E-safety:
Protecting Your Child Online

Information For Parents

Camden Safeguarding
Children Board

CAMDEN SCB

Introduction

All children use technology at school and at home, and schools are keen to use the benefits of the internet to support children's learning. Many children will also have mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets that give them internet access anywhere.

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. As technology is constantly evolving, many parents feel they don't know enough about it to protect their children from the risks.

This leaflet aims to provide parents with the information they need to keep their child safe online.

How Children Use The Internet

Your child may use the internet to:

- Search for and download music, games and information from websites

- Send messages to friends through email and instant messaging from their mobile phones and social networks

- Talk to people online in chat-rooms, blogs, forums and online games

- Share information such as photographs and talk to people on social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Instagram

- Share files and download music, games and film through peer to peer networking

- Play games online with others using a games console, e.g. X-box, Playstation

- Video-chat with friends and relatives on Skype or Facetime

- Buy and sell goods and services such as games and applications.

The Benefits

Using the internet can help your child to:

- Learn important computer skills that will help them in later life

- Improve confidence and social skills by communicating with a wide group of friends

- Develop their hobbies and interests

- Find a wide range of information to help them with schoolwork

- Improve their educational achievement.

The Risks

Unsuitable content:
Web searches can come up with a lot of information and images, and some of it may be explicitly sexual or violent and not suitable for children.

Unsuitable contacts:
Some adults who pose a risk to children 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 publish personal information or photographs of themselves on social networking sites that allows them to be contacted or located by unsuitable adults.

Online sexual exploitation and abuse:
Children may be pressured into viewing pornographic material online, watching or performing sexual acts over a webcam or video chat, or taking part in a 'conversation' that is sexual in nature. This can be initiated by a peer or an adult and can be someone the child knows off and/or online.

Buying 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. They may also be tempted to download apps that are not suitable for their age or that may cost more than advertised.

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.

Loss of privacy:
Some children may share information, photographs and images of themselves that they may only intend for particular recipients or may regret posting. For example, young people may share images that are sexual in nature ('sexting'). However, they may not realise that once on the internet, these images can be widely distributed to be viewed by a much wider audience than intended.

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 at other locations or on phones or tablets. 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 negotiate with them to agree the 'golden rules' including boundaries on use of computers and mobile devices

- Let them know what kind of sites they should and shouldn't visit and try to encourage them to only use services and social networking sites that are designed for their age group

- Make children and young people aware of their 'digital footprint' and that once images and information are posted on the internet it cannot be removed

- 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

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

- Find out how they use the internet and stay up to date with the devices that can be used to access the internet

- Make sure you know how to check parental controls and privacy settings and filters on all computers, lap-tops and mobile and gaming devices; contact your internet service provider (e.g. BT, Virgin etc) for advice on how you can do this

- Visit the websites your child uses to check out their content, safety features and reporting buttons

- Use a family email address and for younger children, child-friendly search engines 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.

Be Aware Of…

- Excessive and secretive use of computers and mobile devices and especially webcams

- Suddenly switching screens when you walk in

- Phone calls from unknown adults.

If there's a problem…

- 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, smartphone 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 security settings for accessing personal websites and accounts

- If the bully's identity is known 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 contact with the person immediately

- 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).

Golden Rules

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 have to 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 send intimate or inappropriate images of themselves, or personal comments, even to friends

- 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 or download apps without your permission

- To only use a web-cam with people that they know and trust and who are known to you

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

Mobile and Gaming Devices

Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets and some gaming devices such as X-boxes are an important part of children's lives and can provide them with access to the internet. Mobile and smartphones are very common because most parents like their child to have one in case of emergencies. However, mobile devices make supervising children's internet use more difficult and can make the child more vulnerable to cyber bullying and harassment. To help children stay safe, parents can:

- Agree rules to using mobile devices and where they can be taken (some schools do not allow mobile devices)

- Agree who the phone number may be given out to, for example only close friends and family

- Check privacy settings and get advice from providers about what safety features are available on the device

- Make sure the device can only be accessed by a strong password.

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.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)
www.ceop.police.uk

Think U Know
www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Childnet
www.childnet-int.org

Internet Watch Foundation
www.iwf.org.uk

Kidsmart
www.kidsmart.org.uk

CBBC Stay Safe
www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/topics/stay-safe

Cybermentors
www.cybermentors.org.uk

Internet Matters
www.internetmatters.org