

The Internet & Safe Surfing

The internet is such an integral part of children's lives these days. It opens up so many educational and social opportunities, giving them access to, quite literally, a world of information and experiences.

Whether on a computer at school, a laptop at home, a games console or mobile phone, children and young people are increasingly accessing the internet whenever they can and wherever they are.

As you would protect your child in the real world, you will want to make sure that they are safe whatever they are doing. Like learning to cross the road, online safety skills are skills for life. If your child understands the risks and can make sensible and informed choices online, they can get the most from the internet and stay safe whilst doing so – particularly from those people who might seek them out to harm them.

So, how can you protect your child online?

The answer is simple. If you understand the internet and understand what the risks are, there are a number of things you can do that will make your child safer online...

Internet Safety

- * Help your children to understand that they should never give out personal details to online friends they do not know offline.

- * Explain to your children what information about them is personal: i.e. email address, mobile number, school name, sports club, arrangements for meeting up with friends and any pictures or videos of themselves, their family or friends. Small pieces of information can easily be pieced together to form a comprehensive insight in to their lives and daily activities.

- * Make your children aware that they need to think carefully about the information and pictures they post on their profiles. Inform them that once published online, anyone can change or share these images of them.

- * It can be easy to forget that the internet is not a private space, and as result sometimes young people engage in risky behaviour online. Advise your children not to post any pictures, videos or information on their profiles, or in chat rooms, that they would not want a parent or carer to see.

- * If your child receives spam or junk email and texts, remind them never to believe their contents, reply to them or use them.

- * It's not a good idea for your child to open files that are from people they don't know. They won't know what they contain—it could be a virus, or worse - an inappropriate image or film.

* Help your child to understand that some people lie online and that therefore it's better to keep online mates online. They should never meet up with any strangers without an adult they trust.

* Always keep communication open for a child to know that it's never too late to tell someone if something makes them feel uncomfortable.

Some simple ways to keep children safe online

* Get to know your child's online habits. Children are inquisitive. They will look to explore the internet as much as they do the real world. Knowing the sites they go to, the people they meet there and what they do will help to keep children safe.

* Stay alert to any sudden changes in mood or appearance, or to any major change in habits or to increased secretiveness. These are often tell-tale signs that something is not right.

* Keep lines of communication open - tell your child they can always talk to you or another trusted adult, such as a teacher, if they do end up in some sort of trouble on the internet. Make children aware that there are things on the internet which may distress them.

* Spend some time surfing the internet yourself. The more that you know about the internet, the better able you are, in turn, to help your child navigate around it without coming to any harm.

* Install internet filtering software showing a **Child Safety Online Kitemark** on your computer. Filtering products with a Kitemark have been independently tested to provide a simple and effective means of support to parents, helping to ensure that a child's online experience is a safe one. The Kitemark scheme is sponsored by the Home Office and Ofcom.

- Be aware of professional sources of help. These include:

http://www.wisekids.org.uk/parents_internetsafetyguidelines.htm

www.ceop.gov.uk: the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) is the Government body dedicated to eradicating abuse of children. Concerns about inappropriate contacts between a child and an adult, including online, can be reported directly to CEOP.

www.iwf.org.uk: the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) works to remove illegal material from the internet. If you have found any material you believe to be illegal e.g. child sex abuse images, other obscene material or material which incites racial hatred, you can report it to the IWF.