E-safety:

Protecting your child online

Information for parents

C S C b

Camden Safeguarding
Children Board

Introduction

All children use computers at school, at home or in places like libraries and clubs, and schools are keen to use the benefits of the internet to support children's learning.

The internet provides children with excellent opportunities for learning and communicating with friends. But sometimes, children don't realise that they can be as much at risk online as they are in the real world, and many parents feel they don't know enough about the internet to protect their children from the risks.

This leaflet aims to help parents keep their child safe online by providing information on the risks and what action they can take to protect their child when they use the internet.

How children use the internet

At school and at home, your child may use the internet to:

- find out information
- send messages to friends through email and instant messaging like MSN
- talk to people online in chat-rooms, blogs and forums
- share information about themselves and talk to people on social networking sites like Facebook, Bebo or MySpace
- share files and download music, games and film.

The benefits

Using the internet can help your child to:

- improve their achievement at school
- learn important computer skills
- improve their confidence and communication skills
- develop their hobbies and interests
- find a wide range of information to help them with schoolwork.

These can be:

- **Viewing unsuitable and adult material on websites;** Web searches can come up with a lot of information and images, and some of it may not be suitable for children. They may also receive emails that have unsuitable images, links to adult websites or viruses that attack the computer.

- **Forming online friendships with adults who pose a risk to children;** Some adults may use chat rooms to meet children online by pretending to be a child themselves. They may build up a relationship with the child with the intent of sexually abusing them; this is known as 'grooming'. Children may also share personal information or photographs of themselves on social networking sites that allows them to be contacted or located by unsuitable adults.

- B**uying over the internet;** Children may be tempted to reply to advertisements and offers they receive over the internet and give out financial information that can lead to fraud or identity theft.

- **Cyber bullying;** Chat rooms, mobile phone texts, instant messaging, social networking sites and emails can all be used to bully children by sending offensive or threatening messages or posting mean comments online.

What schools do

School computer systems are designed to protect your child from many of these risks by blocking children's access to unsuitable websites and supervising computer use in the classroom.

Your child's school will already have discussed internet safety with them and you or your child will be asked to sign an acceptable use agreement that sets out the rules your child must follow when using school computers.

It's a good idea to find out what your child's school are doing and follow this at home.

What you can do

Faced with all these risks, parents may be tempted to just stop their children from using the computer, but most children will be able to access the internet in other places or even on their mobile phone.

The best thing to do is to teach your child how to keep themselves safe online and take the following action yourself;

- talk to your child about the dangers of using the internet, show an interest in what they are doing and agree the 'golden rules'.

- let your child know how important it is to tell you about any suspicious contacts or incidents of cyber bullying so you can take action.

- teach your child the basic rules of "netiquette", behaving responsibly on the internet and keeping messages polite.

- let them know what kind of sites they can and can't visit and try to encourage them to only use regulated chat rooms and social networking sites that are designed for their age group.

- take an interest in their online activities; talk to them about what they are doing and who they are talking to.

- contact your internet service provider (for example; BT, Virgin etc) for advice on family security settings and parental controls that can filter internet content, block viruses or spam email to your computer or limit access to certain websites.

- use a child-friendly search engine such as Yahoo!Kids, CBBC Search or Kidsclick to block out unsuitable websites.

- if your child accidently visits an adult website or opens an unsuitable attachment, don't over-react; this may make them less likely to tell you the next time.

Even if you take every precaution, there is still a chance your child may come into contact with unsuitable people or receive offensive images or messages.

Make sure your child knows to tell you about any problems they may have and reassure them that they won't be blamed.

If your child receives unsuitable images...

- tell them to close the link then go into the history folder and delete the website address.

- contact the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) to report any unsuitable websites.

If your child is being bullied...

- tell your child not to reply.

- print or save messages and emails as evidence.

- if the bullying is through email, mobile phone or instant messaging, contact the internet or phone service provider and ask them to block all messages from the sender.

- if the bullying happens in a chat room, tell your child to leave the chat room, then contact the chat room moderator to deal with the problem.

- if the bullying involves hurtful comments on personal websites, contact the website provider and ask them to remove the comments.

- consider changing your child's email address or mobile number and look into the privacy settings for social networking websites.

- if the bully's identity is known and attends your child's school, let the school know what's happening so they can help deal with it.

- if the threats are severe or go on for a long time, contact the police.

If your child is in online contact with an unsuitable adult...

- keep any messages as evidence.

- tell your child to end the online friendship.

- ensure your child only allows close friends to access their social networking site by setting their privacy level to 'friends only'.

- report the matter to the police or the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (see the end of this leaflet for contact details).

Just as you have rules to keep your child safe in the real world such as letting you know where they are going, who they'll be with and what time they should come home, it's a good idea to have similar rules about using the internet.

To make sure they stay safe online, you should teach your child:

- not to give out personal details online, such as their name, address or school, or anyone else's personal details

- not to upload photographs or information onto social networking sites unless you agree.

- not to arrange to meet people they have only met online.

- not to open attachments to emails unless they know and trust the person who sent it.

- not to buy anything off the internet without your permission.

- to only use a webcam with people they know and trust.

- to tell you if they receive any messages or material that makes them feel uncomfortable or makes them feel frightened.

Mobile phones

Mobile phones are now an important part of children's lives and most parents like their child to have one in case of emergencies. Many mobile phones now offer access to the internet but this makes supervising children's internet use more difficult. When buying mobile phones for children, parents may want to consider if internet access is really necessary.

Useful websites

The following websites provide information for parents and children on how to stay safe online and how to report concerns. The Internet Watch Foundation also allows parents to report illegal or concerning websites.

Think U Know
www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Childnet
www.childnet-int.org

Internet Watch Foundation
www.iwf.org.uk

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
www.ceop.gov.uk

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