Keeping our young people safe online

WHERE DO I START?

The best way to keep your family safe online, and to understand your children's internet use, is to use the internet together. Active engagement and conversations with your children are key. Be positive and embrace the technologies that young children enjoy and look for family activities or games. Take time to explore the games and services that your children are using, or want to use, and look out for any safety features that may be available. This will give you a better understanding of the different ways that children are engaging with technology and help you to feel more confident.

SHOULD I SET RULES?

In the same way that you set rules for most areas of your children's lives, establish your expectations regarding online activities. Creating a family agreement is a useful step, which might include time spent online, sites that can be visited, and behaviour expected; remember, what's right and wrong offline is also right and wrong online. It's a great idea to agree these rules from the outset, so that you and your children are aware of their boundaries.

HOW CAN I SUPERVISE MY CHILD?

Placing your computer or laptop in a busy part of the house e.g. the living room or kitchen can be helpful. This can make it easier for you to be involved in their technology use. But remember, the internet can be accessed from a number of portable devices, for example smartphones, iPod Touch, games consoles and tablets. Portable devices may allow you to ensure your children are using them where you can see them and your children can still be supervised.

HOW MUCH TIME IS TOO MUCH TIME?

Children can be enthusiastic users of technology. The challenge can be to harness this enthusiasm and ensure a balance, so that the use of technology does not negatively impact on other important areas of young children's lives. Some strategies that can help manage time online include agreeing time limits or using time limiting tools, designating weekly times to use the internet together, or removing portable devices from your child's bedroom at night to avoid tiredness.

ARE THERE TOOLS TO HELP?

There are free parental controls and filters available, to help you set safer boundaries for your children, but you will usually be required to set them up. Your internet service provider (such as BT or TalkTalk) will provide free filters to help block age inappropriate content for children, and on the UK Safer Internet Centre website you can watch video tutorials that show you how to find and set these up. All mobile phone operators (such as O2 or Vodafone) also provide such parental controls for free, however it is important to request this at the time in which the phone is bought for a child. Often, young people may receive their parent's 'hand-me-down' phones, however as the phone was bought in an adult's name, these parental controls will not be in place. The websites of device manufacturers (such as games consoles) should also outline the controls to which you have access.

Filtering options can be found within websites and services themselves, for example on YouTube 'restricted mode' or 'safe search'' settings can be applied to search engines such as Google or Bing. Parental controls can be password protected, so it's advisable to choose a strong password and not share it. Parental controls and filters are a good starting point but it is important to recognise that they are not 100% effective. They are a great help, but not a solution, and work best in combination with parental supervision and engagement, to help your children understand how to stay safe online. As children grow and develop, so do their online needs, therefore you may want to periodically review your parental controls to accommodate this.

WHAT ADVICE CAN I GIVE MY CHILD?

Education is the best tool that a child can have, so discuss with your child the importance of telling an adult immediately if someone, or something, upsets them online. Make sure that your children know that they can come and talk to you (without

necessarily getting into trouble) if they see anything that worries them on the internet, and encourage them to feel confident enough to do so. Other immediate strategies to deal with unwanted content or contact could include; switch the screen off, close the laptop, exit the website, or turn the iPad or phone over and put it down.

Younger users may be distracted by advertising and pop ups and with just a couple of clicks, or a spelling mistake, they may find themselves on a different website, perhaps ones that you don't think are appropriate. Children are naturally curious and will innately push boundaries. Bookmarking sites or creating a 'favourites' list is a simple way to help your children find the content they want without having to search the internet for it. It is also important whilst beginning to explore the internet that your child realises that other internet users may not be who they say they are and that 'friends' made online are still strangers, so personal information should be kept safe, including their name, address, phone numbers and passwords etc. Encourage the use of screen names and nicknames where possible. This is where a family agreement can be incredibly useful, to establish rules and good online behaviour in advance.

WHAT GAMES ARE OK FOR MY CHILD TO PLAY?

There are many different online games and playing experiences currently available to children e.g. via computers, consoles, internet games and apps. Gaming may be the very first way that your child encounters life online. Some games however are for adults or older audiences and contain images, content and language that are not suitable for children. Therefore it is important that the games your children play are the correct age rating. Like film classifications, these ratings are determined by the game's content, and all video games sold in the UK are clearly marked with age ratings set by PEGI (Pan European Games Information). Some online games may also be age rated or be classified 'PEGI OK.' Familiarise yourself with the different PEGI icons so you are aware of what type of game you are buying.

Many games allow children to play with other internet users and may have chat features enabled. Some games provide a "safe chat mode" where simple predetermined phrases can be used. Playing these games in advance yourself can be fun and will also enable you to identify the safety features provided, such as reporting to a moderator. Reading online reviews of games can be a really useful way to hear other parents' experiences and feedback, and highlight potential safety issues like whether 'in-app' adverts are present, and whether the adverts displayed are suitable for the audience for which the app is intended. The Common Sense Media website is a good place to start by reading reviews from other parents. There have been news stories of young children running up large bills by inadvertently making 'in-app' purchases whilst playing, so do look out for whether you can spend real money during the game; it should be in the app description in the app store. You can also disable 'in-app' purchasing on a number of devices within the settings.

WHERE CAN I REPORT?

Reports can be made to websites through safety/help centres and moderation services. If you are suspicious about the behaviour of others online, where you think an adult is contacting your child for malicious purposes, reports can be made to CEOP for grooming incidents. Inappropriate media content, online and offline can be reported via Parentport. Criminal content online, such as indecent images of children, can also be reported to the IWF.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

The following websites contain lots of useful information to keep your family safe online and when using mobile technologies:

- www.theparentzone.co.uk/ - so many great resources and advice on how to approach digital safety with your child.
- www.childnet-int.org - a non-profit organisation working directly with children, parents and teachers to ensure that the issues of online child protection and children's safe and positive use of the internet are addressed. Childnet International produce and online CD guide specifically for parents called Know IT All - www.childnet-int.org/kia/
- www.thinkuknow.co.uk - The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre has set up its own edcational website which has been designed and written specifically for children, young people, teachers, parents and carers.
- www.getsafeonline.org A beginners guide to using the Internet safely, including a quiz and some video tutorials about how to 'stay safe' on-line.
- www.kidsmart.org.uk - Kidsmart is an award winning internet safety website for parents and those working with children. It has been developed by the children's internet charity Childnet International and has excellent information on many of the technologies used by children, with guidance on how to 'stay safe' online.