

E-safety: information for parents

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Introduction

Parents have a highly important role to play in keeping their children safe online; any changes that are made at home are likely to impact their child's behaviour elsewhere, including in school. If pupils are taught to minimise the risk of online activity by their parents, they will usually reinforce this practice themselves and with others when accessing the internet in school.

This guidance document outlines what parents can do to increase their own awareness of e-safety and influence their child's behaviour, helping them to understand how to use the internet safely. Schools should use this document to print and hand out to parents – it may also be useful to publish this on the school's website.

Chatting

Children can talk to others online in a variety of ways using many different platforms – this can be via text-based messaging, including instant messaging and SMS, or voice/video link, including internet phone calls and webcam. Chatting can also take the form of instant, real-time communication through chat rooms and instant messaging, or delayed communication using email and voicemail.

Tips for parents:

- Familiarise yourself with the chat programme your child uses and make sure you understand its safety functions – contact the service provider if you are unsure.
- Make sure you talk to your child to find out who they are talking to online – encourage them to think before talking to anyone they don't know in person.
- Pay attention to and monitor your child's online behaviour – make sure you negotiate and establish boundaries, highlighting the importance of the concept of 'friends'.
- Make sure your child understands that arranging to meet with anyone they have met online is dangerous, and that they should only do so with your permission.
- Ask your child if they know how to block or remove someone that they don't want to talk to – if they don't, make sure you learn about this and show them. Ensure they know how to report someone who makes them feel uncomfortable online.
- Consider installing parental control software to introduce filtering options, monitoring and time limits for access to online chat.

- If you notice any misconduct between your child and someone else, investigate it. Report people and inappropriate conversations to the site provider, and always keep a copy of the conversation as evidence.
- Discuss with your child how people may use chatting to explore their sexuality, e.g. through sexting.

Sharing

Children are able to share almost anything online – whether this be imagery, videos, opinions and thoughts, interests, or personal details – and all at the click of a button. Whilst this ease of use is widely supported, the risks associated with this also need to be managed.

Tips for parents:

- Consider setting up a family email address and only use this to fill in any online forms requiring personal details.
- Establish clear guidelines for your child so they understand what is suitable to share online and what is not – perhaps give examples of what you have shared online and why.
- Talk to your child about how easy it is for people to assume another identity online.
- Identify and list any sites you wish to block access to – contact your internet service provider to install parental controls.
- Make sure you have internet security software on your computers and mobile devices, and keep these up-to-date.
- Ensure you understand that children can access the internet through publicly available WiFi, such as in restaurants, and check whether your child's devices have any tools to manage inappropriate content from this access.
- Be aware that some devices contain location technology allowing the device's location and surrounding services to be identified. This also allows the location of the device, and your child, to be identified by others.

Gaming

Online gaming is increasingly popular amongst children and can be accessed via mobile phones, computers, games consoles and other devices such as tablets. Through online gaming, children are able to interact with others, including people they don't know, and engage in chat and sharing.

Tips for parents:

- Access the [guidance](#) to inform your choices when buying games for your child, or deciding whether the games they are playing are appropriate, by following the age-ratings assigned to each game.
- Read each game's advice for parents, and play the game yourself to help you understand what it involves.
- Only allow your child to use games from reputable and legal online providers.
- Determine boundaries for the amount of time your child can spend on online gaming – in particular, regular five minute breaks taken every 45-60 minutes can help their wellbeing.

- Install parental controls on game consoles to disable or restrict access to facilities, such as voice chat, or to prevent online credit payments.
- Talk to your child about protecting themselves when gaming – keep personal information private, only play games with people they know, etc.
- Make sure your child knows how to report abusive chat when using the game.
- Familiarise yourself with the game’s safety functions – contact the service provider if you are unsure.

Content providing

Similar to sharing, content providing involves files that can be accessed when browsing the internet and which can potentially harm others, such as viruses that take personal details and pass them on to others.

Tips for parents:

- Install safe search filters and apply these to particular devices.
- Make sure your child knows it’s illegal to download most films, songs and games without paying for them. Show your child the secure sites to purchase these from – if it’s your account, set limits on how much they can spend.
- Check any download site your child is using and make sure it’s legal and trustworthy.
- Consider installing parental controls to monitor your child’s browsing and access to certain sites. For those under 18, parents can contact mobile service providers to install network filters that block certain websites.
- Check your child’s internet search history for signs of illegal activity – remember, a deleted internet history can also be an indicator of illegal or suspicious activity.
- Install software filters on all computers, laptops, mobiles and other devices. Similarly, make sure you install antivirus or firewall software on all devices, and keep these up-to-date.
- Check your bank accounts and all bills for any signs of identity theft.
- Discuss how others may explore their sexuality through content providing, e.g. by accessing pornography.
- Find out what plagiarism rules your child’s school employs through a discussion with your child or with the school.

Networking

The use of social networking platforms is popular for a number of reasons and, whilst it allows children to communicate with others and share their information, it is these actions that pose harmful risks. Parents should be able to recognise the risks networking can have on their children, and aim to communicate with them to better understand what they are doing.

Tips for parents:

- Regularly communicate with your child to find out who they are talking to online, for what purposes, and using which platforms.
- Set boundaries for your child on when they can set up certain social networking accounts, and do it with them when you allow this.

- Make sure your child applies the strongest privacy settings to their social networking accounts.
 - Talk to your child about being aware of who they communicate with online, making sure they only talk to people who they know.
 - Explain the importance of being truthful about their age online – particularly when signing up for social networking sites.
 - Discuss the information that is suitable for them to post on social networking sites, and that they should remember what is posted is retrievable in future.
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