

Staying Safe Online – Support for parents and carers

The internet – on the whole 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 may be at risk because of their own behaviour, for example, by sharing too much information

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: age-inappropriate or unreliable content can be available to children

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: children can be contacted by bullies or people who groom or seek to abuse them

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 can be unaware of hidden costs and advertising in apps, games and websites

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.

Have a conversation

It is really important to chat with your children on an ongoing basis about staying safe online.

Not sure where to begin? These conversation starter suggestions can help.

1. Ask your children to tell you about the sites they like to visit 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?

How much screen time is OK for my child?

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) have produced guidance for screen time use of under-18s. Following research into this area, they have advised that no set amount of time is necessary to adhere to but that devices should not replace sleep, exercise or family time. They advise that devices should be avoided in the hour before bed to promote healthy sleep and have provided the following checklist to help parents and carers make decisions about their family's screen time use:

- Is your family's screen time under control?
- Does screen use interfere with what your family want to do?
- Does screen use interfere with sleep?
- Are you able to control snacking during screen time?

Dr Russel Viner, President of the RCPCH comments on screen time, stating that,

"One size doesn't fit all, parents need to think about what's useful and helpful for their child."

"Parents should consider their own use of screens, if screen time is controlled in their family, and if excessive use is affecting their child's development and everyday life."

Trying to actively count or keep track of screen time hours can be problematic and raise anxiety levels unnecessarily. Instead, forming a family media plan that takes into account screen time, when and where devices are accessible and what content can be accessed will be beneficial for the whole family..

Top Tips to get you started:

Although a one-size-fits-all solution would arguably be unrealistic, there are lots of simple things you can do as a parent/ carer to ensure that you feel confident about your child's interaction with technology, and set achievable goals that work for your family.

Read our top tips:



1. Use digital devices together

Get involved in your child's online activities. Have fun, play games and learn together online, just as you would in the physical world. It will then be natural for your child to turn to you if they experience anything upsetting online.



2. Set clear expectations

Clear family rules can help your child have a positive start to their digital life and get the most out of being online. Ask your child to help create some family rules.



3. Be informed

Many digital devices, services and content providers offer a range of parental controls. You can choose the type of content and options that are suitable for your child.



4. Establish good habits early on

Both adults and children enjoy sharing moments with family and friends through online images and videos. Starting conversations and good habits early on is a great way to support children in staying safe online.

Further advice and guidance can be found through the following links:

[Safer Internet:](#)

[CEOP](#)

[NSPCC Online Safety Quiz](#)