Supporting young people online

Information and advice for parents and carers



The internet – an inspiring and positive place

The internet is an amazing resource which enables children and young people to connect, communicate and be creative in a number of different ways, on a range of devices. However, the internet is always changing, and being able to keep up to date with your children's use of technology can be a challenge. You may sometimes feel that your children have better technical skills than you do, however children and young people still need advice and protection when it comes to managing their lives online.

Issues that your child may encounter on the internet will vary depending on their age and online activities. We have grouped potential online risks into these 4 categories.

Conduct:
Children need to be aware of the impact that their online activity can have on both themselves and other people, and the digital footprint that they create on the internet. It's easy to feel anonymous online and it's important that children are aware of who is able to view, and potentially share, the information that they may have posted. When using the internet, it's important to keep personal information safe and not share it with strangers. Discuss with your child the importance of reporting inappropriate conversations, messages, images and behaviours and how this can be done.

Content:
Some online content is not suitable for children and may be hurtful or harmful. This is true for content accessed and viewed via social networks, online games, blogs and websites. It's important for children to consider the reliability of online material and be aware that it might not be true or written with a bias. Children may need your help as they begin to assess content in this way. There can be legal consequences for using or downloading copyrighted content, without seeking the author's permission.

Contact:
It is important for children to realise that new friends made online may not be who they say they are and that once a friend is added to an online account, you may be sharing your personal information with them. Regularly reviewing friends lists and removing unwanted contacts is a useful step. Privacy settings online may also allow you to customise the information that each friend is able to access. If you have concerns that your child is, or has been, the subject of inappropriate sexual contact or approach by another person, it's vital that you report it to the police via the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (**www.ceop.police.uk**). If your child is the victim of cyberbullying, this can also be reported online and offline. Reinforce with your child the importance of telling a trusted adult straight away if someone is bullying them or making them feel uncomfortable, or if one of their friends is being bullied online.

Commercialism:
Young people's privacy and enjoyment online can sometimes be affected by advertising and marketing schemes, which can also mean inadvertently spending money online, for example within applications. Encourage your children to keep their personal information private, learn how to block both pop ups and spam emails, turn off in-app purchasing on devices where possible, and use a family email address when filling in online forms.

There are real advantages in maintaining an open dialogue with your child about their internet use. Not sure where to begin? These conversation starter suggestions can help.

1. Ask your children to tell you about the websites and apps they like to use and what they enjoy doing online.

2. Ask them about how they stay safe online. What tips do they have for you, and where did they learn them? What is OK and not OK to share?

3. Ask them if they know where to go for help, where to find the safety advice, privacy settings and how to report or block on the services they use.

4. Encourage them to help someone! Perhaps they can show you how to do something better online or they might have a friend who would benefit from their help and support.

5. Think about how you each use the internet. What more could you do to use the internet together? Are there activities that you could enjoy as a family?

What can I do right now?

- ☐ Maintain an open dialogue with your child and encourage them to talk to you about their internet use: for example who they're talking to, services they're using, and any issues they may be experiencing.
- ☐ Create a family agreement to establish your children's boundaries, and your expectations, when on the internet.
- ☐ Give your child strategies to deal with any online content that they are not comfortable with – such as turning off the screen, telling an adult they trust and using online reporting facilities.
- ☐ Consider using filtering software to block unwanted content. In addition to filtering, remember that discussion with your child, and involvement in their internet use, are both effective ways to educate them about the internet.
- ☐ Encourage your children to 'think before you post.' Online actions can impact not only yourself but the lives of others. Content posted privately online can be publicly shared by others, and may remain online forever.
- ☐ Understand the law. Some online behaviour may break the law, for example when downloading or sharing content with others. Be able to recommend legal services.
- ☐ Familiarise yourself with the privacy settings and reporting features available on popular sites and services.
- ☐ If your child is being bullied online, save all available evidence and know where to report the incident, for example to the school, service provider, or the police if the law has been broken.
- ☐ Familiarise yourself with the age ratings for games and apps which can help to indicate the level and suitability of the content. Also see if online reviews are available from other parents as these may be helpful.
- ☐ Set up a family email address that your children can use when signing up to new games and websites online.
- ☐ Encourage your children to use nicknames (where possible) instead of their full name online, to protect their personal information, and create strong passwords for every account.
- ☐ Set up a PIN or password on devices to help protect personal information.

Sign up to our Childnet newsletter at **www.childnet.com**.

Help make sure that your children know how to stay safe online, by using our SMART Rules for primary aged children, or 5 Tips for Teens.

5 SMART Rules for primary aged children:

S **Safe:** Keep safe by being careful not to give out personal information when you're chatting or posting online. Personal information includes your email address, phone number and password.

M **Meet:** Meeting someone you have only been in touch with online can be dangerous. Only do so with your parents' or carers' permission and even then only when they can be present. Remember online friends are still strangers even if you have been talking to them for a long time.

A **Accepting:** Accepting emails, messages, or opening files, images or texts from people you don't know or trust can lead to problems – they may contain viruses or nasty messages!

R **Reliable:** Someone online might lie about who they are and information on the internet may not be true. Always check information by looking at other websites, in books, or with someone who knows. If you like chatting online it's best to only chat to your real world friends and family.

T **Tell:** Tell a parent, carer or a trusted adult if someone, or something, makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, or if you or someone you know is being bullied online.

5 Tips for Teens:

1 **Protect your online reputation:** use the tools provided by online services to manage your digital footprints and 'think before you post.' Content posted online can last forever and could be shared publicly by anyone.

2 **Know where to find help:** understand how to report to service providers and use blocking and deleting tools. If something happens that upsets you online, it's never too late to tell someone.

3 **Don't give in to pressure:** if you lose your inhibitions you've lost control; once you've pressed send you can't take it back.

4 **Respect the law:** use reliable services and know how to legally access the music, film and TV you want.

5 **Acknowledge your sources:** use trustworthy content and remember to give credit when using other people's work/ideas.

Further advice and resources:

www.childnet.com
www.saferinternet.org.uk

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