

Internet safety

New technology, old problem

"Greg is ten - same age as me. I haven't met him, but we chat on the Internet all the time. He's really funny. He wants to meet up tomorrow to play football...

I can't wait to see what he looks like."

- Child exploitation has bad effects on children.
- Paedophiles have been quick to use the Internet as a tool, they are very well practised in how they approach children
- Children are interested in the 'adult' world, but there are measures you can take to protect your child from online risks and help them make the most of the Internet in a safe way
- Be sensitive to changes in how your child acts. It is up to adults to look for the signs of sexual exploitation.
- Research from the NSPCC shows that one in five 9 to 16 year-olds use Internet chat rooms
- Being there for children and taking an interest avoids a lot of problems including internet exploitation

Risks from the Internet

The Internet is a useful tool for people wishing to exploit children. Recent cases in the news have shown that Internet chat rooms can be used by paedophiles to make relationships with children. They then 'groom' children to become victims, either on the Internet itself, or by arranging to actually meet with them. Often victims believe that they are chatting to other children online, as they cannot see who they are talking to.

Internet pornography can cause damage to children who see it. But worse still, the Internet is a way in which pornographic images of children are obtained and exchanged. Sadly such images are in high demand, so pornographers will go to great lengths to get children involved against their will.

Making it safe to surf

There are ways in which you can help to protect your child online and make sure that the Internet is a safe way to learn and have fun.

Ask your Internet Service Provider or local computer specialist about parental controls, which can stop your child seeing websites with sexual or other harmful content. These methods cannot give a total safeguard but do offer some degree of protection.

Learn all you can about the Internet. In the same way that you would teach your child about the dangers from strangers, warn your child about dangers on the Internet and lay down some ground rules regarding the time they spend online. If possible avoid your child going online in private, or at least make sure you have access to their computer. Make sure that they know they should never arrange to meet a new friend made on the Internet without a trusted adult going with them.

Watch out for possible signs of exploitation or abuse. Some of these signs are often completely innocent, but look out for changes in your child's mood or how they act, not sleeping or bedwetting, bruises or marks, problems at school, going missing or hurting themselves on purpose, or having any pornographic material. Be especially aware of any new friendships between your child and older people, whether male or female.

If your child is abused, whether mildly or severely, it is vital to be 100% supportive, make it clear that it is not their fault and that you are there to help and protect them no matter what happens.

ACTION

If you think your child has been exposed to any form of exploitation try to get them to tell you. Assure them that they've done nothing wrong and that you will support them. Contact Social Services, Young Peoples Services or other appropriate organisations for further advice and support.

WHAT TO SAY

Make sure your child knows that you believe what they are telling you to create trust between you. Explain in your own way why these things happen and avoid making them feel ashamed or foolish about what they have experienced.

Let them know that you will protect them from further harm.

WARNING SIGNS

Spending a long time in secret on the Internet, changes in how they act or moods, unusual sexual behaviour, asking questions about sexual experiences or words, leaving pornographic material, diaries, letters or emails where they can be found.

PREVENTION

Know where your child is, know their friends and daily activities. Teach your child to trust their own feelings and assure them that they have a right to say NO to what they sense is wrong. Listen carefully to your child's fears and be supportive.

Check the ACPC website for the latest phone numbers: www.iwight.com/parents

Make Contact

Local Police and Social Services have specialist teams who are specially trained to deal with these forms of exploitation and offer support to children and their families.

CONTACTS

- *Useful websites on Internet use and safety:*
- *Parent information network*
www.pin.org.uk
- www.kidsmart.org.uk
- www.ngfl.gov.uk
- www.websafecrackerz.com
- www.chatdanger.com
- www.parentsonline.gov.uk

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