Online safety and awareness

In our ever-changing world of technology, it is important that we as professionals, parents and carers keep up to date with all the online risks to our children. Technology is now a normal part of everyday life and with this comes learning and development from our children and young adults. This handout is designed to inform you of what children and young people most commonly do online, how to build their online resilience and how to teach them online safety. It will also signpost to specific organisations that provide information and training to professionals, parents, carers, and young people.

What children like to do online according to NSPCC statistics:

- Meet new people
- Access social media
- Communicate to friends and family around the world
- Explore websites
- Write blogs
- Keep up to date with the latest gossip
- Shopping
- Gaming
- Keeping occupied

Risks online: The 3 C's

Content risks- It is very easy for children to come across these online by accident or by deliberately seeking them out. These include:

- Exposure to sexual content or imagery
- Violent content
- Extreme content or opinion
- Biased and skewed content
- Commercial content such as inappropriate advertising, spam, or being asked for sponsorship

Contact risks- Children who go online are participants who engage and interact with the online world. They may be sharing information about themselves, meaning they are exposed to greater risks. These include:

- Being bullied online or harassed by another person
- Having their personal information taken and shared
- Meeting strangers or being groomed and coerced into sharing sexual content

- Being pressured into a behaviour, for example, by someone advocating harm

Conduct risks- Children who go online can be key actors who proactively engage in certain risky behaviours in the online world. These risks include:

- Creating or sharing sexually explicit material, such as explicit pictures or films of themselves
- Bullying or harassing another person
- Downloading music or films illegally
- Creating biased or misleading information or advice

Each of these areas of risk-taking need to be viewed in the context of each individual child, what is harmful to one child may not be to another- It very much depends on their age, levels of maturity, their exposure to online safety, the support they receive, and their personality traits. These can all make children and young people more or less resilient to harm.

Sexual Content

There is growing concern that children who regularly access pornography online are at increased risk of:

- Normalisation of extreme/risky sexual acts, making them more likely to engage in harmful sexual activity
- The development of discriminatory attitudes, perceiving people (in particular girls & women) as sex objects instead of caring partners
- Struggle to engage in, or enjoy real-life relationships or sexual activity, as pornography creates unrealistic expectations.
- An unhealthy preoccupation with sex, which can interfere with other aspects of their lives

ThinkUKnow offers a range of help, support, and advice for parents, professionals and children and young people about sex and relationships: https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/ Legal adult pornography is readily available online and can be found via search engines. However, many children recite instances when they unintentionally find it through pop-ups. Many teenagers are likely to seek

out pornography at some point due to adolescent curiosity and are unlikely to suffer any long-term negative effects from this. Therefore, when a computer is shared it is important for adults and children to have their own separate logins. Whilst you cannot prevent children from seeing certain material, either online or in the real world, you can input **parental controls**. There are a range of filters, blocks, and settings that can restrict children and young people's access to inappropriate online content. Visit the NSPCC website to gain advice on setting up parental controls on a wide range of devices and services:**https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls/**

Youth Produced Sexual Imagery

A young person may send a fully/partially nude image for the following reasons:

- As part of a relationship, to explore sexuality, develop trust, or to flirt
- For affirmation, such as the positive feedback they may receive for sharing nude images
- For a joke with other individuals or a group
- Because they have been pressured, manipulated, or coerced into sharing an image

Ways to support young people with this:

- Help them to understand the risks of sharing images- discuss risks and identify safe and unsafe behaviours, using the education resources available
- Help them learn to resist pressure- young people need to develop the skills and confidence to say no to things they do not want to do, including sharing an intimate message of sending nude images/videos. The NSPCC has created the making sense of relationships PSHE recourse to help parents and teachers cover online safety topics which can be found here https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/schools/making-sense-relationships
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- Help young people to challenge abusive behaviour- sending or sharing a nude or nearly nude image of a child or young person who is under 18 years of age is both abusive and illegal. It is important that this and the consequences of this are understood by young people.

Supporting Young People to Grow up Online

Before and after puberty, it is normal for a young person to want to find out about the process of growing up and developing into a sexually mature person. Sometimes a young person might feel like they cannot talk to an adult they know about sex for a number of reasons, and so they may seek reassurance and information from the internet.

How to support young people growing up online:

- Ensure young people know that they can speak to a trusted adult if they are worried about sexual content they may have seen
- Ensure that young people understand the characteristics of healthy vs unhealthy relationships, and have explored issues around consent
- Address the issue of pornography directly through relationships and sex education
- Help young people to develop confidence to resist peer pressure and give them opportunities to practice this
- Challenge discriminatory language or comments
- Refer young people to the information about online porn on the ChildLine website
- Find clear, direct messages on pornography for older teenagers on the ThinkUKnow website

How to develop resilience online

- Encourage open communication about online activity and talk about the risks they could encounter
- Demonstrate practical solutions, empowering young people to block, delete messages and manage their privacy settings
- Help children to tackle and build their confidence with online use

- Promote internet use in a safe environment
- Encourage young people to support each other
- Ensure that conversations around online safety are engaging and informative.

Harmful Sites to be Aware of

Exposure to biased content and extreme opinions can trigger more complex behaviours and responses which could further put children and young people at risk. Whilst dangerous and inappropriate content can be found anywhere on the internet, there are particular sites which many people are unaware of and are specifically designed to target and cause harm to children and young people. It is key that parents and carers are aware of these:

- Pro suicide sites exist which operate in the UK that promote suicide.

- Eating disorder sites such as 'pro-ana' and 'pro-mia' which are social networks that offer children and young people the opportunity to discuss eating disorders with others. These sites are dangerous and can teach children how to hide their disorders.

- Self-harm sites which can be in the form of blogs, forums and websites reinforce harmful behaviours and encourage children to self-harm. They can include information on how to self-harm and how to hide it through videos and tutorials.

Online Radicalisation and Extremism

Online radicalisation and extremism can pose a significant threat to the well-being of children, this may involve:

- Exposure to upsetting images and material
- Psychological manipulation
- Isolation from friends and family
- Sexual commercial exploitation
- Encouraging young people to act in a way that puts them at risk of physical harm or death

How can you prevent risks of radicalisation or extremism?

- Discuss the dangers of radicalisation with children and how it can impact on them. Information and support can be found on the NSPCC website here- https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/radicalisation and on the internet matters website here- https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/radicalisation/protect-children-from-radicalisation/
- Help them to manage difficult situations online and to manage risks
- Help children and young people to support each other online
- Ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to air their views in a protected and sensitive environment
- Have policies and practices in place to escalate issues of concern
- Stay informed of the issues associated with radicalisation
- Remain aware of any unusual behaviour from a child or young person, such as withdrawing from family or peers, adopting styles of dress associated with groups they were not previously involved in, expressing opinions of violence or extremist organisations, possessing, or sharing extremist material

Digital Footprint

Before posting something online, young people should think about who might see it, both now and in the future, what personal information it gives about them, be it the school they attend or their home address, and what impression it gives of them. It is important to inform and help children and young people to learn how to manage their own digital footprints. Ways to reduce digital footprint include:

- Using privacy settings to keep some control over who they are sharing with
- Blocking people with whom they are not comfortable sharing information with
- Remove content that they have previously shared online
- Report content which other people have posted about themselves, in order to get it taken down

Online Gaming

Violent Content when Gaming

Some games, especially those which involve players talking to others can expose children and young people to scenes that:

- Feature extreme violence, warfare and criminal activity
- Show explicit sexual acts, which may glamorise rape and assault
- Use racist, homophobic or sexist language and feature swearing
- Depicts certain groups such as women in derogatory ways

Children can be groomed or bullied through games, as well as be introduced to other content and platforms by other players. The PEGI rating system helps parents to decide if the game is appropriate for the child, and parental controls can be used to help reduce access to age-inappropriate content.

The PEGI rating system- Logo Descriptors

 The game contains bad language, which made conclude mild swearing.

 Games desipting nudity or references to sexual behaviour

 The descriptor can only appear on games rated 18 contain desiptors of ethnic.

 Game may contain some kind of deception of violence.

 Game may encourage the use of tobacco or alcohol.

 Games can be played online.

 The disruptor may appear on 7 rated games with pictures and sounds that could be frightening.

 Used for games rated 12,16 or 18 that may encourage or teach for money

The PEGI rating system- Age Rating Descriptors

PEGI 3

The content of games given this rating is considered suitable for all age groups. Some violence in a comical context (typically Bugs Bunny or Tom & Jerry cartoon-like forms of violence) is acceptable. The child should not be able to associate the character on the screen with real life characters, they should be totally fantasy. The game should not contain any sounds or pictures that are likely to scare or frighten young children. No bad language should be heard.

PEGI 7

Any game that would normally be rated at 3 but contains some possibly frightening scenes or sounds may be considered suitable in this category.

PEGI 12

Videogames that show violence of a slightly more graphic nature towards fantasy character and/or non graphic violence towards human-looking characters or recognisable animals, as well as videogames that show nudity of a slightly more graphic nature would fall in this age category. Any bad language in this category must be mild and fall short of sexual expletives.

PEGI 16

This rating is applied once the depiction of violence (or sexual activity) reaches a stage that looks the same as would be expected in real life. More extreme bad language, the concept of the use of tobacco and drugs and the depiction of criminal activities can be content of games that are rated 16.

PEGI 18

The adult classification is applied when the level of violence reaches a stage where it becomes a depiction of gross violence and/or includes elements of specific types of violence. Gross violence is the most difficult to define since it can be very subjective in many cases, but in general terms it can be classed as the depictions of violence that would make the viewer feel a sense of revulsion.

Core Principals in being Supportive Parents/Guardians with Online Safety

There are **four core principals** which parents can use to make sure they are keeping their children as safe as possible online:

1) **Fostering Understanding**- Keeping up with what children are doing online, such as understanding the latest trends with apps, games and websites. Offer advice and support around online issues to children and young people, and make sure you talk with them about the risks.

2) **Enabling Positive Communication**- Having early, regular, and informed conversations about online safety with children is key. Boundaries for going online should be set the same as they would be for other situations. It is importance to get balance of activities right, because as children get older, they will want more freedom online, therefore this should be discussed.

3) **Building Children's Trust**- Parents/guardians are encouraged to have ongoing, honest and open conversations about their children's internet use. Parents should also consider their own online behaviours, such as what they post about themselves or their children. Parents should also avoid blaming the child if anything goes wrong, instead they can turn to professionals for support and advise, for example by calling the NSPCC number on the front page of this handout.

4) **Using the Technical Tools**- Using tools such as parental controls means that your child can be protected from much of the harmful content discussed in this handout. Make sure you check your privacy settings on all of your devices to restrict the information that can be shared. Set time scales to restrict the amount of time your child spends on the internet. Make sure password protection is enabled and be conscious if credit card details are saved to automatic, as children may be able to access these and spend money when playing games on apps.

Useful Resources

Websites:

- [NSPCC Learning home](#)
- [Thinkuknow - home](#)
- [Childline | Childline](#)
- [Online safety - BBC Teach](#)
- [UK Safer Internet Centre - Online Safety Tips, Advice and Resources | Safer Internet Centre](#)
- [Child Safety Online: A practical guide for parents and carers whose children are using social media - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](#)
- [Keeping young children safe online - Childnet](#)

Children's books to increase awareness:

- **Chicken Clicking** by Jeanne Willis- "A great book for parents and teachers to use to introduce safety on the internet (not forgetting the fun story, too)."

- **Goldilocks (A Hashtag Cautionary Tale)** by Jeanne Willis- "A great book to introduce the concept of online safety to Early Years and Primary age children, a modern take on goldilocks and the three bears. The story explores the dangers of social media in a fun, child like way but the message is clear that posting online and collecting likes can get you (Goldilocks) into trouble."

- **Once Upon Online** by David Bedford- " A great rhyming picture book offering a modern take on the traditional fairy-tales. Full of humour and with delightful illustrations this book is a great way of introducing the online world to the youngest of bookworms. It is a great conversation starter about online safety, and it emphasises the importance of checking with a grown up before going online."