted during school hours and it can be used to monitor kids' locations, and send alerts to parents when they leave a preset area.

MOOCHIES

\$200, moochies.com



 The Mochies smartwatch is designed to let children call or message a vetted group of contacts. Picture: Supplied

This kid-friendly gadget is designed to be a watch and a phone in one. The Mochies smartwatch has an independent mobile connection so kids can phone a list of approved contacts, or place a video call to chat with them face-to-face. The smartwatch is also waterproof, comes with an SOS feature, and offers GPS tracking.

APPLE WATCH SERIES 3

\$319, apple.com/au



📷 Apple Watch Series 3. Picture: Supplied

Apple's cheapest smartwatch sneaks in at just over \$300 and it provides a lot of features for small arms, including phone and text message alerts, exercise-tracking, and apps you can run on its small screen. This model is also water-resistant, has an SOS feature, and can be used with the Find My Friends app. It has just one drawback: it needs to be connected to an iPhone.

VTECH KIDIZOOM DX2

\$90, vtech.com.au



📷 Kidizoom Smart Watch DX.

Designed for children as young as four years old, VTech's smartwatch puts games, cameras, a pedometer and the time on their wrist. The cameras can be used to snap selfies or record videos of their friends, the games can be puzzling or movement-based, and it doesn't come with the complication of an internet connection.