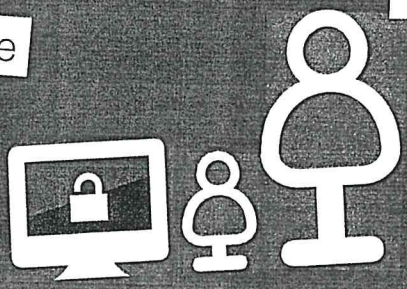
Supporting young people online

Information and advice **for parents and carers**

Childnet International



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 create 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?

KEEPING **UNDER FIVES** SAFE ONLINE

Children love using technology and are learning to navigate websites, online games and consoles, and touch screen technology like tablets and smartphones from a younger and younger age.

81%

Latest Ofcom research has shown that 81% of 5-15 year olds have access to a tablet at home and almost 40% of 3-4 year olds and two thirds of 5-7 year olds go online. We know that children need support in these environments, to get the best out of using the internet, and there are real advantages in making sure that children are supported in their internet use right from the start.

These eight frequently asked questions will provide you with useful information and tips that you can put in to place at home, to help keep your youngest children safe online.

1

Where do I start?

The best way to keep your family safe online, and to understand your children's internet use, is to use the internet together. Active engagement and conversations with your children are key. Be positive and embrace the technologies that young children enjoy and look for family activities or games. Take time to explore the games and services that your children are using, or want to use, and look out for any safety features that may be available. This will give you a better understanding of the different ways that children are engaging with technology and help you to feel more confident.

Should I set any rules?

In the same way that you set rules for most areas of your children's lives, establish your expectations regarding online activities. Creating a **family agreement (www.childnet.com/have-a-conversation)** is a useful step, which might include time spent online, sites that can be visited, and behaviour expected; remember, what's right and wrong offline is also right and wrong online. It's a great idea to agree these rules from the outset, so that you and your children are aware of their boundaries.

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How can I supervise my child?

Placing your computer or laptop in a busy part of the house e.g. the living room or kitchen can be helpful. This can make it easier for you to be involved in their technology use. But remember, the internet can be accessed from a number of portable devices, for example smartphones, games consoles and tablets. Portable devices may allow you to ensure your children are using them where you can see them and your children can still be supervised. To find out more about the internet capabilities of smartphones, gaming consoles and other devices, check out our **Parents' Guide to Technology (www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech)**.

How much time is too much time?

Children can be enthusiastic users of technology. The challenge can be to harness this enthusiasm and ensure a balance, so that the use of technology does not negatively impact on other important areas of young children's lives. There are some strategies that can be used to help manage the time online issue, such as agreeing time limits or using time limiting tools, designating weekly times to use the internet together, or removing portable devices from your child's bedroom at night to avoid tiredness.

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Are there tools to help?

There are free parental controls and filters available, to help you set safer boundaries for your children, but you will usually be required to set them up. Your internet service provider (such as BT or TalkTalk) will provide free filters to help block age inappropriate content for children, and on the UK Safer Internet Centre website you can watch **video tutorials (www.saferintenet.org.uk/parental-controls)** that show you how to find and set these up. All Mobile phone operators (such as O2 or Vodafone) also provide such parental controls for free. The websites of device manufacturers (such as games consoles) should also outline the controls to which you have access.

Filtering options can be found within websites and services themselves, for example on YouTube or 'safe search' settings can be applied to search engines such as Google or Bing. There are even some services adapted for children (such as the YouTube Kids and BBC iPlayer Kids apps). Parental controls can be password protected, so it's advisable to choose a strong password and not share it. Parental controls and filters are a good starting point but it is important to recognise that they are not 100% effective. They are a great help, but not a solution, and work best in combination with parental supervision and engagement, to help your children understand how to stay safe online. As children grow and develop, so do their online needs, therefore you may want to periodically review your parental controls to accommodate this.

4. Online resources for parents and carers

A Parents' Guide to Technology: The UK Safer Internet Centre has created this guide to answer commonly asked questions and introduce some of the most popular devices used by children, highlighting the safety tools available and empowering parents with the knowledge they need to support their children to use these technologies safely and responsibly. **www.saferinternet.org.uk/parent-tech**

Internet Parental Controls: The four big internet providers - BT, Sky, Talk Talk and Virgin Media - provide their customers with free parental controls that can be activated at any time. Video tutorials on how to download and use these controls are available on the UK Safer Internet Centre website. **www.saferinternet.org.uk/parental-controls**

Safety Tools on Social Networks and other Online Services: Information and advice on the safety tools, age requirements and terms and conditions for a variety of online services popular with young people. **www.saferinternet.org.uk/safety-tools**

Online Gaming: Childnet's guide contains helpful advice and information on supporting children and young people playing games online. **www.childnet.com/online-gaming**

Young People & Social Networking Sites: Aims to help parents understand the positive and creative ways young people are using social networking spaces (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). It also points out the potential risks of using these sites and ways to minimise these risks. **www.childnet.com/sns**

Social Network Checklists: Free guides produced by the UK Safer Internet Centre that contain detailed instructions and information on privacy and account settings on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram. **www.saferinternet.org.uk/checklists**

5. Where to report / get help

Need help? Information about what to do if a child comes to you for help and advice about how to report online concerns such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content or illegal behaviour. **www.saferinternet.org.uk/need-help**

Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP): A police agency tackling child abuse on the internet. This website includes a unique facility that enables parents and young people to make reports of actual or attempted abuse online **www.ceop.police.uk**. CEOP's Think U Know website contains information for children and parents, as well as a link for children to report abuse online. **www.thinkuknow.co.uk**

Internet Watch Foundation: Part of the UK Safer Internet Centre, the IWF is the UK's hotline for reporting illegal content found on the internet. It deals specifically with child abuse and criminally obscene images hosted in the UK and internationally. **www.iwf.org.uk**

NSPCC: The NSPCC has partnered with O2 to provide an online safety helpline for parents and carers to answer questions and address concerns about a child's online safety: **0808 800 5000**

Children can talk to someone for advice and support at any time by contacting **Childline** on **0800 1111** or chatting to a counsellor online at **www.childline.org.uk**

True Vision: Online content which incites hatred on the grounds of race, religion and sexual orientation can be reported to True Vision; a UK website set up to tackle all forms of hate crime, including those on the grounds of disability and transgender identity. **www.report-it.org.uk**

Co-financed by the European Union
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