

Online Safety Parent and Carers Tips



“We are living through the largest unregulated social experiment of all time - a generation of youth who have been exposed to extreme content online”

Psychologist Michael Seto

This leaflet accompanies the parent online safety presentation from Ictinspires. This document provides an overview of the subject and more information is available on our website: www.ictinspires.com/parents

Access to harmful content:

One of the key risks when using the internet, is that young people may be exposed to inappropriate material. This can be content that is pornographic, hateful or violent in nature; that encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal; or that is age-inappropriate or biased. The digital world is complicated. It is risky, challenging and has little respect for age.



Children need the skills to recognise problems such as bullying or grooming and feel confident about confiding in you. They need to take age - appropriate risks online so they can learn how to navigate the digital world, with all its challenges. However, they need to do so in a safe environment.

Remember: Once a child has seen something inappropriate they cannot 'un-see it' and it can leave an invisible scar.

Tips:

- Investigate available parental controls to protect your child from adult content (e.g. from your home broadband service)
- Talk about relationships and pornography - before they start looking online. Parental support for conversation starters is available online (e.g. Parentzone.org.uk)
- Be aware of any changes in your child's behaviour - make sure lines of communication are open so they can talk to you
- Protect your child from age inappropriate or violent games. Decide what PEGI rating games you will allow them to play (e.g. 7+, 12+, 16+, 18+ games). Check out content through Common Sense Media (commonsensemedia.org)
- Tell them about risks in the real world and online world and help them build resilience

Violent or explicit games normalise abnormal behaviour. Young children and adolescents do not have the maturity to make the distinction. Many games also include extreme language and live chat not suitable for children.

Potential risks of excessive online access:

- Behavioural issues
- Increase in anxiety and depression
- Low self esteem
- Sleep problems



Recommended Screen Time

There are no specific guidelines from UK government on screen time for children and young people. In the US the guidance is :

- **No screen time AT ALL for babies under 2 years**
- **Under 5's should be less than 1 hour per day**
- **Aged 6 - 18 years no more than 2 hours per day**

That's a tough call for teenagers, especially with homework often requiring computer time. The real concern is non-educational, leisure screen time, so you may wish to discount any educational screen time.

Pay attention to how your child behaves during and after watching TV, playing video games or using social media. If you're concerned about heavy media use, consider creating a 'technology agreement' that works for your family. (e.g. from childnet.com)

Tips:

There are many ways to restrict and monitor your child's access to technology. For example:

- Remove devices from bedrooms (immediately you will be aware of how much time they are online and what they are doing or seeing)
- Set boundaries on your children's devices (e.g. use screenlimit.net or ourpact.com)
- Set ground rules (e.g. no devices at meal times)
- **Set a good example (be aware of your own online access). Make sure you look up from your device to talk to your child**

Social networking and changed behaviour:

The benefits of the internet are enormous - including the ability to network in real time across the globe. However, social networking is still in its infancy. In the mid 2000's psychologists claimed social networking in an online context would never take off. It's all so new; there are no studies yet to evaluate the impact of technology on the 21st century child.

We all need to be aware of the psychological changes and potential risks when we are online but in particular of the impact to children and young people. For example:

- Disinhibition (more likely to do or say things online that they wouldn't do offline. This includes sharing inappropriate content).
- Impact on sleep which can affect mental health.
- Low self esteem due to comparing themselves with 'online perfection' of others. This can lead to chasing 'likes' or 'friends' in an obsessive way and can lead to depression.
- Bystander effect/Online Bullying. The more people there are in a situation the less likely it is that one person will intervene. Therefore online bullying can draw a child in 'to join the crowd' or make it less likely they step in and stop it.
- Confused sense of themselves. Young people have an online 'persona' which can be very different from the offline one. Altered images and inflated scenarios can affect their perception of themselves.



Tips:

- Talk about the way most people online only share the 'good stuff' which can seem that everyone's life is better than theirs.
- Talk about online bullying and that it is important to not be drawn in. Make sure they can talk to you if they are being bullied.
- Talk about their self development and what it means - distinguishing between their 'real self' and their 'cyber self'.