Parental Control
Single Product Test

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ESET Smart Security 8.0
Parental Control Test August 2015

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Test commissioned by the vendor of the product.

Content

Introduction: parental control software and its limitations

In today's world, even young children commonly use Internet-connected devices. Parents who are concerned about what their children may find online can use parental control software to restrict their access. A common feature of parental control products is web-category filtering. This allows parents to block websites relating to topics they feel are inappropriate for the child, such as pornography, drugs or violence. Some products may contain additional features such as time limits for computer or Internet use, monitoring of the child's online activities, and restrictions on usage of particular apps. Before employing a parental control product, parents are advised to check that it includes whatever web-filtering categories and other features they deem appropriate.

We must stress that no software product can ever be a substitute for parental advice. Parents should always talk to their children about the dangerous and worrying things in life. Amongst other reasons, children will in all probability get to use unrestricted devices at some stage, e.g. when visiting friends, and will then be free to explore as they please.

We also strongly advise parents who decide to use parental control software to ensure that it is appropriately configured and working as intended on all relevant devices. This can be done by searching for some websites in categories that should be blocked, to see if these can be accessed. If time restrictions have been set, the parent should attempt to use the computer/Internet at a time when usage has been forbidden. If the child has his or her own account on a computer, parents need to log on with the child's account to ensure that monitoring and filtering are being applied as expected. In most cases, simply installing a parental control product, or security suite with a parental control component, will not have any effect; the software has to be configured in line with the parent's requirements and applied to all account(s) that the child has access to. We suggest contacting the vendor's technical support service if parents are unsure how to use the product.

About this review

In this review, we have attempted to answer the following questions about the product:

- Which versions of Windows does it work with?
- What features does the product provide?
- Which categories of website can be blocked?
- Is it easy to install and configure?
- Does it work with common browsers, i.e. Internet Explorer, Edge, Chrome, and Firefox?
- Could a child bypass the software by using the Google Cache or Google Translate?
- What does the child see when restrictions are applied, e.g. when a web page is blocked?
- What help features are available?

Web-filtering test

Using AV-Comparatives' unique Real-World testing environment, we have tested the product's ability to recognise and block 1,000 websites with pornographic content, and a miscellaneous group with a further 200 sites in the following categories: abortion-related; alcohol sales; creationist (anti-evolution) cults; sale and use of cannabis; online gambling sites; hate sites (e.g. racist or homophobic); web proxies (which allow parental control products to be bypassed); sites encouraging suicide or advising how to do it; online tobacco shops; online weapons sales. Before testing, we configured the product as accurately as possible to block the websites in the test categories. We have additionally tested for false alarms, using 50 specifically child-friendly sites.

ESET Smart Security 8.0.319.0
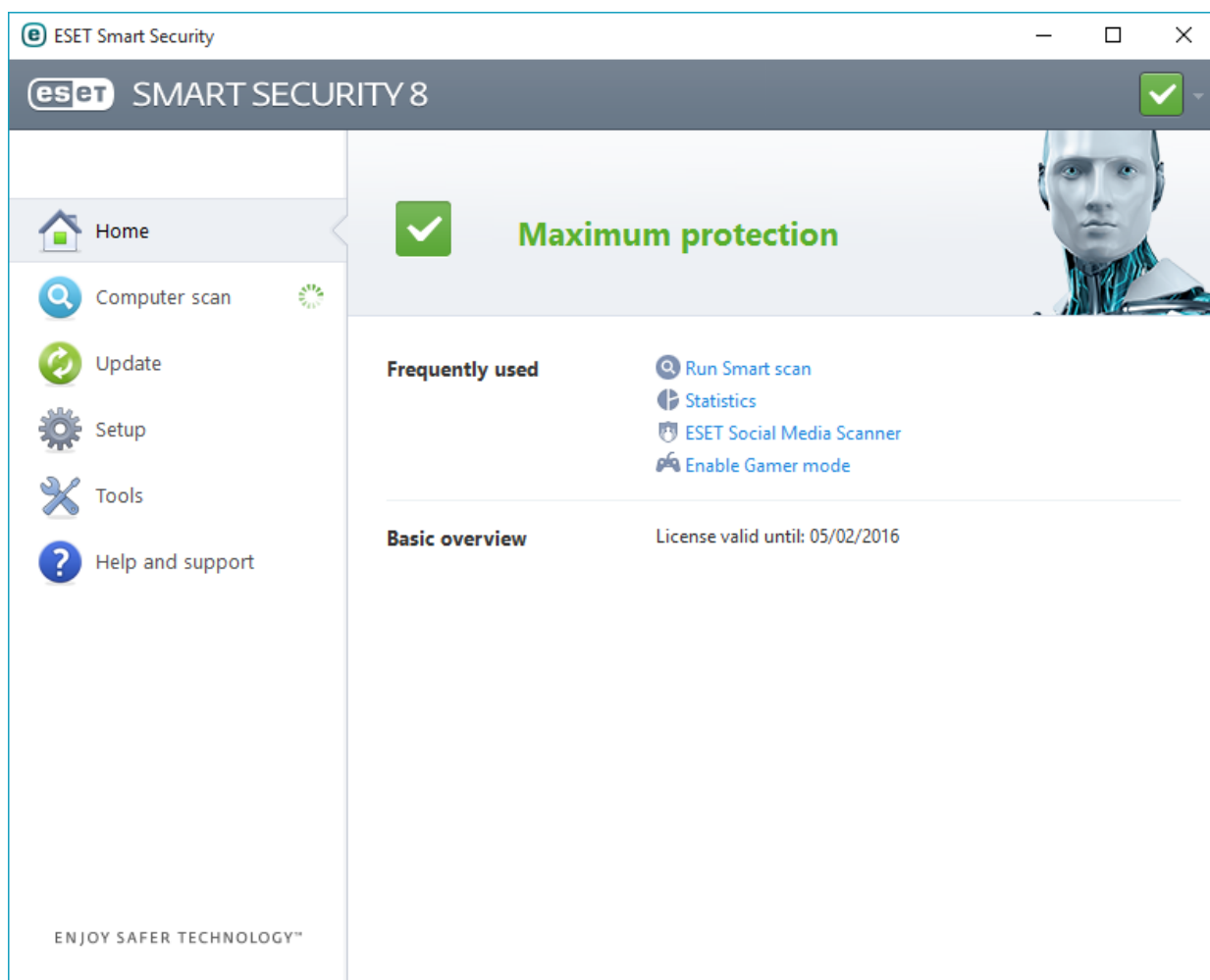
System requirements

Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8, 8.1, 10, Windows Home Server 2003, 2011

Nature of the program

ESET Smart Security is a full security suite, featuring antimalware, antispam, theft protection and a firewall, in addition to the parental control component.

Parental control features

Smart Security includes Web content filtering and Internet-activity monitoring.

Installation and configuration

Installing the program requires the user to accept a licence agreement, decide whether to detect potentially unwanted programs, and whether to join ESET's data-sharing scheme. A prompt also asks the user to define the current network as private or public, and decide whether to set up the anti-theft feature.

To configure the parental control feature, the parent clicks on *Setup* in the left-hand column of the program window, then *Parental control* and sets this to *Enabled*. A list of Windows user accounts is then shown:

Test commissioned by the vendor of the product.
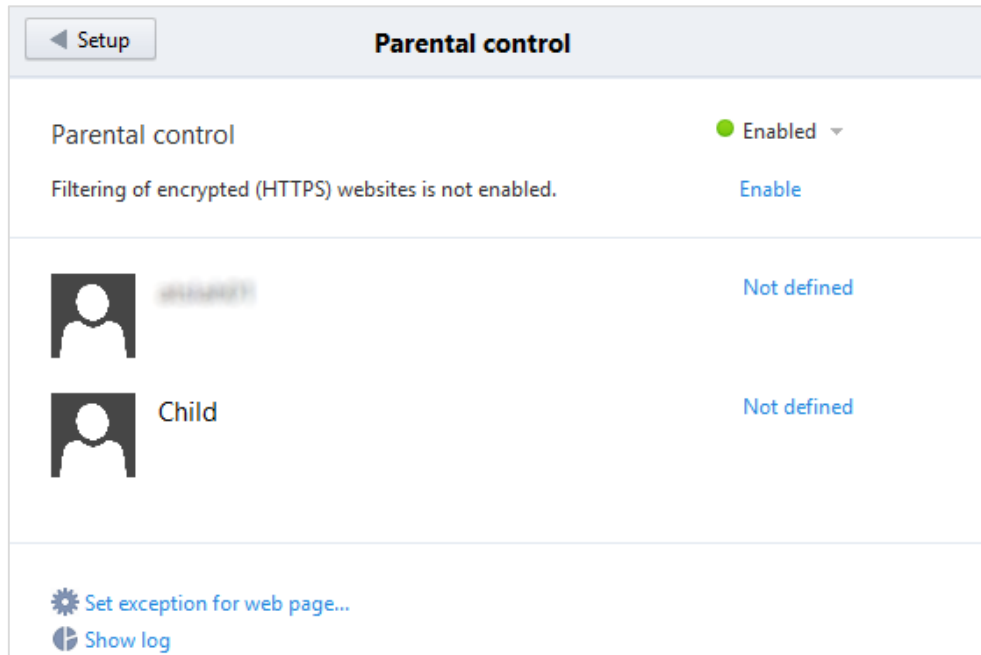
Clicking on the child's username brings up a prompt for the child's age. When this has been entered, the feature becomes operational, with the default filtering settings for that age being applied. We note that filtering of https websites needs to be enabled separately; this is done by clicking *Enable* in the relevant section of the page at the top. To see and customise the list of categories filtered by the program, the parent clicks on the *Setup* link which appears next to the child's account name when the feature has been activated. This opens the following dialog:
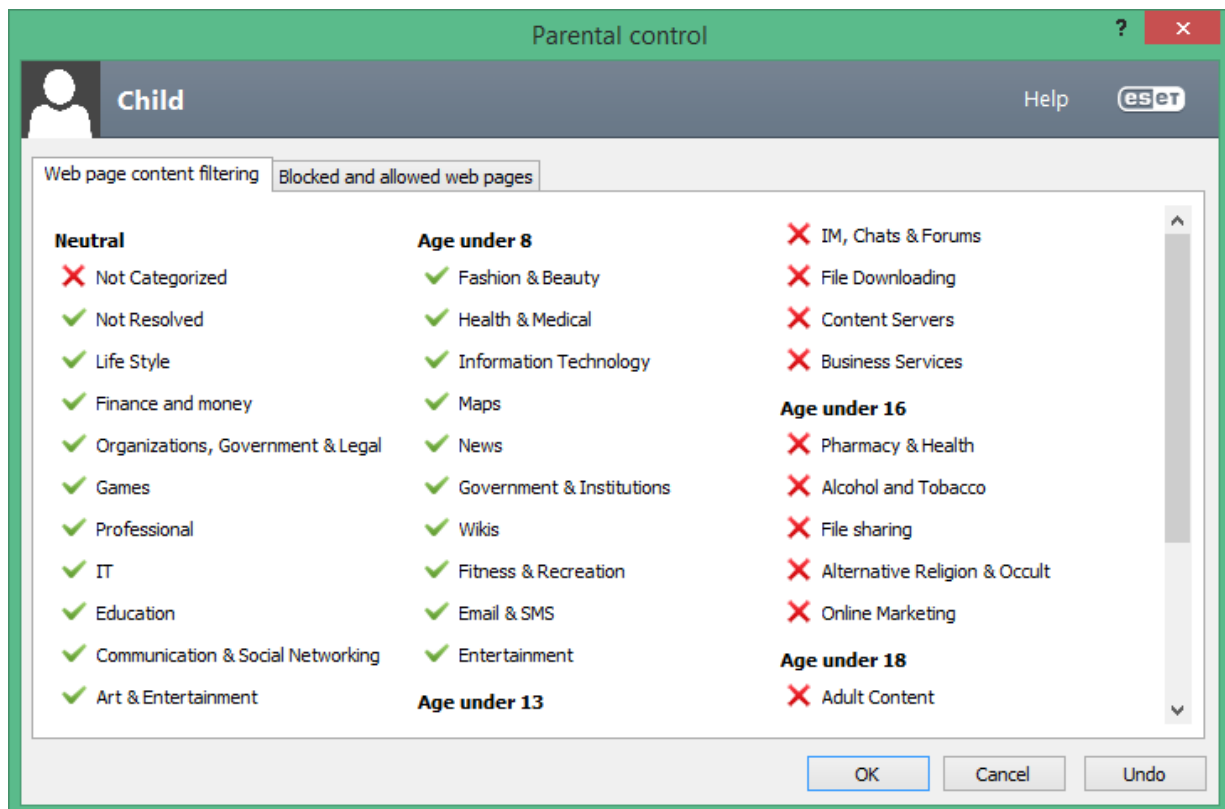
Web filtering Categories

Not categorised, not resolved, lifestyle, finance and money, organisations/government/legal, games, professional, IT, education, communication/social networking, art/entertainment, search engines/portals, recreations/sport/hobby, security/malware, criminal/questionable, for children, fashion/beauty, health/medical, information technology, maps, news, government/institutions, wikis, fitness/recreation, email/SMS, entertainment, weapons, shopping, religion/philosophy, recreation/sport, nudity, jobs/properties, IM/chat/forums, file downloading, content servers, business services, pharmacy/health, alcohol/tobacco, file sharing, alternative religion and occult, online marketing, adult content, criminal/drugs, gambling, miscellaneous, violence and hate.

Browser Test

In our test, we found that the software worked identically with Microsoft Edge, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Internet Explorer.

Web-filtering test results

In our URL filtering test, Smart Security blocked 99.8% of pornography sites, and 89% of other sites, with a high block rate in all individual sub-categories[1]. In terms of false positives, it blocked 7 out of 50 child-friendly sites.

Using Google services as a bypass

When we attempted to bypass the filter using the Google cache, the cached page was blocked. However, using Google Translate, we were able to see blocked sites, both in translation and in the original English.

## What does the child see when a page is blocked?
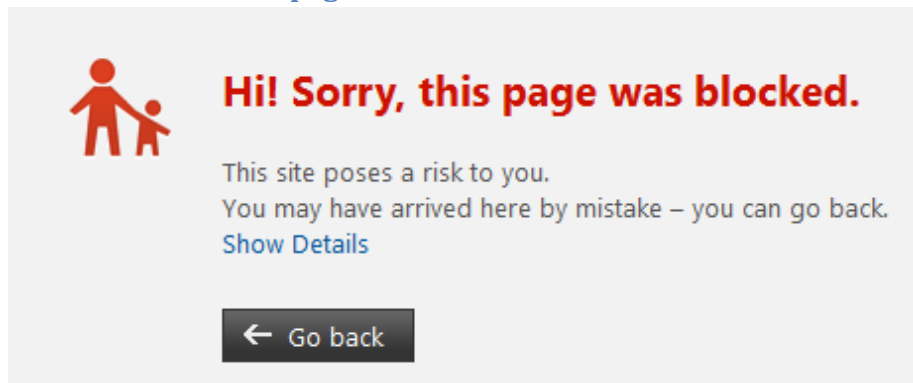
Clicking *Show Details* displays the category of blocked material that the website is considered to belong to.

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[1] Abortion 80%; Alcohol 100%; Cults 85%; Drugs 95%; Gambling 89%; Hate 83%; Proxies 85%; Suicide 69%; Tobacco 100%; Weapons 100%

Blacklisting/whitelisting

To blacklist or whitelist an entry, the parent clicks *Blocked and allowed web pages* tab in the Parental Control dialog box, types in the web address, selects *Allow* or *Block* as appropriate, and then *Add*:
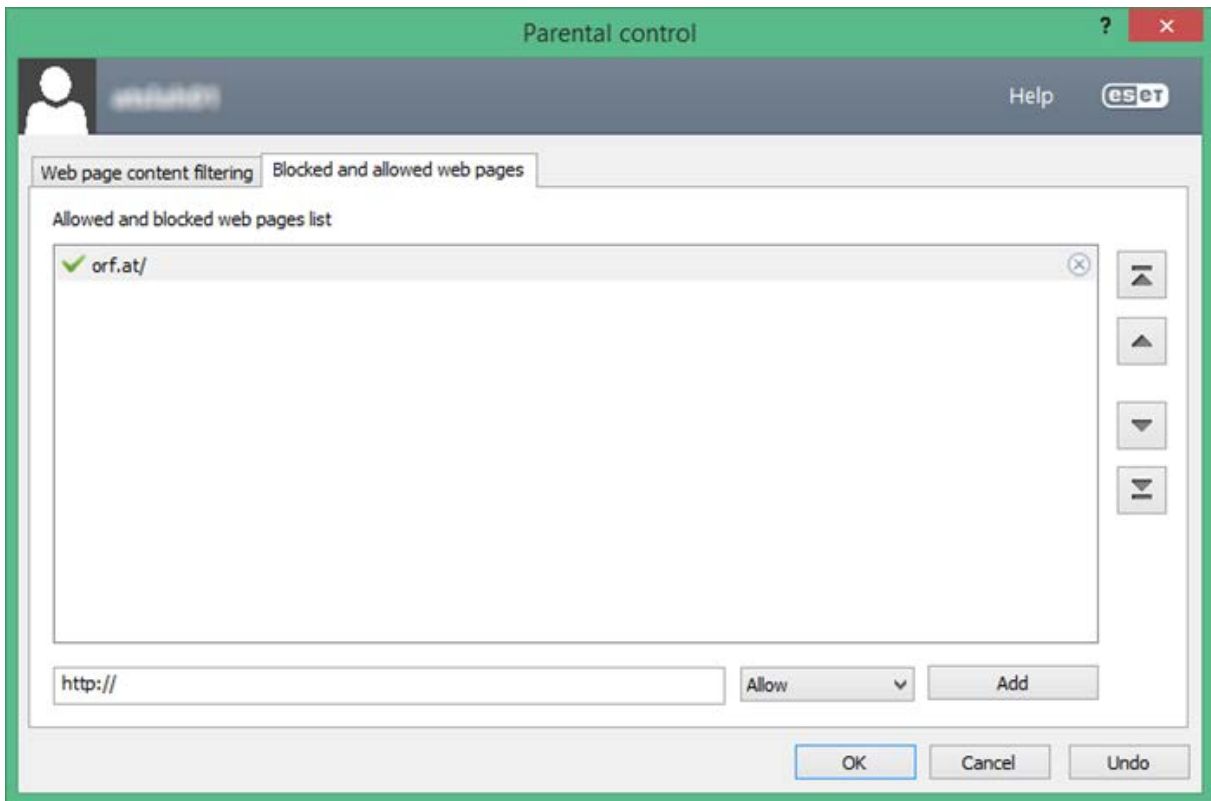

Monitoring

A list of websites blocked by the program can be seen by clicking on *Tools* in the main program window, then *Logs,* and setting the dropdown list at the top to *Filtered websites*:
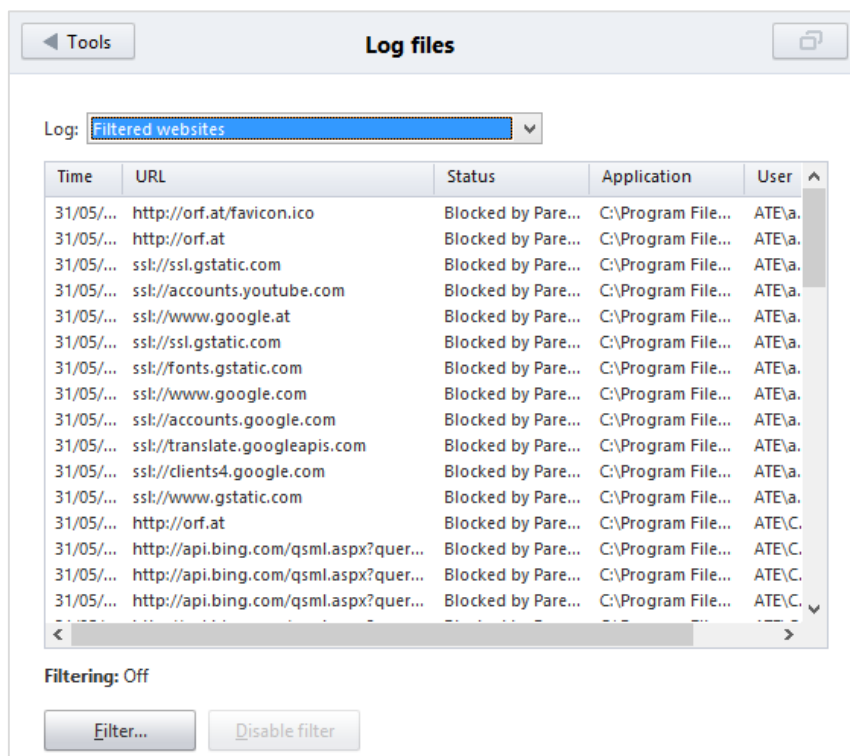
Help

Clicking on *Help and Support* in the left-hand pane of the main program window, then *Open Help* opens the local help window. This has comprehensive text instructions for all the features of the suite, illustrated with screenshots:
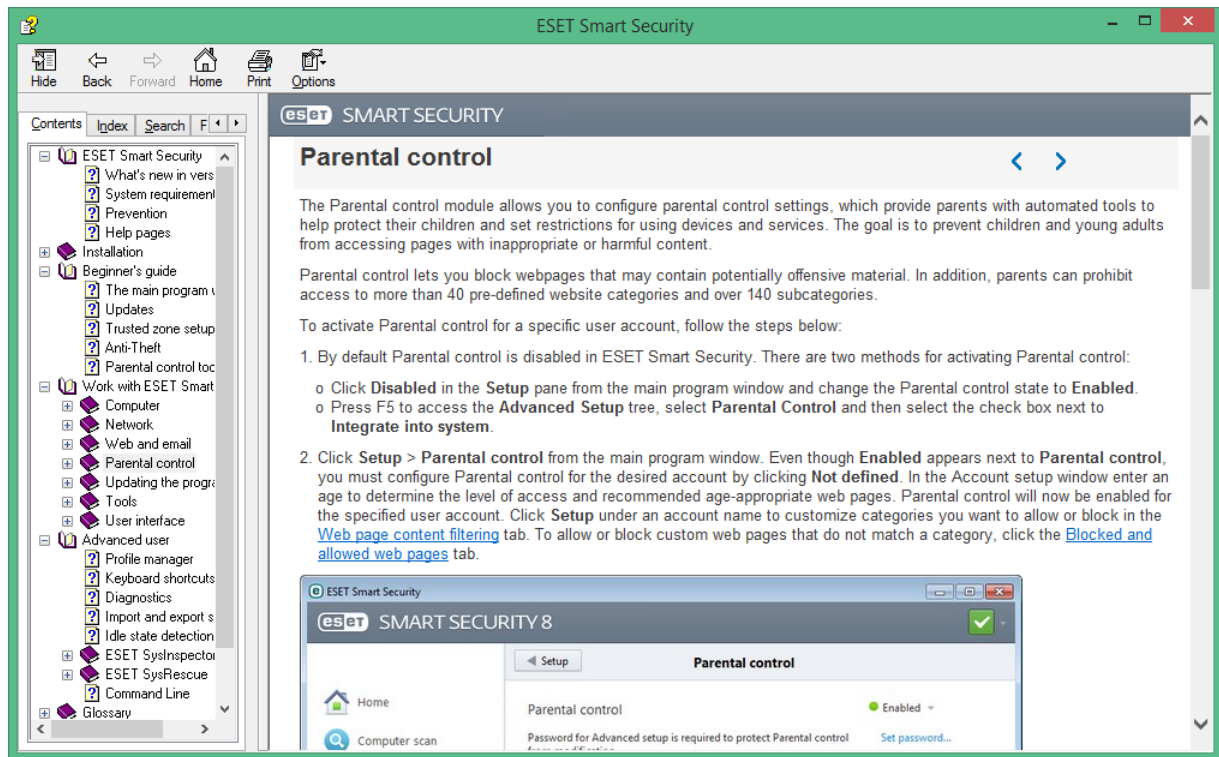
The *Help and support* page of the main-window also has a link to the ESET knowledge base, which provides instructions for specific tasks, generously illustrated with annotated screenshots. Finally, there is a comprehensive 120-page manual with detailed descriptions of all the features and their use, also very well illustrated.

Verdict

ESET Smart Security's parental control features are limited to web filtering and monitoring, but we feel it does these very well. We found it to be straightforward to configure, with excellent help facilities. The list of categories is extensive but not excessive, whilst the pre-defined age groups are helpful in making a selection for a child of a particular age. In our web-filtering test, it was very effective at blocking sites in all categories. We have one suggestion for improvement, namely to prevent the use of Google Translate to bypass the filter.

As ESET Smart Security performed competently in our test and is easy to use, we are happy to give it our Approved Parental Control Product award.

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For more information about AV-Comparatives and the testing methodologies, please visit our website.

(September 2015)