

# Family guide to the Meta Quest

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## Foreword

By Natalie Chyi, Reality Labs Policy Manager

*Virtual reality (VR) is an emerging technology that we believe has the power to transform the way people connect and strengthen bonds in so many ways. We've consistently heard about how families in particular enjoy using their Quest headsets in the household as a tool to spend time together and enrich family life, and we have continued to build for families and children 10+ through parental supervision tools and parent-managed accounts.*

*We've heard that parents and guardians want more guidance on how they can use their headsets as a family, and suggestions to get the most out of their device. To help provide that, we collaborated with Catherine Allen, a VR and child safety expert at Limina Immersive, to create this guide in consultation with parents and families. In it, you'll find tips from VR-enthusiast families on how they use their Quest at home, including activity and content guides, as well as suggestions for set up and how to ensure a fun and safe experience for the whole family. We hope this guide will spark some new ideas to use your Quest!*

## Welcome to the Family Guide to the Meta Quest!

VR is unlike any other technologies of the past. If there is a Meta Quest in your household, you own one of the most powerful immersive devices ever created; a small, wearable computer that is both capable of transporting you to new worlds and augmenting your home with virtual wonders. With this technology you have both a gateway to new incredible experiences and a tool to support you in every day family life.

Because VR is still relatively new, however, devices like the Meta Quest devices may not yet have such an obvious current place in daily life like smartphones, computers or televisions do. Many parents remember, not that long ago, a time before smartphones became second nature, and immersive tech is in a similar moment right now — exciting, full of potential, but also unfamiliar terrain. This guide aims to help you and your family make the most of this powerful new form of media. It offers plenty of ideas for how your Meta Quest, combined with the right apps, can become a meaningful part of family life, along with essential safety and wellbeing tips.

To put this guide together we spoke to some of the many, many families who are heavily experienced Meta Quest users. These are families who are already using the Meta Quest all the time, and who are finding it adds value to their lives in all sorts of ways. You'll see experiences from these 'super user' families peppered throughout this guide — they have so much immersive wisdom to share!

## What is VR? What is MR?

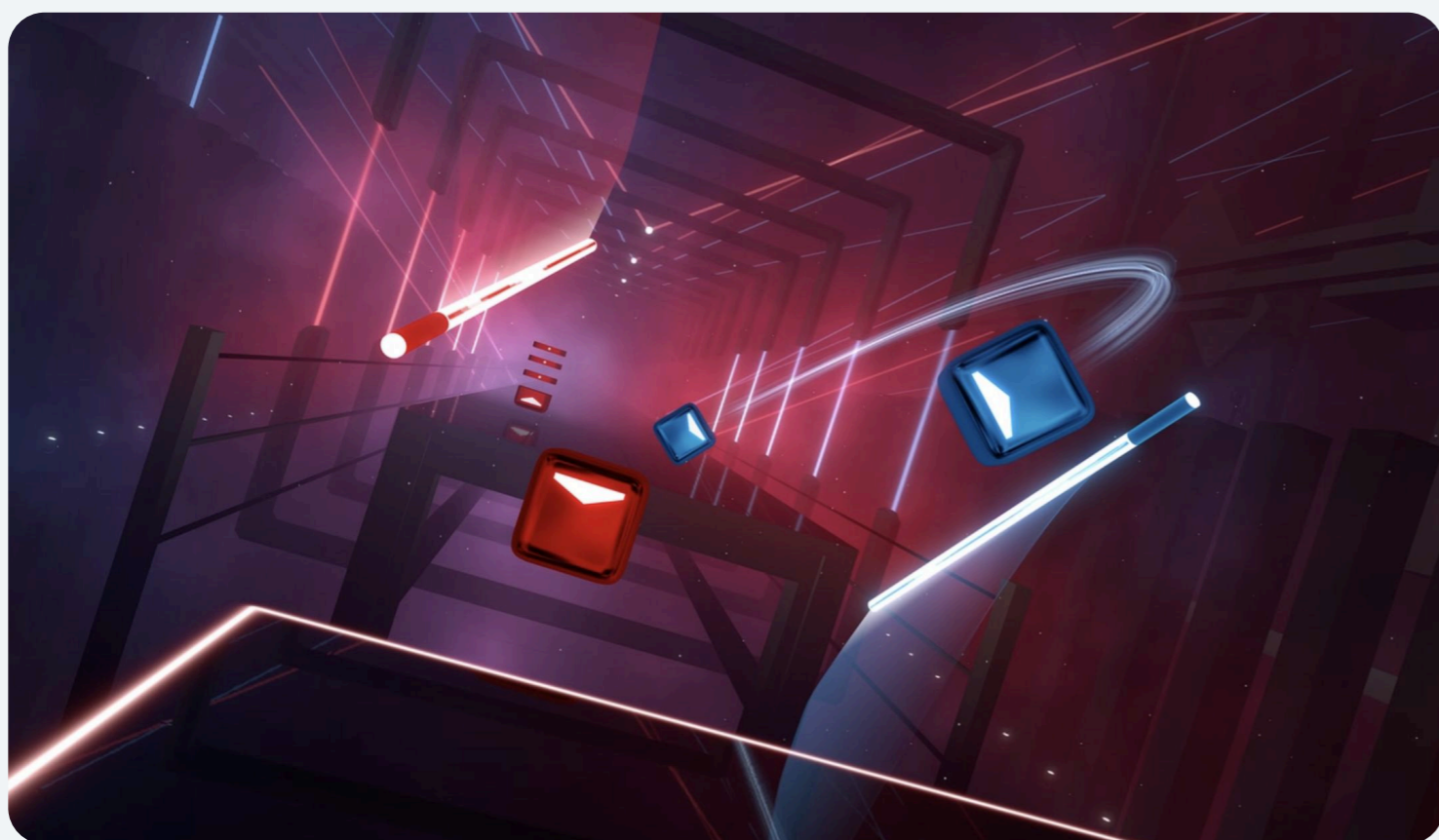
One question people often ask first is what are VR and MR?

The Meta Quest allows you to do both. Here's a simple way to think about it:

- VR (virtual reality) puts you inside a completely virtual space.
- MR (mixed reality) adds digital things to your real world, but can also allow you to seamlessly transition back to VR. Digital objects and characters can interact with your real space.

If you're using a Meta Quest, you're already experiencing VR and likely MR as well. Immersive technology is a term that encompasses both VR and MR, as well as other technologies that surround the user and allow for an enhanced sense of presence.

## VR Examples



An example of a VR experience from the Beat Saber app



An example of a VR experience from the Population: One app

## MR Examples



An example of an MR experience in the First Encounters app



An example of an MR experience in the Miracle Pool app

## So what makes immersive tech so special?

*The power lies in the way it fully engages both the body and the mind, transforming a user from passive viewer to active participant.*

### Active play

Something interesting we found when talking to our Quest ‘super users’ was how they felt that VR is a different sort of ‘screen time.’ VR time is usually more active than flat screen time, physically and mentally. While VR definitely still uses a screen, the fact you bring your body into the experience makes it feel very different, even more akin to active outdoor play. Several parents we spoke to mentioned that in the winter months, the Quest can keep the family moving, whatever the weather.

This observation from parents points to the fact that VR is fundamentally different to other forms of screen media — it isn’t something you simply watch, it’s something you *do*. Virtual reality places you inside an experience, rather than looking at a flat rectangular screen. While websites are something you visit, TV shows are something you watch and podcasts are something you listen to, an experience on the Quest is something you participate in.

Because VR surrounds the senses, it feels immediate. There is no symbolic representation of a place, but instead the feeling of being there directly. This immediacy can spark all sorts of genuine physical reactions, from an increased heart rate in an action game to a lowered blood pressure during the peaceful calm of a simulated woodland at dawn.

### Involving the body, not just the mind

VR involves your entire body. Even if you’re sitting still, your brain perceives you as *in* that environment. As one of our ‘super user’ research participants told us, “If my daughter’s playing a 3D piano app, she physically sees the keys in midair. Her mind and arms remember the arrangement in ways that reading a book can’t match.” Another participant told us, when talking about his son’s favorite Quest app, “It’s not just pressing buttons, you’re physically ducking to dodge or stepping forward to explore.”

This embodiment also often makes immersive experiences more memorable. As many of us have experienced ourselves, we tend to learn by doing, so VR is perfect for educational content.

So what do these super powers described above mean for a Meta Quest headset in everyday family life? In essence, a VR headset is a highly effective multitool that can be put to lots of different experiential purposes. Your device can do so much, from taking you on a field trip, to whisking you off to a virtual theatre show, to motivating you for a morning work out.

Ultimately, VR's power lies in the way it fully engages both the body and the mind. That transformation from passive viewer to active participant makes it extraordinary.



## The best mindset to get the most out of VR

### Get the whole family involved

A recurring theme in our interviews was that VR works best when the whole family engages, not just the kids. Parents who actively use the Quest alongside their children, or stay engaged with the kids' VR use not only have more fun themselves but also can make the experience safer and more enriching for the whole family.

When parents participate, they can help find apps and experiences they know their kids will enjoy, and even come up with ideas for family VR activities. Parents can also spot potential issues early, for instance knowing if a game is appropriate for the age and comfort level of their child.

Another benefit of parental engagement in VR is that parents can model healthy tech habits. Just like other forms of screen time, balance is important. Because VR is so new, however, it can be hard to gauge when, and for how long it feels right. Similar to modeling behavior for mobile phones and console games, a parent can set an example of how to engage with VR, and for what purpose.

## **The Meta Quest is a flexible tool**

One of the biggest misconceptions about immersive tech is that it's for gaming and nothing else. Some families love playing competitive multiplayer games, while others prefer immersing themselves in VR stories, attending live concerts or working out together. VR is a flexible tool that can be shaped to fit your family's interests.

## **Feel confident, calm and open**

If putting on a VR headset for the first time makes you feel a little silly, don't worry, that feeling passes quickly! In fact, many of the families we spoke to said they hesitated at first, but once they got used to it, the device became a meaningful part of their household rhythm.

Ultimately, the best mindset for VR is a mix of calmness and openness. VR works like a kind of magic — it creates the illusion of presence, making virtual spaces feel real. The more you allow yourself to embrace that magic, the more immersive and rewarding your experience will be.

## Activity guide

Your Meta Quest opens up all sorts of possibilities for shared activities as a family. Here are some ideas for Quest-based activities to get you going, but they really are the tip of an iceberg — the only limit is your family’s imagination. One evening you can be experiencing a *Cirque du Soleil* show together, the next you can be playing chess with grandparents miles away. Experiences that in real life would take lots of planning and cost become accessible from your living room.

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<sup>1</sup>"In the Brain, Memories Are Inextricably Tied to Place," *The Atlantic*, August 12th, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/08/in-the-brain-memories-are-inextricably-tied-to-place/375969/>

## Storytime

For a group experience, try casting your Quest’s view to a screen everyone can see

## Life story night

Ever wanted to show your kids the neighborhood where you grew up, but can’t easily travel there? The *Wander* app makes this simple. Input your old address or a special place from your family’s history, and “walk” those streets again in VR. Relive cherished memories and places, for instance a childhood home or a beloved park, and narrate them for your children. Studies show that memory is linked to place<sup>1</sup>, so virtually visiting childhood locations might bring out memories you didn’t realize you even had!

## Narrative adventure

For a family story evening, the Quest library is a treasure trove of imaginative adventures you can watch, or even interact with, together.

Narrative experiences on Quest to check out include:

- *Tales of Soda Island* (available on the *Theater Elsewhere* app): A series of tales that take place on a strange, remote musical island. These quirky, whimsical vignettes each unfold like mini stage productions.
- *Gloomy Eyes*: A hauntingly beautiful animated series narrated by Colin Farrell, set in a Tim Burton-esque universe.
- *Wallace & Gromit: The Grand Getaway*: Britain’s claymation icons star in a fun adventure that you can get involved in too.



## Family game night

### Local multiplayer games

Want a night in with your family or friends? You could take inspiration from a board game night and enjoy a local multiplayer game for your Quest. In many of these titles, one person is in the Quest while everyone else joins in on their phones or tablets. As mentioned above, casting is another way of being able to see what is happening in the headset — players can cast their view from within the Quest to a family TV or other compatible screen, and share in the delight.

Game night apps to try include:

- *Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes*: One person sees a bomb in VR, while everyone else is an external ‘expert’ and has the defusal manual on their phones. Shout instructions to beat the clock!
- *Acron: Attack of the Squirrels!*: One player in VR plays as a tree of acorns, while those on phones or tablets play as mischievous squirrels trying to steal those acorns.
- *Wander*: This app isn’t set up to be a party game, but you can turn it into one with casting! One person, wearing the Quest headset “drops” into a random place on Earth, and everyone else shouts out guesses as to where they are. A perfect group ‘guess where I am!’ challenge.

### Indoor sports

How about a game of pool tonight? Followed by some table tennis and bowling? There are several apps that offer these indoor sports. Apps to try here include *Premium Bowling*, *MiRacle Pool*, *Home Sports* and *Eleven Table Tennis*. If you have more than one Meta Quest you can try playing games like table tennis at the same time (rather than taking turns), with several individuals donning a headset in the same physical space, by choosing the multiplayer option.



## Learning and creativity

### Creativity sessions

If you want to explore making art, there’s a wealth of creative apps on the Quest store. *Open Brush*, for instance, offers a limitless canvas where you can paint in three dimensional space. The *Vermillion* app lets you do oil painting on canvas, just in a virtual studio with infinite supplies and no clean up. One of the best parts about getting creative in VR is the subsequent family

'show and tell'. The fact the art is both immersive and three dimensional really adds that wow factor for people you show your art to.

## Cooking fun

An interesting way of learning the origins of foods we take for granted can be making them from scratch. *Lost Recipes* on Quest allows you to learn historic dishes in a virtual kitchen — mixing ingredients, chopping vegetables, and perfecting techniques without any cleanup. Dishes range from simple barley pita bread with grapes and olives to Mayan xec salad and mukbil pollo. After your virtual practice run you could work together to bring the recipe to life in your actual kitchen. All the real life recipes are available in a downloadable recipe book on the app developer's website.

## Documentary night

If you're into documentaries IRL, you'll be pleased to learn that there are lots of really awe-inspiring, high quality documentaries on the Quest. Some of them are interactive, too, and could even be tied into the topics that children are already passionate about or learning about at school. David Attenborough's *Hold the World* is a great example; with David Attenborough as your guide, you can get 'hands on' with some amazing natural history treasures at London's Natural History Museum.

For a cosmic vibe, *Spheres* transports viewers into the depths of outer space, where you can learn about the origins of the universe, while bathing in the universe's hidden sound harmonies.

## Health and wellbeing

### Morning fitness

Because VR brings the whole body into the experience, it is fantastic for exercise (often without it even feeling like exercise!). Immersive exercise can be incredibly motivating as well, as there are often gamified elements or beautiful scenery to engage the mind as well as the body. Like with any other form of exercise, short bursts of regular practice can make all the difference. If you and another family member want to train and stay fit together, you could schedule a regular morning burst of VR activity. For boxing, dance and HIIT, try *FitXR*. If you think gamified music and movement will get you going check out *Beatsaber* and *SynthRiders*. For these options you could take it in turns to do a song or a short exercise class (often around 7-10 minutes), which provides a rest break for the other participant. If you're looking for a slower pace, *Alo Moves XR* features yoga, pilates and meditation. You could even turn it into a joint experience by casting onto a bigger screen, having one participant in the headset and the other without a headset copying the VR participant.

### Chill time wind down

Using calm Quest apps can be a surprisingly effective way to shift the atmosphere, trading overstimulation for a tranquil mental reset. If the kids' energy is running high at the end of the day, or if you just want some group mindful quiet, apps like *Tripp* offer gentle, guided meditative journeys in beautiful, dreamlike settings. It allows you to focus on your breathing, float through awe inspiring journeys, and emerge generally feeling better. Another favorite is *Nature Treks*, where you can peacefully wander through lush forests or tropical beaches, hearing birdsong and ocean waves. Even a few minutes in these environments can help shift the household atmosphere. For a group experience, try turning the lights down low, maybe lighting a candle in a safe place and casting the experience to a bigger screen for those not in a headset. It can also work well if you have more than one Quest device, so you can all be in VR at the same time — akin to a group meditation!



## Bringing in family and friends from afar

### Remote hang out

Social virtual and mixed reality offer a completely different way to spend time together by *doing* something together rather than just talking and ‘catching up’. Studies show that bonds are strengthened through shared experiences<sup>2</sup>, and this approach allows you to do just that.

*Walkabout Mini Golf* was cited many times by ‘super users’ in our research as a great way to relax and spend time with loved ones. Instead of, “So, how’ve you been?” you’re swapping tips on how to sink that tricky putt and helping each other perfect their swing. If you’re more into classic games, *Chess Club* lets you play chess together in beautiful spaces. Both games have closed multiplayer modes, so it's just you and your family member or friend. Our ‘super users’ told us that this style of virtual hangout was a great way for natural conversation to flow. You can share stories about your week, but you are also creating new memories together.

### Disco!

Planning an IRL house party? Your Meta Quest can be a great addition to the night. With your Quest you don’t need a huge professional DJ booth to provide the bespoke DJ experience — there are two different DJ apps that provide you with a proper, professionally-inspired DJ set up in virtual or mixed reality (as well as teaching you how to use it beforehand!). *Tribe XR* and *Djay* are surprisingly easy to learn how to use. Each has tutorials built in, so you can quickly learn how to cue tracks, adjust tempo or layer effects like a pro. For the party itself, to get the full immersive sound experience, just connect your headset up to some bigger speakers.

*Just Dance* is another great app for parties, inviting everyone to get moving. One person takes part in the dance challenge on the headset while others can gather around, either dancing along, taking turns or cheering on from the sidelines while casting. What’s great about this app is it can set the mood for the rest of the evening, getting people geared up for the real life dance floor later on!

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<sup>2</sup>“Synchronized Affect in Shared Experiences Strengthens Social Connection,” *Communications Biology (Nature)*, 2023, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s42003-023-05461-2> and “Sharing Extraordinary Experiences Fosters Feelings of Closeness,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2018, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320082393\\_Sharing\\_Extraordinary\\_Experiences\\_Fosters\\_Feelings\\_of\\_Closeness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320082393_Sharing_Extraordinary_Experiences_Fosters_Feelings_of_Closeness)

## Setting up the perfect environment for VR

Creating a good physical space at home for immersive tech can make all the difference when it comes to both safety and levels of mental immersion.

Here are some ideas to make your set up ideal for VR:



### 1. Ensure minimal interruptions

Before putting on your headset, try to create a calm space where you won't be interrupted by people (or pets!) who aren't part of the experience. It's absolutely fine to have others around, but they should be supportive of what you are doing; whether watching, joining in via casting or simply being aware and not interrupting unless necessary. Being pulled out of the moment for something unrelated can feel jarring, especially in VR, where you're fully immersed in virtual space.

*"Jumping around the room tends to attract my cat, Cleo, to sniff around. So if I was on my own doing it, I might not realize that Cleo had come into the space. Most of the time Maddie [my partner] is on the sofa, so she will call out and spot."*

— Oliver, dad in London

### 2. Make room for movement

Having a clear play area is crucial for safety, especially if you're using fully immersive VR apps and games where you can't see your physical environment. Clearing your space will also let you fully let go and reduce the likelihood of bumping into anything, so you can focus on the virtual world you are engaged with.

Some families we spoke to added an extra level of safety — they use a rug or mat as a tactile boundary on their feet. Having no shoes on helps them feel the edges of their VR space without needing to rely solely on the headset's boundary system. Just make sure the rug or mat is secure on the ground and doesn't create a trip hazard.

*"Something I really recommend is people get a rug that's the size of their play space. Just getting a round rug on my floor has been the best thing... you already know which way to go to get back to center, because you can feel that edge and get yourself, say two steps back into the middle"*

— Markus, dad in Arizona

### **3. Adapt the space to suit the experience**

Different types of VR experiences might call for different room setups. A little preparation can really help make your immersive experience become even more ‘wow’:

For mindfulness and meditation apps (like Tripp or Alo Moves XR), consider sitting on a yoga mat, laying a blanket on your lap or adding a cushion for comfort. An electric scent diffuser (placed safely out of reach) can add to the calming atmosphere. For high energy exercise sessions, keeping a fan on low nearby can help keep you cool. Again, just make sure it’s placed well out of your play zone.

For group VR experiences, setting up a cozy seating area for spectators or for people waiting their turn can make it feel more comfortable for those not in the headset.

For seated experiences, a swivel chair can be a great addition as it allows users to turn freely without craning their neck. Some parents also set up small side tables nearby to hold controllers when not in use.

### **4. Come out of VR gently**

If you’re in an immersive experience that involves lots of movement or you are embodying an avatar then it is particularly important to come out of VR gently — taking it off too quickly can feel disorienting, like stepping out of a dark cinema into bright daylight. Try pausing the experience, closing your eyes for a few seconds and taking a couple of deep breaths before removing the headset. The Quest home screen is also a great place to come to to regroup yourself and move gently back into the outside world.

## Ensuring child wellbeing in VR

With the introduction of a VR headset into the home comes both opportunity, but also some new responsibility for everyone. Ensuring children’s wellbeing in immersive environments isn’t just about setting rules, it’s about guiding them to use it in a way that is safe, enriching, and positive.

Thoughtful guidance helps kids navigate immersive tech’s incredible potential while avoiding common pitfalls. Across the ‘super user’ families we spoke to, some clear best practices emerged.



### 1. Agree on boundaries from day one

Every family has different lines on things like in-game violence, jump scares, or talkative strangers. Decide early how you feel about certain apps — and let children know which are off-limits or require your sign off. You might want to talk about the length of time each day or week you think is a good maximum amount of time to spend in the Quest. Ideally these conversations should happen in the very early stages of the family’s headset use, but it’s also helpful to have experience in VR yourself. Deciding on things in advance will help make it non-contentious later on. As two children we spoke to for our research advised:

*“Make sure that the parents set the rules as soon as they get it”*

*“[My tip is] agreeing [on] rules as soon as you get it, so that then it's almost like it came with those rules. As kids get older, they will learn how to use it properly...then, then you can slowly take away the rules.”*

### 2. Focus on content, not just hardware

A London dad we spoke to emphasised that buying a VR device is only half the story; he highlighted that parents and children should talk about what kinds of games or apps spark interest and what they might want to use.

Before letting a child dive into a new VR title, many parents also say it helps to explore it themselves first. Sometimes this is using YouTube Let’s Play videos or looking at Common Sense Media reviews. Another way to build a picture of how appropriate the experience is for your child is to look at the information on the Quest Store, including comfort rating and age rating.

It can also help to agree on certain types of ‘core experiences’ to try together.

The benefit of these conversations about content is that they establish the activities that children are doing as something that parents, even if they aren't in that app as well, are still interested in and will want to discuss later.

### 3. Seek out other families

VR is especially great when you have peers to play with, or when parents can share tips with other parents. Many parents we spoke to saw significant social potential if families team up and meet in the same apps — turning VR into an ongoing group adventure.

### 4. Frequent check ins

Many parents said that either they are almost always in the room while their child is in VR, or they frequently check in. One dad told us that either he or his wife look in every 10–15 minutes. Other parents said they would use it as an opportunity to sit and read or catch up on emails while their child is on the Quest in the same room.

### 5. Explore casting

Nearly every 'super user' family would regularly stream the headset view onto a bigger screen that others can see. Casting to a phone or TV transforms VR from a solo bubble into a shared activity. This is helpful for fun, bonding and supporting parental guidance. The Meta Horizon OS on Quest offers this feature.

### 6. Don't tease or allow teasing for how someone looks different wearing a VR headset

Because wearing a VR headset is still new and unfamiliar, some people feel self-conscious when they first try it. Several 'super users' in our research talked about being VR "hosts" in their family, making sure first-timers felt comfortable and had a great introduction to immersive technology. Teasing — even if meant playfully — can make people feel awkward and put them off from trying again. The best approach is to be welcoming and supportive. If a family member is trying VR for the first time, guide them through.



## **7. Explore the parental controls in the Meta Family Center**

Meta Family Center provides a set of parental supervision tools that, depending on the age of your child, allow parents to manage screen time, restrict access to certain apps and oversee purchases.

For younger users (ages 10–12), the controls are designed for close supervision, enabling parents to restrict access to only age-appropriate content and manage social features such as messaging and seeing who their child follows. The Family Center also lets parents set usage limits and monitor in-app purchases.

Make sure children aged 10–12 have their own parent-managed Meta account, rather than sharing an adult account. This allows for extra controls for parents. You can set this up using the Family Center.

For teens, with mutual consent from both the parent and the teen, parents can set daily time limits, schedule breaks, and manage safety settings such as voice channel and personal boundaries. They can also see who their teen follows and who follows them, as well as track app usage, including how much time their teen has spent in VR over the past seven days. Parents can also adjust privacy settings and approve or block specific apps.

## Getting the most out of VR's social features

For many families, social VR can unlock a whole new type of experience. The families we spoke to told us how it can be a really special way to spend time with friends and relatives near and far. At the same time, parents in our research did raise concerns about unsupervised social time with strangers — just like in the real world, parents want to ensure their children stay safe and happy.

We've compiled some tips, specifically around social features, that have come from the wisdom of our parental 'super users'.

### 1. Remember that it's optional

Remember that social features are a way of using the Meta Quest, but not the only way. If you want your family to avoid social features and apps, you absolutely can by making that boundary clear, or only approving non-social experiences in parental supervision.

### 2. Take advantage of customizable settings

If you are okay with your child going into social VR, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Children of different ages, confidence levels, and digital literacy abilities might need different supervision styles. A 10-year-old might do best in private spaces with real-life friends, while a well-guided 14-year-old might participate in short open sessions if you're casting and keeping an eye on things.



### 3. Stay engaged and ask questions

Remain engaged rather than mentally checking out. Think of it like real-life socializing: you wouldn't drop your child at a random party with no idea what it is or who's attending, especially when they're younger. The same goes for VR. There are ways you can proactively stay engaged, for instance showing your child how to mute and/or block others, if the app they are using has this feature. You can also talk with your kid about what activities they have in mind and who they plan to spend time with. You can also ask them after a session about what happened, what they enjoyed and what they didn't. Consciously framing VR as a shared interest and shared journey will help the conversation stay feeling natural.

## 4. Use supervision tools to monitor activity

The Meta Horizon OS on Quest has some helpful features that can support you in supervising your child. The ‘cast’ function, for instance, as already discussed in this guide allows you to see what your child is doing on another screen. The Family Center also has parental supervision features that can help you stay engaged with your child’s Quest use, for instance adjusting your child’s visibility settings, privacy settings and the ability to approve/decline apps and follow requests.

## Conclusion

VR is a powerful new medium: it is one that turns screen time into something active and immersive. Unlike many other digital experiences, VR isn’t just something you watch; it’s something you do.

Through our conversations with families, one message stood out: VR is at its best when it’s a shared family endeavor.

This doesn’t have to mean always using the Quest with casting turned on, or even always being in the same room together. What it means is that families get the best from VR when everyone is engaged and everyone is interested. The journey is shared, and family members learn from each other. A teen and her mom might tell younger siblings over dinner what their virtual trip to a comedy show was like. Or a dad and his son might work out together with Beatsaber every weekend, sharing tips and ideas over the week. This approach makes the concept of ‘supervision’ in VR feel totally natural. Safety and fun become easy to achieve and less of a negotiation.

Immersive tech is still evolving, and there’s no single right way to integrate it into family life. Experiment, adapt, and find what works for your household. With curiosity and an open mind, your Meta Quest can become more than just a gadget, it can become both a gateway and a tool to all sorts of new experiences.

## Bonus: A brief history of immersive experiences & technology

Today’s Meta Quest is part of a long human history of technology facilitated immersion.

Since prehistoric times, humans have sought to transport each other into simulated imagined worlds — well before any physical headsets existed! Children’s make believe games offer our earliest likely example of immersion, where pretend scenarios come alive through physical play. As societies grew, we found many ways to surround ourselves with art and story, whether through cave paintings in the flickering firelight of Lascaux 17,000 years ago, or through vast frescoes covering medieval cathedral walls. More recently, artists have used installations, in-the-round theater stages and immersive performances to place audiences in the action. It is through these strides towards immersion over human history that we have developed concepts like perspective, illusion, and ‘stepping inside’ a story. These are fundamental and foundational notions that continue to shape our media today.

Yet these immersive examples from history have always faced a challenge: how to distribute or replicate them for many people? Hand-painted murals and epic stage designs were mesmerizing, but remained assigned to one place and/or time. Cue the use of technology to scale the immersion...

In the mid-19th century, the stereoscope let individuals experience three-dimensional photography at home — an early parallel to modern VR’s personal, ‘headset’ style akin to goggles. But it wasn’t until the computing era of the 1960s that the phrase ‘virtual reality’ began crystallizing. Researchers like Ivan Sutherland built bulky prototypes (such as the ‘Sword of Damocles’) to let users navigate computer-generated spaces. By the 1980s, a company called VPL Research offered VR headsets, gloves, and bodysuits, showcasing early potential but were plagued by high costs and clunky graphics.



*Age and access may vary by region*

Entering the 1990s, VR arcade machines and the Nintendo Virtual Boy brought the concept into pop culture, yet widespread adoption stalled — often because motion lag caused nausea. Meanwhile, augmented reality advanced quietly, boosted by smartphone technology in the 2010s. Apps like Snapchat lenses and Pokémon GO let millions play with digital overlays on the real world. Users often weren't aware they were using AR, as it can feel so intuitive and natural.

Today, computing power and internet speeds finally support detailed, low-latency VR headsets. As the medium evolves, it edges closer to joining film, music, and books as a standard cultural form — fulfilling humanity's age-old longing to step beyond the boundaries of our immediate reality and into alternate worlds.

Every family that uses virtual reality is part of a long heritage of forward-thinking people exploring new immersive horizons through technology.