



Keeping your Child Safe in a Digital World

Information and Guidance for Parents about Media and Internet Safety

Updated September 2014

*Respect for Each Other
A Caring Partnership
Quality and Success for All*

Dear Parent or Carer

I would like to take this opportunity to present to you our publication '***Keeping your Child Safe in a Digital World***'. We have published this booklet to provide you with information, guidance and advice about children's use of media, such as television, films and games, and communications technology, including the internet and mobile telephones.

The booklet makes clear the amazing potential of technology and the internet as a learning and communication tool but also draws your attention to the ways in which your child may be at risk if you, as parents, do not take steps to manage and monitor your child's use of media and technology over time.

As a school, we have identified very clear issues and messages to share with you about the effect on children of using media and technology which is not appropriate to their age or in such a way that it affects their relationships, behaviour, well-being or personal safety.

The messages and advice in this booklet are not meant to be patronising; they are a response to the children's (and sometimes parents') behaviours we have experienced over a period of time. I hope you find the advice useful. If you or your child experience any issues with regard to media or internet safety, please get in touch for further advice.

Ian Beard
Headteacher

A DIGITAL WORLD

Children now grow up with technology and digital media as part of their everyday lives. They have access to hundreds of television channels, DVDs, video games, digital cameras, hand-held devices, the internet and mobile telephones (which are much more than telephones), all of which have more computing power than the first spaceship sent to the moon.

Technology has opened up a whole new world in terms of:

- entertainment and leisure time
- communicating with others
- access to information
- education, learning and work
- shopping



These technologies have changed adults' and children's lives in many ways and it is difficult to imagine now how we would now cope without being able to:

- record or 'catch up' our favourite television programmes
- access instantly information via the world wide web
- keep in constant reach via our mobile telephones
- use an 'app' to read the newspaper or book a holiday
- communicate with friends and family via social networking

Whilst a great thing, this development in technology also presents a number of challenges and children and parents.

USE OF MEDIA

We are using the word '**media**' in this booklet to mean a range of sources which essentially present us with pictures (still or moving) and/or sound. This includes television, film, DVDs, electronic games consoles (Sony Play Station, Microsoft X-Box, etc.), mobile telephones, computers, hand-held devices (iPod, iPad and others) and, of course, the internet.

Television and Film

There is no doubt that access to a huge range of television channels, films and games can bring hours of entertainment and fun for all the family. However, we now live in a world in which the content of television programmes, films and games has become more and more cutting edge in order to keep us gripped and entertained. This presents a number of problems and dangers which can, if not supervised and controlled by parents, have an unwanted impact on children.

*It seems today that all you see
Is violence in movies and sex on TV
But where are those good old fashion values
On which we used to rely!*



The opening theme to *Family Guy* (which, contrary to popular belief amongst our older children, is not aimed at children) puts it very clearly that the nature of television and film have changed dramatically in recent years. Programmes with violent or edgy storylines are now common place and appear on our screens before the traditional 9pm 'watershed.'

Ongoing dramas and 'soap operas' such as *Eastenders* which are shown before the 'watershed' are full of gritty adult themes as are cartoons such as *Family Guy* and *South Park* which, although shown after the watershed, seem to very popular viewing for children. Added to this is the availability of hundreds of television channels and DVD players in children's bedrooms which are often watched without supervision or parental control.

Impact on Children

Television and films are such a strong influence in some children's lives that it becomes the way in which they learn their values, responses and behaviours to everyday situations.

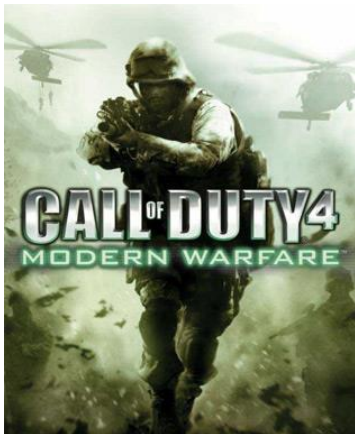


There is evidence to show that the viewing habits of some children have a clear impact on their development, their behaviour and their attitudes. Violence and swearing on television and in films, for example, can influence these behaviours in some children. Children's exposure to inappropriate scenes, sexual content, bad language, horror or programmes which promote fighting and violence can also lead to behaviours, attitudes or language which are inappropriate or beyond a child's age.

You would be surprised how many children tell us in school that they have watched films or programmes very late at night and which include adult themes. We see how this affects their energy levels, their attention in lessons, their mood and their behaviour.

GAMES

Gone are the days when games were simply about reaching the end of a maze or winning a race. Many of today's electronic games, particularly those enjoyed most by boys, are based on scenarios which involve battle and violence. The games are highly-sophisticated, presenting many different scenarios for the players to defeat their enemy through gun fights, kicking, boxing or blowing things up!



In many of these games, players are rewarded for violence and killing their opponents. Again, these games have been shown to have negative effects on some children who have developed very aggressive behaviours towards others, always turning to violence to solve a problem. They copy what they have seen and learned in the violent games they play.

Although many games now enable children to play alongside others, including over an internet connection, they are not the best way in which children develop their social skills or learn about friendships, taking turns or fair play or develop their creativity. The ability to communicate with others whilst playing online (particularly when unsupervised by parents) also exposes children to risks from strangers.



Television, Films and Games Parents' Checklist

- Ensure that the television programmes and films that your child watches are **appropriate to their age**, avoiding films and programmes which have adult themes, unsuitable content and violence.
- Make use of the very **clear guidance and ratings which classify films and games** (18, 15, 12A, PG, U, etc), avoiding anything not rated PG or U.
- Limit the amount of television that your child watches and the games that they play, particularly **late at night** and when they have gone to bed.
- Avoid games which rely on **violence or fighting** for their entertainment and reward value.
- Use the '**parental controls**' which are available on cable/satellite TV boxes to limit access to channels.
- Watch out for any **behaviours and language** which you think is **modelled on film, television or games**
- Ensure that you **know who your child is talking to** when playing online games and what they are saying to each other.

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

We are using the term '**communication technology**' in this booklet to mean all the ways in which we can now access or exchange information and messages via our mobile telephone, hand-held devices and the internet.

Using New Technology Safely

For the great majority of children, their use of mobile telephones or the internet will be perfectly safe and enjoyable. However, there are risks and there are things you should think about to make sure that your child knows how to use this technology appropriately without placing themselves or others at risk.

Nowadays, children are competent users of communication technology and in some families are the experts, leaving their parents behind. Children may be far more advanced at using the technology than their parents and may use the internet at home without any supervision or guidance. Many have a computer or other device in their bedroom, using them mostly unsupervised. Whilst children's skills and knowledge are encouraging and necessary for the future, their growing use of such technology can also present a challenge for parents to ensure their children are using it in an appropriate and safe way.

The most important piece of advice that we can give you is to be involved and to talk to your child about their use of the internet and other technology, making it clear what is appropriate and what is not and that they can turn to you if they run into any problems.

USING THE INTERNET

The **internet** or **world wide web** (www) is an amazing technological development. It has changed the way in which we do so many things in our lives and it is now very hard to imagine life without it. We can now use the internet to:

- access 24-hour news
- find out detailed information on any topic
- do our shopping and pay our bills
- swap and auction items we no longer want
- download music, books and films
- play games, including gambling
- find images, including photographs, of almost everything
- share information about ourselves via online 'spaces'
- make available our own photographs and amateur films
- keep in touch with others via email and social networking



Most children now use the internet as part of their everyday lives, both in school and at home. They are skilled at using the internet to find information, support their school work, send and receive e-mails, make online friends and keep in touch, and play online games.

Whilst using the internet can be fun and educational, its wealth of pages can also expose children to **unsuitable** or **indecent pages of content** and give them opportunities to have **contact** with people whom you may not want them to know.

SAFE USE OF THE INTERNET

When using the internet for any purpose, children need to be kept 'safe' from **content**, **contact** and **conduct** which is unsuitable or inappropriate.

Unsuitable or Inappropriate Content

The content of the vast majority of pages on the internet is reliable, legal and decent. There are hundreds of websites which offer countless hours of fun, activity and information suitable for children (and adults) of all ages. However, it is easy to find, or even to stumble across by accident, internet pages that may be unsuitable for children.

Unsuitable **content** refers to any **website** or **online activity** which should **not** be seen or undertaken by someone of your child's age because it is not age-appropriate, illegal, offensive, upsetting or puts them at risk. Unsuitable content may include pages or e-mails which:

- include offensive language
- promote violence, racism or bullying
- include pornographic images or activity
- promote gambling
- promote unhealthy activities (e.g. drug-taking)
- include advertising and spam which is not age-appropriate
- provide misleading or biased information and advice

Avoiding Inappropriate Content

Given that there is so much of it about, it is hard to avoid all online content which is inappropriate for children. However, there are things you can do to attempt to reduce the risks for your child, starting with ensuring that any home computer or other device is used by everyone in a responsible and secure way.

Children do not always intentionally select or see inappropriate websites or content. Often, they appear in **search engine** results, as **pop-ups** or as on-line **advertising** or a **link** from another website, particularly if the computer has been used by someone else and 'cookies' saved on a computer by websites are doing their job of logging user activity and using it to select advertising content.

However, children, particularly older children, are also curious and the internet presents an opportunity for children to easily and discretely search for things that you may not want them to see.



There are steps you can take at home to ensure that your child does not access inappropriate material. However, nothing will guarantee that they never do so.

The **UK Internet Safety Centre** website has lots of advice for parents about children's online safety.



Blocking Unsuitable Material

You should be aware that it is possible to **block or filter** the material that comes onto your computer from the internet. Some of the software that does this is **free** and comes with your internet browser or from your internet service provider (ISP). These filters are often called **parental controls** and enable you to block specific websites or websites containing certain words or adult content.

Most ISPs now offer controls which enable parents to block web content in various categories, including adult content, shopping and gambling websites.

Filtering Searches



Many children (and adults) use Google or another search engine to find and access new or familiar websites. Each time they search, they are exposed to a list of hundreds of websites, some of which may contain unsuitable references or material.

Many users prefer not to have adult content included in their search results (especially if children use the same computer). Google's *SafeSearch* filters provide you with the ability to change your browser setting to prevent adult content from appearing in your search results. No filter is 100% accurate, but *SafeSearch* should help you and your children to avoid most of this type of material. The setting can also be locked.

Favourites

One way of encouraging your child to access often-used websites directly (to avoid searching in Google every time) is to place them in the **favourites** folder. By accessing websites via **favourites**, they bypass the need to search for them and the need to scroll through a long list of websites, some of which may be unsuitable.



Remember, however, that savvy children can bypass some filters or use the internet at a friend's house or via their mobile telephone or another device, including the family iPad, if there is one. This underlines the fact that there **is no substitute for good advice and supervision from you** and **highlights the need for you to be involved in what your child is doing online**. Some parents go as far as only allowing access to the internet in the family room and checking their children's online activity on a regular basis.

Talking with your child

It is unlikely that you will be able to block all unsuitable materials from your computer. The most effective way of ensuring that your child is protected from inappropriate content is to **discuss** their use of the internet with them and **to take an interest** in what they are accessing and why. They should also know that they can **come to you for advice** or to let you know about anything they have seen or done online that worries them.

Unsuitable or Inappropriate Contact

The internet has become a wonderful tool for staying in touch and contacting other people. This is done via email, online chatrooms and via social networking sites (such as *Facebook and Twitter*). There are lots of others, including sites, such as Disney's *Club Penguin*, which enable children to play and chat with others online. Adults and children alike see chatrooms and social networking as a great way to extend their social lives and contact with other people, particularly from the comfort of their own homes or bedrooms and at any time during the day or night.

Chatrooms / Instant Messaging

It is **easy** to meet people over the internet, to have online 'conversations' and to strike up online friendships. One of the popular ways for children to communicate with others online is through **chatrooms** or **instant messaging** which allow two or more people to exchange messages as if they were having a real conversation. Chatrooms are often set up for people to share specific interests and it is quite easy to join them without using a real name.

Stranger Danger

Children are particularly **vulnerable** when using chatrooms. Someone who is not who they say they are may try to establish a relationship with your child.



Remember : Everyone is a potential stranger

Chatrooms enable people to have **public** conversations which everyone can see or **private** conversations. Having a private conversation is known as **whispering**. Someone who wishes to form a relationship with a child online may invite them into a **private** chatroom so that no one else can read what is being written.

Grooming



There have been lots of reported cases where adults have built up relationships with children online (this is known as 'grooming') with the intention of arranging to meet with them. Children who have followed this through have put themselves in grave danger, including some who have been hurt by those they have arranged to meet in person.

Children **must never** disclose any details about themselves to others online. Ensure that your child **never** discloses their (or your) name, address, telephone number, school name, email address or any other personal information, including a photograph or video of themselves, their friends or their family.

Discuss with your child the need for **you to know** who they are talking to online **and to let you know immediately** if someone they are in contact with asks them to 'talk' in private, asks for their personal details or tries to arrange to contact or meet them.

Inappropriate Conduct and Online Behaviour

Conduct is about the way in which your child and others **behave** whilst using the internet. It is concerned with the **language** they use, the **comments** they make and the **information they share** with and about other people.

Most children will want to use the internet without causing a problem for others. Their exchanges of messages will be friendly and have a pleasant purpose. However, we are aware, and have been surprised, that some children are using the internet, particularly Social Networking sites (see next page), to:

- insult and abuse other children and their families
- spread rumours and gossip about others
- bully other children (cyberbullying)
- break up friendships between other children
- publish embarrassing video of others, e.g. on *YouTube*
- threaten other children and their families
- use extremely bad language
- access someone else's accounts
- create a fake account to pretend to be someone else

Advice for Parents

It is this **behaviour** that you, as parents, need to monitor carefully. You would be surprised how many children have been or are involved in some of the above and how it affects children and their friendships in school. This needs greater attention from parents.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Social networking sites such as *Facebook* are a great way to keep in touch with people and share information about yourself or common interests. These sites enable users to share a wealth of information about themselves, including photographs, personal information, career history, hobbies and interests, thoughts about the day and opinions about school and work.



A *Facebook* **profile** or **wall**, for example, can be used to share a lot of personal information, thoughts and opinions. They are designed in such a way to enable users to quickly enter an update which is then available on the **newsfeeds** of their friends.

It is surprising how many people (mostly adults) express themselves openly using such sites, sharing everything about themselves, their activities and their thoughts. Often, people reduce their inhibitions when online and say things that they would not normally say in a face-to-face conversation.

This is worrying and potentially dangerous for adults and children as we may share things about ourselves, our work or other people without thinking about what we have said and who is reading our comments. Posting a comment online is like sharing it in a shopping centre using a megaphone!



Advice for Parents

Our very strong advice to parents is that you deny or restrict children from using social networking or chatroom sites until they are old and responsible enough to do so.

You will be aware that social networking sites such as *Facebook* and *Bebo* **do not allow children under 13 years of age** to register to use the site. This is, of course, possible if they lie about their age during the registration process.

However, knowing that many parents allow their children to lie about their age (which is worrying in itself) and use these sites, often without supervision, we need to offer some advice.

If you do decide to let your child to use chatrooms or social networking sites, we advise that you do so **with extreme caution**, bearing in mind the dangers and the ways in which your child or those whom they are contacting may be saying something of which you and other parents do not approve.

- **Public Domain**

You and your child should remember that everything that is posted online is in the public domain and could be seen by a wide audience. Even if shared privately, messages (good or bad) and photos can easily and quickly be shared.

Friends

We know that many children (and some adults) want as many **online friends** as possible. There is a certain status or kudos in having lots of online 'friends' and some see it as competition to have as many *Facebook* friends as possible.



I AM TRYING TO
ADD MORE FRIENDS

This is fine as long as the people your child **invites** and **accepts** as friends are actually **known** to them. Children should not invite or accept as a friend **anyone** they (and preferably you) do not actually know and consider to be 'a friend'. Most people who have hundreds of friends on *Facebook* would probably admit that very few of those contacts are actually 'friends' and that the content they share online would not normally be shared with this wide circle of people.

- **Passwords**

Your child should not share their password with anyone else. If they do, it would be possible for someone else to access their account and post information and comments about other people in their name. It is a good idea to insist that you have access to your child's *Facebook* account and password so you can monitor what they are doing online. If they are using their account appropriately, your child should have nothing to hide and should not object to you occasionally accessing their account to check what they are doing.

- **Location / Place**

It is possible using mobile technology to post your location to a *Facebook* or similar profile. Your child should **never** reveal their location in this way.

- **Accounts**

Do not forget that it is possible for your child to create more than one online account and could hide conversations from you via another account. It is also possible for one child to create an account in the name of another child and post comments under that name rather than their own. Sometimes parents say to us that they monitor their child's use of *Facebook* closely, only to discover that they have two accounts and undertaking most of their online activity in secret.

- **Photographs**

You should be aware that your child's *Facebook* or other page, including their photograph or photograph album, is available for all to see unless they have set their **privacy settings** in such a way that only their friends can see that information. You should not allow your child to publish online any photographs of themselves or your family that you would not be happy for them to pin to a public noticeboard.

You should also be aware that others can publish photographs of your child without permission.

- **Sharing and Privacy Settings**

When you or your child create a *Facebook* or similar account, you should be aware that your security and privacy settings could be set so that every other user can see your profile, your personal information, your photographs, your hobbies and interests, your friends list and the comments you post online. Some social networking sites are beginning to change their policies regarding their default privacy settings and encouraging users to undertaken

Make sure that you use the **privacy settings** so that other users have limited access to your child's profile, photographs and comments. You can limit access to 'friend', 'friends of friends' or even specific people. This will stop just anyone from finding and contacting your child online.

Facebook have introduced a Privacy Checkup for users to review their online privacy settings. Users will be assisted by the 'Blue Dinosaur'





Online Chatrooms and Social Networking Parents' Checklist



Ensure that you know **which** chatroom or social networking sites your child is using and why. Agree with your child **how** and **when** they may use these sites.



Locate the computer in a **shared area** of the house so that you are aware of what your child is doing online.



Ensure that you know **who** your child is talking to online and who they have as their 'friends' or contacts. Regularly monitor your child's online activity.



Ensure that your **child does not reveal any personal information** about themselves, including their names, address, school, travel plans or a picture of themselves.



Use any available **security** and **privacy settings** to limit what others can see of your child's profile.



Ensure that your child **does not arrange to meet** in person anyone they have met online without your permission or supervision.

DEALING WITH ISSUES

If your or child encounters a problem, including online bullying, whilst using the internet or Social networking sites, you should:

- Encourage your child to discuss it with you**
- Block or report** anyone who is sending inappropriate comments or is bullying your child
- Tell your child **not to retaliate or reply**. Nor should you, as a parent, retaliate or reply. This may make the situation worse.
- Discuss the issue** with your child and continue to monitor the situation
- Print and save** the evidence, perhaps by cutting/pasting any comments into a separate file
- Report** the matter

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

The school is very keen to ensure that children are safe at all times and maintain good relationships with each other. If you are concerned about how someone else in school is treating your own child online, please contact us for advice. We may be able to help.

ONLINE GAMES

The use of online games can be fun, educational and entertaining. Some online games are activities for one person whilst others offer the opportunity to involve other internet users and compete with other people.



If your child does play online games, such as the very popular *Minecraft*, please follow our general advice about games and also think about the nature of any online communication they have with other people. Try to limit when and for how long your child plays games online as there are probably much better ways to develop your child's interests and social skills.

Be very aware **who** your child is playing with online and what they are saying to each other.

ONLINE SHOPPING

Most children will not get involved in everyday online shopping or banking but we are aware that some children have **spent their parents' money** by accessing websites which store parents' bank or credit card details. This is rare but does happen.



If you do have online banking or online shopping accounts (supermarkets, online music stores, etc.), please make sure that you protect them with a password and hide or remove your account details so that you need to enter them each time you use the site. Make sure that you **logout** of any online shopping or banking system when you have finished using it. Make sure then when **logging** in, you do not tick the box which makes your computer remember your Username or password. Your child (or anyone else for that matter) could easily access the website and intentionally or unintentionally spend or transfer money on your behalf!

MOBILE TELEPHONES

Mobile telephones are now part of everyday life and we know that many children have them, even if just for 'safety' reasons. Again, the majority of children will use them sensibly and safely but there are also risks involved.

There have been reported cases where children have sent or received offensive remarks via text or mobile telephone. This is also known as **cyberbullying**.



If your child has a mobile telephone, please make sure that:

- you know **how** and **why** they are using it
- you are aware of **who** they are calling or texting
- web access** is not enabled if it is not needed
- you encourage your child to **show and discuss** with you any texts they receive which are insulting or may be bullying. Your child should not reply to any harmful texts. **They should discuss them with you or another person they trust**
- regularly check your child's mobile telephone, including contacts, text messages and pictures taken using the telephone

SUMMARY OF ADVICE

There are three essential things for your child to remember:



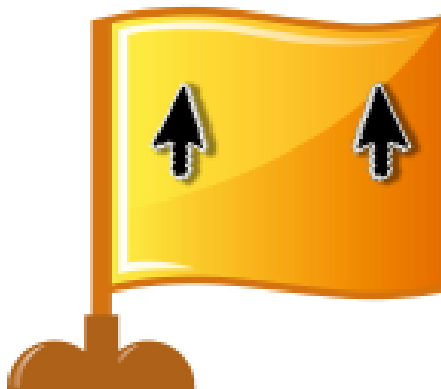
ZIP IT

Keep your personal stuff private and think about what you say and do online.



BLOCK IT

Block people who send nasty messages and don't open unknown links and attachments.



FLAG IT

Flag up with someone you trust if anything upsets you or if someone asks to meet you offline.

REPORTING CONCERNS

SCHOOL SUPPORT

If you are concerned about your own child's internet activity or have evidence that your child is being bullied online by another child in school, please contact us at school in person, by telephone or by e-mail for help and advice. We will try to support you in this matter.

CEOP REPORT

The **Child Exploitation and Online Protection** (CEOP) centre is a national organisation run by the police. The organisation investigates online activity which is inappropriate or harmful to children.



Anyone can report harmful behaviour to the CEOP centre by clicking on the **REPORT** button which appears on some chatroom and social networking websites. Alternatively, you can go directly to the CEOP website for lots of advice and to report online abuse or inappropriate material.

www.ceop.police.uk



If you feel that your child is in immediate danger, you should contact the police.

FURTHER GUIDANCE AND USEFUL WEBSITES

Further Information

There is a wealth of information and advice available online to help you and your child become 'safe' users of the internet.

THINK YOU KNOW



The 'Think you Know' website is particularly good. It contains lots of information for parents and children of all ages about online activity and safety. The website can be found at:

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Other useful websites include:

www.google.co.uk/familysafety

www.kidsmart.org.uk

www.childnet-int.org

www.saferinternet.org.uk

www.ceop.police.uk

KEEP YOUR **KIDS** **SAFE** Online



NOTES

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