

Background information to Online Safety



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Introduction

The use of online technologies is on the increase. A survey by Ofcom¹ tracking digital usage has shown that 66% of **5-7 year olds** use the internet at home – with at least 30% using it for games, schoolwork (26%) and information (15%). Additionally, over 85% have access to games consoles which may have an online 'gaming' or 'chat' facility when linked to the internet.

It has now become common for older children to have internet access in the bedrooms or away from the living room without an adult present, accounting for one in six children aged **8-11** (16%) and one-third of **12-15** year olds (25%). This is all the more worrying as 13% of parents of **5-15s** say they either haven't heard of, or don't know how to set up internet controls or filtering software.

Thus it is essential that we equip our young people with the knowledge to '**stay safe online**' while also educating parents on what they can do to keep their children safe.

Explanation of the safety risks involved with online technologies

What is Sexual Grooming?

Often, adults who want to engage children, or talk to them for sexual gratification will seek out young people who desire friendship. They will often use a number of grooming techniques including building trust with the child through lying, creating different personas and then attempting to engage the child in more intimate forms of communication including compromising a child with the use of images and webcams. Child sex abusers will often use blackmail and guilt as methods of securing a meeting with the child.

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, mobiles, or other forms of information technology to deliberately harass, threaten, or intimidate someone. Cyberbullying is often done by children, who have increasing access to these technologies, though may not understand the impact such actions can have on others because they can't see them. However, it is by no means confined to children. The problem is compounded by the fact that a bully can hide behind an electronic veil, disguising his or her true identity. This makes it difficult to trace the source, and encourages bullies to behave more aggressively than they might face-to-face. Cyberbullying can include such acts as making threats, sending provocative insults or racial, homophobic or ethnic slurs.

Below are a range of communication mechanisms and an explanation of the risks they can pose to young people:

Social Networking

Social Networking websites utilise applications which help connect friends using a number of tools like blogs, profiles, internal email systems and photos. Well known sites include Bebo, Myspace, Facebook, and these have become an influential part of contemporary culture.

Although chatting online can be great fun, young people can sometimes find themselves in situations where they can feel out of their depth. Risks can arise when young people give out their personal details to strangers. The online world can often seem very different to the real world for young people,

¹ Ofcom, UK Children's media literacy – 2009 interim report.

and they can be tempted to say and do things that they wouldn't dream of if they met someone face-to-face. This can include giving out personal information such as mobile numbers and pictures of themselves. Paedophiles are very clever at piecing together small bits information to track children down in the real world.

If they are talking to another child there is a risk that they will misuse this information - for example, by texting abusive messages to the child, or by posting their image on a website; but there is obviously a greater risk if the person that they are chatting to is an adult.

Chat rooms and Instant Messaging

A chat room is an online forum where people can communicate by broadcasting text based messages in people on the same forum in real time. Sometimes these venues are moderated either by limiting who is allowed to speak (not common), by enabling users to report inappropriate posts to the website's facilitator or by having moderation volunteers patrol the venue watching for disruptive or otherwise undesirable behaviour.

Instant messaging (IM) is a form of real-time text-based communication conveyed over a network, such as the internet, between two or more people on a user's contact list. Examples include Windows Live Messenger, Jabber, ICQ and AIM. IM technologies often include additional features that make them even more popular such as having the ability to talk directly for free; to share files; or to view the other party through a webcam.

Young people will often 'swap friends' through Instant Messaging (IM), and therefore can be chatting to strangers who they feel they trust because a friend of a friend knows them. IM is a very intimate form of communication - more so than a chat room with many participants, and therefore child abusers will often use this as a means to extract personal information from a young person.

Mobile

Apart from young people spending all their time chatting to their friends, there are some risks in their use of mobile technology. A large proportion of new mobile phones have web access, and more recently - mobile TV has been launched. This means that young people can access content from the internet and TV wherever they are, and without parental or teacher supervision. With the advent of picture and video messaging - young people need to be increasingly careful about the images they share. It is very easy for inappropriate images to be shared around a number of phones, changed and even put online, where it is impossible to get back. This is particularly worrying, if images are used in child abuse sites. Young people also need to be aware that they put themselves at risk of mobile bullying, or inappropriate intimate contact if they give out their mobile number to people they don't fully trust.

Gaming

Gaming sites can be fantastic fun for young people, however as with any online technology - there are risks.

5-7 year olds regularly look at such sites as:

- Cbeebies site: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/games/>
- Disney's Club Penguin: <http://www.clubpenguin.com>
- Miniclip: www.miniclip.com/

8-11 year olds look at:

Free online games -

- www.neopets.com
- www.binweevils.com
- www.addictinggames.com

11-16 year olds view such sites as:

- www.worldofwarcraft.com
- www.xbox.com/live
- www.ukplaystation.com

The three main risks are:

- **Addiction**
Online gaming can occasionally be addictive for young people. They can become so involved in the gaming communities (where you play against other users rather than the computer) that they lose touch with their offline friends, in favour of spending time with online users playing games. Young people often spend hours every night playing games, especially when their parents have gone to bed. For this reason, CEOP recommends that the computer is kept in a family room.
- **Abuse**
Some young people who use online games can be abusive to other gamers. This can range from saying nasty things if there is a chat facility within the gaming site, to always winning and not sharing cheats or knowledge on how to progress to the next level. Young people should be encouraged that when they play online games, they treat others how they would like to be treated.
- **Risky behaviour**
There are some young people who engage in risky behaviour to obtain cheats or knowledge to progress within a game. Adults with a sexual interest in children will encourage them to engage in inappropriate behaviour for rewards including sexual acts via webcam or sex chat. Young people need to understand that their online behaviour has offline consequences and that if someone engages them in a sexual manner online that they should inform a trusted adult immediately.

Procedural advice in case of disclosure

Things to remember

It is important to remember that the Think U Know discussion and cartoon may raise issues for children. Children in the session may have suffered abuse in the past or be suffering abuse currently. Also be aware that some adults may find these sessions difficult. They may not have realised that experiences they are having are abusive. As a result, following a Think U Know session they may want to tell someone about their experiences. It is of utmost importance that the school or organisation the session is taking place in is prepared for this.

Things to prepare

- Make sure you are familiar with your agency's **Child Protection Policy** and **Procedure** and local e-safety policies. Pay particular attention to any guidelines for reporting concerns.
- Hold a planning meeting with senior management within the school or organisation to ensure they are aware that the session is taking place.
- Ensure that you are aware of the named individual in the school or organisation who is responsible for Child Protection and how to contact them.
- The named individual for Child Protection should be made aware that the Think U Know session is taking place and they, or their deputy, should be contactable during and after the session.
- All responsible adults involved in the Think U Know session must have recently received Child Protection training i.e. within the last 3 years.
- There should be at least one member of staff available outside of the session that can support children if they become distressed, or if they want to talk about their own or other's abusive experiences. Again, that member of staff should be familiar with the child protection process and know how to make a Child Protection Referral to Social Care or the police if necessary. It is always better to be prepared.
- Groups should be of a manageable size bearing in mind the sensitivity of the content of the presentation and the potential for it to raise child protection issues.
- There should be a process agreed for identifying any children for whom there are concerns.
- Preparations should be made for after the presentation e.g. a "drop in" for children who have questions that they were unable to ask in the big group.

Additional preparation for Key Stage 2 and above

- When informing young people about the content, explain to them how they will be supported if they feel the need and that they can talk to any of the adults at the session at any time. Tell them that if they are upset or need to leave the room someone will be available outside to talk to them in private. At that stage they should be told that it is not appropriate to talk about their own or other's abusive experiences within the group.

Responding to a report of abuse:

It is important to acknowledge that the presentation may raise issues for children about their own or others abusive experiences and this may be unrelated to sexual abuse and/or internet related crime.

It is therefore important that teachers understand the different types of 'abuse' and are able to recognise causes for concern. The different types of abuse are **Emotional, Neglect, Physical and Sexual Abuse**.

What to do if a child or young person reports abuse or a concern to you?

'Listen, record, refer'

Listen

If a child/young person comes to you and asks if they can tell you something, it is important that you react calmly and listen carefully to what the child/young person may wish to tell you.

Think:

- Who else can hear what the child has to say? If necessary, take the child/young person somewhere that they can talk more freely. **Always** inform someone of where you have gone and ensure that you are **not alone** with the child/young person **or** out of sight from others for any period of time. If you are alone in a room with them make sure there is a window in the room and/or leave the door open.
- The child/young person may ask you to keep what they are going to tell you secret. You should not promise them confidentiality. Tell them that if you are worried about their safety you may have to tell someone else about what they have told you. Reassure that they were right to tell somebody and be clear who you will be passing the information on to. You can also offer them your support in the future.

Record

It is important that you don't ask any leading questions or attempt to investigate. Only ask questions which will give the child the opportunity to tell you what they want to say. Initially, for instance, you might ask, 'What happened?' It is vitally important that you keep questions open and to the absolute minimum. This is to ensure a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said and to prevent the child/young person from having to repeat things, as this may jeopardise any investigation.

Afterwards make accurate and factual notes of what the child/young person has said and make sure you sign, time and date them.

Refer

If a child/young person discloses something of concern to you, you will need to **refer** it on. Use the following flowchart:

STEP 1

If following a Think U Know session you are concerned that a child may have been abused



STEP 2

Your organisation should have a policy for child protection

Talk to the Lead or Deputy Person for Safeguarding

Record your concerns



STEP 3

S/he (or anyone else if not available must refer the concern to Children's Social Care Services and/or the police (in an emergency dial 999) and follow up the referral in writing within 24 hours.

In cases of allegations against a person with a "duty of care", the LADO (Lead Authority Designated Officer) will co-ordinate the next procedural steps

Consult with the Lead or Deputy for child protection in your organisation. They will be able to make a referral to Children's Social Care Services and/or the police (in an emergency). If they are not available you will need to phone children's social care in your area. Ask to speak to a duty social worker and tell them that you need to make a child protection referral. They will be able to advise you how to do this.

Immediate safety

If a child/young person has made a disclosure of abuse to you it is essential that you find out if they are in any immediate danger. Consider, are they likely to suffer further abuse if they go home? If they have made allegations against their parent/carer or another individual in the family home you can call Children's Social Care for advice and guidance. In an emergency dial 999 for the local police who will be able to ensure the child/young person's safety.

When listening to a report of abuse it is important to remember the following:

- Keep calm.
- Reassure the child/young person.
- Do not show shock, distaste or disbelief.
- Do not use terms such as well done, you're doing really well etc.
- Take what the child/young person says seriously, recognising the difficulties inherent in interpreting what a child/young person in distress says, especially if they have communication difficulties such as a speech, disability and/or differences in language.
- Record what the child/young person has said and what you have observed.
- Do not probe for more information than is offered.
- Do not introduce personal information from either your own experiences or those of other children/young people.
- Do not make comments about the person against whom the allegation has been made.
- Do not approach the individual against whom the allegation has been made.
- Do not make promises or agree to keep secrets.
- Do not promise the child/young person confidentiality.
- Be honest and tell the child/young person that you will need to tell somebody else what has been told to you.

Where else to go for help

There are a number of URL's and services that provide further advice and support:

ChildLine: **0800 1111**

You can also contact Childline online at - www.childline.org.uk

Crimestoppers: **0800 555111**

The Samaritans: **0845 790 9090** (confidential, non-judgemental support 24 hours a day)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre – www.ceop.police.uk

SAFEchild – www.safechild.co.uk (Child Protection training and CRB checks)

Your Local Safeguarding Children Board (for Child Protection policies and procedures in your locality)

Stop It Now!: **0808 1000 900** (an organisation that works with offenders and adults with a sexual interest in children to encourage early recognition and responses to the problem)

Contact Us

If you have any further questions, please get in touch with us:

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