# NetSupport

Online Safety Guide
2023

Contents

What is online safety?

The internet is a magnet for us all – a fantastic place full of adventure, inspiration, learning and engagement. However, risks can and do arise, from online abuse, grooming, bullying, sexting, harassment or exposure to inappropriate content, so it's vital that we educate young people how best to keep themselves safe.

Just as we complete a risk assessment to ensure those engaging in 'real life' activities where dangers might present themselves can be kept safe, so we have a duty of care to ensure that when young people are navigating the online world, we work to mitigate any risks that might be involved.

In a world where 61% of 5-15 year olds have their own tablet and 55% have their own smartphone[1], it is ever incumbent upon us to make sure that young people are aware of the risks involved in engaging in online spaces; hence, online safety has never been more important.

61%

55%
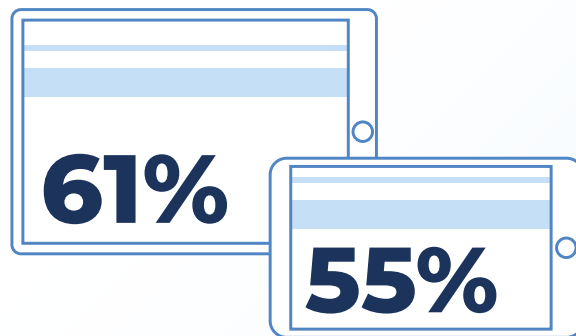
Working together to protect young people

There are tools, strategies and technologies we can use to scaffold and support a young person's use of the online world. Recognising that technology use doesn't stop at the end of school, it is important that society does what it can to work together to protect young people from potential online harms. This is why in the KCSIE (Keeping Children Safe in Education) update this year there is now an expectation that the governors hold online safety as a central theme in their whole-setting approach to safeguarding.

What is this guide?

This guide aims to offer approaches and resources to help schools, children and families make the most of the online world, whilst giving advice and support on how to safely navigate a space which, whilst wonderful, can have so many pitfalls.

Source: [1] Ofcom

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Cyberbullying

What is cyberbullying?

Bullying is often defined as repeated behaviour which is intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally. This can happen in real and virtual spaces and often involves targeting people because of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or other aspect, such as their appearance or due to a disability. It can take a variety of forms, such as social bullying, cyberbullying, name calling, sexual bullying or general threatening behaviour. Online disinhibition can often exaggerate actions and words online and so in recent years we have seen increasing incidents of bullying (cyberbullying) taking place on online forums such as:

- texting services and iMessage
- chat platforms, e.g. Messenger, Snapchat, and WhatsApp
- community platforms like Reddit and Discord
- social media sites, e.g. Instagram, Facebook and Twitter
- gaming platforms.

What to be aware of?

There are many platforms that can facilitate cyberbullying. It is easy for children to access them. The internet never stops, and issues can be difficult to pin down as they often happen over time and are emotional rather than physical in nature. The impact that cyberbullying brings to its victims can be significant, with victims being more than twice as likely to self-harm or attempt suicide.

What can you do?

Children see parents/guardians and teachers as being their two main sources for information[1], so aim to create a culture with young people where they can talk to you about these issues. Whether you are a parent/guardian or a teacher, ensuring you are approachable and that you make it clear that it is okay to talk about these things will go a long way to help protect a child.

Learn more: [1] SWGfL, Internet Matters, National Bullying Helpline, NSPCC

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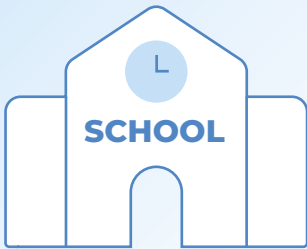
SCHOOL

Nearly 72%

of UK children who had experienced cyberbullying experienced it at school or during school time. [3]
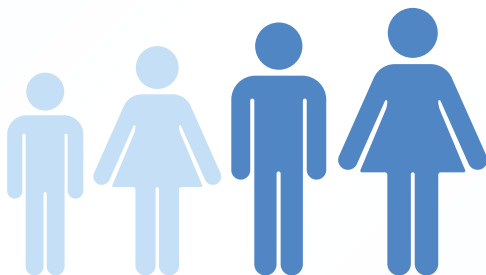
32%

of US 9-12-year-olds say cyberbullying affected their friendships. [1]

26%

of UK children did not report their cyberbullying experiences to anyone. [3]

Between the ages of

10 and 18

the risk of being cyberbullied increases by 2% each year. [2]

Sources: [1] Cartoon Network report, [2] Security.org report, [3] ONS

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Fake news

What is fake news?

Fake news is false or misleading information that is presented as legitimate facts in the style of a news report. It ignores the principles of journalism that ensure that information is accurate and credible. Instead, it is designed to manipulate readers' interpretations of real events, with the intention of causing disruption or division.

We are all presented with news on our devices, 24/7, so how can we identify what is real and what isn't? It's just as easy for adults to be caught out by fake news as it is for young people, so we all need to confirm that what we are reading is a true representation of the facts.

How can we check?

When reading news, be on the lookout for:

- misleading headlines written as clickbait
- propaganda
- poor quality writing
- spoof or parody reporting.

Then, there are several things you can check to ensure you're not potentially being misled.

- Be alert and adopt a critical mindset when reading news.
- Check the author – are they known and credible?
- Check the story – has it been published anywhere else?
- Check the source – is it well-known? There's a big difference between reading news from established providers or from social media posts.
- Check that images are original – Google Lens now includes a reverse image search.

You can even verify facts for yourself on established sites such as FactCheck, Snopes or BBC Reality Check.

Sources: CiTS, Microsoft, BBC

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'Inaccurate news'

The internet is also full of articles and blogs that are based on fact but may not be totally accurate. These are not published to intentionally mislead people, but most self-publishing writers may not apply all the necessary checks and standards that qualified journalists do, so you may still need to verify any facts before sharing or quoting a post.
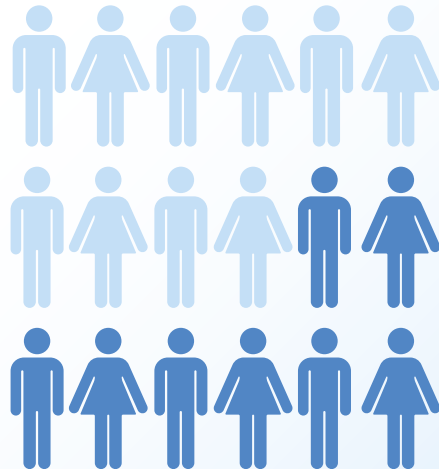
Only 2%

of children have the critical literacy skills they need to tell if a news story is real or fake.

Half of teachers (53.5%)
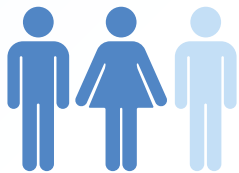
Two-thirds of children (60.9%)

now trust the news less because of fake news.

believe that the national curriculum does not equip children with the literacy skills they need to identify fake news.

Source: Literacy Trust

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Gaming

What's the problem?

Play is an important part of learning and of growing up. Playing games digitally brings additional opportunities for learning and growth – and not just from those games that promote problem solving, mathematics practice or fine motor control and hand-eye coordination. There are many compelling reasons for children to play electronic games.

When it comes to gaming, the problem often isn't with young people having too much fun, although screentime can be an issue. Many games that young people want to play are what are known as MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games). These types of games involve players playing together online in the same space where they communicate through headsets or by typing messages.

These are great fun for young people and gained huge popularity during the pandemic when they were starved of their ability to play together in real life. The social interaction however can bring issues that may concern parents and guardians, such as:

- **Addiction.** When excessive online gaming starts to affect areas of a young person's life, such as schoolwork, sleep or appearance, it's time to act. It helps to be aware that, as with any addiction, withdrawal can be difficult, so managing time spent online before it gets to that stage is wise.

- **Cyberbullying.** The social side of gaming has grown, and it is now possible to interact with players all over the world. However, as ill-intentioned people may hide behind online personas, parents can help to protect children by checking device settings, keeping gaming consoles in shared areas, and playing the games together to help keep them safe.

- **Screen time.** Young people need guidance and support to regulate their screen time, whether they are playing games, investigating the internet or watching YouTube videos. House rules such as keeping devices out of bedrooms and using parental controls are recommended, as is parents setting an example by modelling device-free time.

Sources: Internet Matters, NSPCC
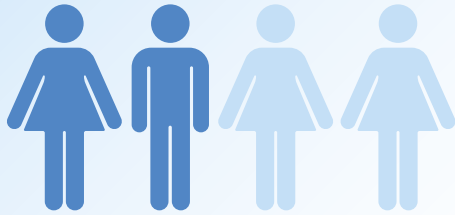
52% of parents

were concerned about their child being bullied while gaming. [2]

75%

played online with someone they knew. [2]

20%

18

of online gamers in the US are under 18. [1]

12-17 year olds

were most likely to play against people they didn't know. [2]

?
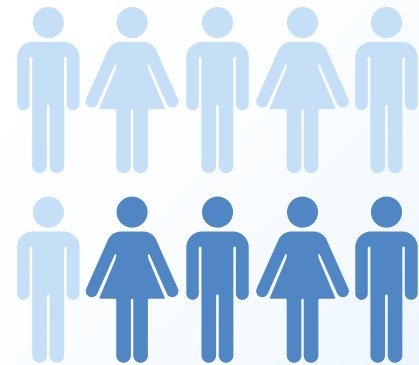
6 out of 10 children

in the UK played online games in 2021. [2]

Sources: [1]Cloudwards, [2]Ofcom

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Grooming

What is grooming?

At its simplest, grooming involves a person gaining another's trust so they can later abuse it – or even them.

Young people are especially vulnerable to grooming. After all, it's flattering when someone takes a special interest, whether it's a stranger or a person who they already know. Grooming can lead to CSE (child sexual exploitation), trafficking, involvement in county lines and more, so it's vital to be alert to the signs.

Groomers infiltrate a young person's online world by inhabiting the same online spaces as they do. This can be on social media, messaging apps, gaming forums or even plain old email. Sometimes it's adults doing the grooming – but not always. Young people are often unaware themselves that they are being groomed.

What are the signs?

Parents are often unaware that their child is being groomed until the process is well under way. However, there are some changes that they can watch out for, such as their child:

- having new items in their room not bought by parents or carers
- being secretive and not talking about how they spend their time at home or at school
- suddenly having money from an unexplained source
- being withdrawn or upset
- going missing from home and/or not explaining where they've been when they return
- not going online or to activities they have previously enjoyed
- having an older boyfriend/girlfriend
- missing school or activities
- using alcohol or drugs.

Where to turn to for help

If you find CSE images online, you can report it to the Internet Watch Foundation or refer to the UK Safer Internet Centre for further support.

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The NSPCC's 'Report Remove' allows young people to report image or videos shared online and see if it is possible to get them taken down.

To report online grooming in Canada via the national tip line at cybertip.ca or get support in the USA at RAINN.org.
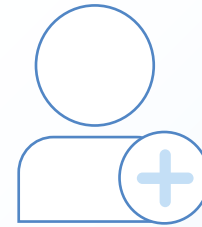
4 in 5

parents are worried about children being groomed online for criminal exploitation. [2]
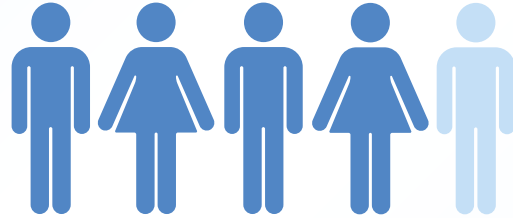
POLICE

In the UK, online grooming crimes recorded by police increased by around

70%

in the three years up to 2021. [1]

30%

of 12-15-year-olds said they had been contacted online by a stranger wanting to befriend them. [3]

Sources: [1] NSPCC, [2] The Children's Society, [3] Internet Matters

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Radicalisation

What is radicalisation?

Radicalisation is the process a person goes through as they adopt extreme beliefs about race, religion, politics or gender. Those who are radicalised often end up being drawn into hate crimes, violence or terrorism, joining extremist groups and alienating themselves from family and friends.

The internet is perfect for those seeking to radicalise and draw others to their cause because of the sheer number of communication channels available. Mainstream social media apps may often be the trigger for young people to further investigate views they are exposed to, especially if they are posted by popular influencers (like Andrew Tate, for example) or are 'celebrities' in their field.

Signs to look out for

Being a part of a group appeals to all of us, young people included, but those who are vulnerable are at increased risk. Changes in behaviour are often the first indicator that something is going on, such as:
- no longer considering others' points of view
- changing/falling out with friends
- being argumentative
- being sympathetic to conspiracy theories
- being secretive
- having new online friends they don't talk about
- having multiple online identities
- reading extremist content online.

Keep an eye on social media

Radicalisation takes time. Watch out for increased use of less mainstream social media platforms such as Omegle, OnlyFans, Wink or Swipr. Young people are often unaware that they are being radicalised, as their 'friends' take their time to gain their trust.

The UK Prevent Duty sets out requirements for schools and organisations to follow to help protect students from radicalisation.

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Useful information
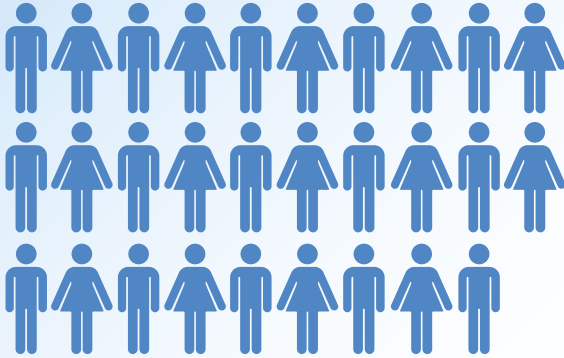
In the UK, police arrested

29 teenagers

for suspected terrorist-related activities between March 2021 and March 2022. [1]

US organisation, RAND, interviewed former extremists, who said that mental health, marginalization and propaganda played a part in their radicalization. [2]

The Action Counters Terrorism website has practical help for parents who are worried their children may be being radicalised.

Europol's Internet Referral Unit, scans the web for online terrorist material and refers it to host platforms. It has referred more than

130,000

pieces of content to internet companies since 2015 (and over 25,000 in 2019). [3]

Sources: [1] Counter Terrorism Policing, [2] RAND, [3] EU Parliament

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Sexting

What is sexting?

Sexting usually involves someone sending nude or semi-nude photos and explicit videos of themselves to another person, who may then share them with others or post them online without consent. The person who is the subject of the photo or video has no control over who it is being sent to, potentially leaving them feeling humiliated and susceptible to bullying and blackmail.

In addition to the emotional effects, the content will have a lasting 'digital footprint' which can be hard to remove, only adding to its long-term impact on the person involved.

What you should know

1. In many countries, it is illegal to send/receive underaged sexual content. In around half of US states it is illegal for under-18s to sext, on child pornography (child sexual abuse) grounds.
2. In the UK, it is an offence to make, distribute, possess or show any indecent images of anyone aged under 18, even if the content was created with the consent of that young person. [1]
3. Sexting is increasingly common amongst children who have vulnerabilities and often occurs due to pressure or blackmail.

Where to find help

- The NSPCC's 'Report Remove' allows young people to report image or videos shared online and see if it is possible to get them taken down.
- The UK Government has published advice for schools on dealing with sexting.
- CEOP (run by the UK National Crime Agency) has an online safety centre for children and parents to reach out to for this and other issues.
- The CyberBullying Research Center publishes what each US state's sexting laws cover.
- Take It Down is a US organization that helps with removal or stopping the sharing of nudes.

Source: [1] Child Law Advice

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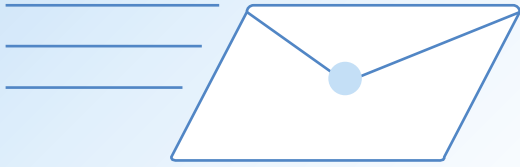
Nearly 40%

of all teenagers have posted or sent sexually suggestive messages. [1]

X100
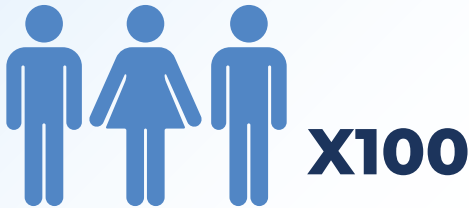
In the UK during 2019, more than 300 children of primary school age were investigated for sexting offences. [3]

17%

of sexters share the messages they receive with others, and

55%

of those share them with more than one person. [1]

18
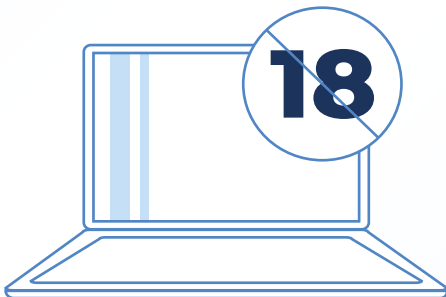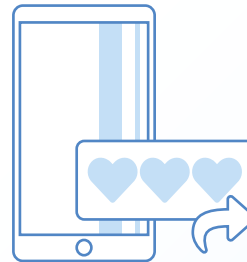
Platforms like OnlyFans and Omegle likely contribute to the spread of self-generated sexual imagery as neither have robust age verification checks in place. [2]

Sources: [1] DoSomething.org, [2] Internet Matters, [3] The Guardian

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Social Media

Social media is a difficult subject for teachers, students and parents. Teachers often must deal with the repercussions of things that happen there. Children often feel compelled to be on it and are drawn in with infinite scrolling and constant notifications. Parents don't know what to do and are often pressured by their children to let them use it, even when they are under the recommended age.
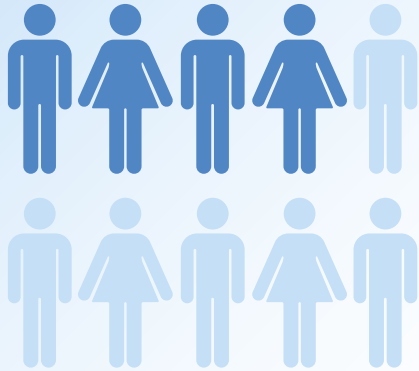
People often assume that the age 13 rating on social media apps comes from a place where children are emotionally mature enough to use them. This is not the case. The rating comes from the legacy setting of the USA's COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, 1998) legislation which made it illegal to collect or store the personal information of children under age 13.

According to Ofcom in its 'Online Nation 2022' report, nearly two thirds of children in the UK aged 3-15 using social media and one third of children online aged 8-15 have seen concerning or disturbing content online in recent times.

What to be aware of

- Algorithms on social media aren't written with children in mind. They're created to keep people on the platform, collect their data and promote advertising to them.

- Social media sites can be addictive using likes, notifications, followers, colour schemes, infinite scrolling and other features to help keep people on the platforms.

- Social media platforms promote sharing and creation of content and can facilitate cruel and bullying behaviour, such as trolling and cyberbullying.

- Social media is often a misrepresentation of real life, where a world of influencers and celebrities sharing content can exert unnecessary pressure to fit into an unattainable mould.

- It can cause feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness. If posts don't receive engagement or likes, it can cause significant upset to children who perceive it as being a personal slight.

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38% of parents

of 8-11-year-olds said they would allow their child to use social media. [1]

Just 4 in 10 parents

of 3-17s knew the minimum age requirement for using most social media, which is 13. [1]
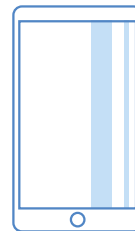
17%

of 3-4-year-olds have their own mobile phone. [1]
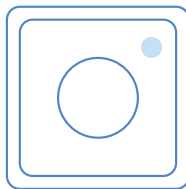
A 2019 survey found that Instagram affected the way US and UK teens feel about themselves and their mental health, with 12-23% saying it made them feel 'somewhat worse' and 2-3% saying 'much worse'. [2]

Be informed! WhatsApp is a 16+ app despite it showing on the App Store as a 12+ app and on the Play Store as being appropriate for everyone. UKSIC (UK Safer Internet Centre) says "We recommend following WhatsApp's guidelines."

Sources: [1] Ofcom, [2] Statista

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How can schools help tackle these issues?

The four key strands a school can use to help mitigate these online safety issues are:

Educating children about the risks.

Educating staff about the risks.

Employing effective monitoring tools.

Working with parents and carers.

Educating children about the risks

In England, Ofsted, Keeping Children Safe in Education and the National Curriculum for Computing require education settings to deliver online safety education through their broad and balanced curriculum, from our youngest phases right through the key stages. This isn't a statutory duty internationally, but it is widely regarded to be an essential part of all school curricula.

Ofsted KCSIE
CIPA ISTE

Resources to support learning

Many organisations, such as the UK Council for Internet Safety (which created the framework of 'Education for a Connected World') and others (e.g., Google's 'Be Internet Awesome' curriculum) have created fantastic resources for supporting learning about how to help keep yourself safe online.

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One particularly useful resource for schools is the brilliant ProjectEVOLVE tool, brought to you by the SWGfL (South West Grid for Learning), Nominet and the UK Safer Internet Centre. Whilst UK curriculum-centric, its free resources are superb and aligned across the main areas schools should be considering teaching to young people.
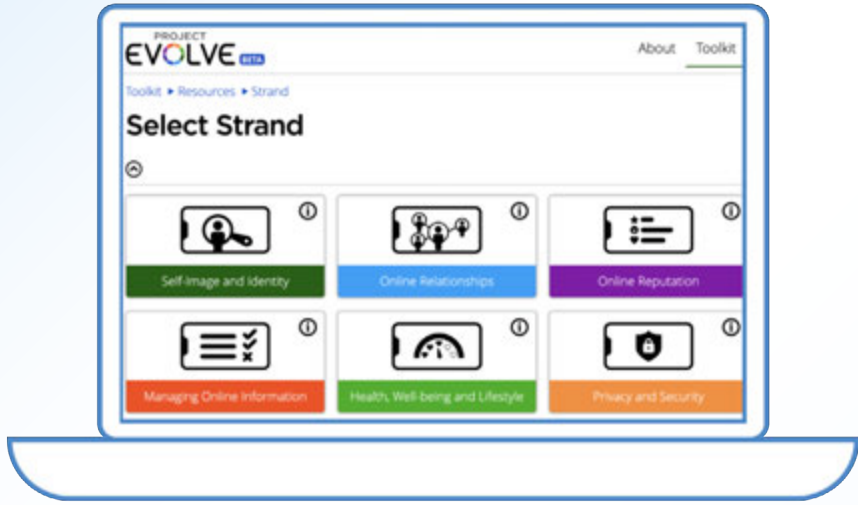
If you're in the US, ISTE has a great curriculum within its ISTE Standards for students which covers Digital Footprint, Online Behavior, Intellectual Property and Data Privacy. The curriculum goes beyond this within the other strands to help embed responsible uses of technology to support and transform learning – they are well worth a look.

There are also products that you can use as a school which help support online safety in your curriculum, like the Bett award-winning Natterhub. With a library of more than 350 lessons, it covers the primary-aged curriculum requirements with teacher-led and independent animated lessons for you to use with your classes.

Awareness days

Celebrating relevant awareness days in your school, such as the annual Safer Internet Day, Digital Citizenship Week or Mental Health Awareness Week are a great way to shine a light on the importance of online safety.

Educating staff about the risks

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility in education, whether you are teaching or support staff. There are several ways schools can educate all staff about the risks, but a key feature of any strategy is to ensure that it does not happen in silos.

Planned staff training (CPD/Inset)

Scheduled and planned safeguarding training is a statutory requirement for all staff so that colleagues are well equipped to identify, support and help young people who need it, when they need it.

Staff training should also inform colleagues of the latest updates to legislation or best-practice advice such as KCSIE (Keeping Children Safe in Education), CIPA (Children's Internet Protection Act), DfE or other bodies that provide guidance on best practice around online safety support.

The bigger picture

Undertaking ongoing reviews of where the school organisation sits against a clear framework – such as that provided by the Online Safety Review tool from SWGfL – is a great way to both benchmark your provision and highlight areas for improvement.

We see every day as being a 'Safer Internet Day' and interweaving online safety into the fabric of your day-to-day curriculum is where best practice sits. Educating staff about the resources available, how to support young people and how to role model best practice themselves, all helps to provide the best support possible.

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If you're looking for a relevant [free CPD discussion resource](#) for Safer Internet Day 2023 for colleagues, check out this recording. It contains a wealth of professional learning opportunities and features guests including the IWF (Internet Watch Foundation), NetSupport, SWGfL, i-vengers, positive mental health advocates, and importantly, a school's technology lead teacher.

Effective monitoring tools

Schools have several statutory duties surrounding online safety and data privacy. There are several tools you can use to help monitor and control what students are doing online, both in supervised and unsupervised environments, including [KCSIE](#) and [CIPA](#). But to fulfil their duties, schools need to do more than just internet monitoring through a firewall.

There are compelling educational reasons for not blanket banning everything. For example, we wouldn't want to stop children learning about areas like online safety, where difficult results and topics such as sexting and pornography might come up. We do, however, want children to not have access to tools and sites that share and promote this content…

Just as blanket blocking and internet monitoring do not provide context, a lack of tracking means you're missing crucial information when understanding students' issues and drivers for seeking out this content in the first place.

A full overview

Considering solutions that allow for contextual analysis as part of your internet monitoring processes could be a better approach. Tools such as [NetSupport DNA](#) or [classroom.cloud](#) are prime examples that do this brilliantly (and have won awards too!).

Contextual analysis is useful when tracking what young people are typing because it helps to provide insight into their thoughts and feelings. It helps to identify any potential risks or concerns, such as signs of cyberbullying or self-harm. It can also provide an understanding of the context of messages, helping to identify any potential red flags and allowing adults with safeguarding responsibility to intervene and provide support in the moment, before a situation escalates.

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The algorithms in NetSupport's tools use variables to consider surrounding activities, such as search parameters used, the time of day, websites being visited (including previous activities that have triggered alerts). All of these help to create a 'risk index'. This index ultimately helps adults to identify genuine concerns and balance them according to the risks shown. Time and time again, schools have contacted us to tell us how these tools have helped highlight problems bubbling beneath the surface that, if hadn't been caught, would have most likely led to much more concerning issues.

Sexting
Grooming Radicalisation
Cyberbullying
Abuse
Suicide Self-harm
Extremism

Working with parents/carers to support young people

The key to success as a school community is to involve parents and carers with what you are doing in school to support their children around all aspects of school life, not just online safety. Here are some ways you might like to consider working with parents/carers to support young people.

Invite parents to digital parenting events

Holding regular events for parents to attend to learn about different strategies or tools to support their children are often very well received and a great tool in providing a wrapper of care. Topics often include gaming, online harm prevention, screen time, use of devices, parental controls and many more.

Use digital signage

By sharing important messages on digital signage in high traffic areas that parents visit, they will soon see that online safety is high on your school's agenda.

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Survey parents and students

As seen from the recent research shared by the i-vengers organisation, perception and reality of what parents think is happening with their children are often at odds with each other. By comparing the results of like-for-like surveys of both parents and learners, you will uncover some great talking and learning points about where young people may need additional support.

Some actions for parents

- Discuss online safety with your children

Talking about these issues with your children will, as some research shows, make them feel proud of you, as their parent, for wanting to have frank and honest conversations about how you want to help and support them online. By working and choosing safe boundaries together, you help foster a positive conversation around safe and responsible use of technology and online spaces.

- Open door policy

It's difficult to always keep an eye on your children, but by having a simple 'door open' policy when gaming at home can be a great start. Being aware of sites such as Taming Gaming (that shares what safe games can do and be used for) is also useful for parents to know exactly what games are about and their capabilities.

- Communication with the school

Hopefully, as a result of the school having open channels of communication and regular touchpoints for conversations around online safety and curriculum, parents will feel confident to be able to report to the school if they have any concerns around online safety that their child or other children might be facing. The school can then act upon any such information to help in ways such as monitoring during school hours or with learning opportunities within the curriculum.

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Summary

Whichever way you look at it, online safety is an area we all have a responsibility to be mindful of and ensure children are properly safeguarded within. The sections within this guide should inform your thinking and your provision, but it should not 'be' your provision. Please do use these resources and tap into the opportunities that they provide - there are even more in the 'Useful Resources' section. You can also follow NetSupport on our social accounts for further shared information.

Twitter   Instagram   LinkedIn

Useful resources

Glossary

Term	Definition
County lines	Refers to gangs who extend their drug dealing business into new locations outside their home areas and almost always involves exploitation of vulnerable young people.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development. Also referred to as Professional Development.
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation.
Cyberbullying	The act of bullying through online channels such as apps, games and forums.
DSL /School Counselor	Member of staff in a school with responsibility for online safety/safeguarding.

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Fake news	Untrue or deliberately misleading information presented in the style of a news report.
Filtering and monitoring	The practice of schools having appropriate technology measures in place to monitor students' online activities and restrict their view of inappropriate material.
Firewall	A technology security measure to monitor incoming and outgoing network traffic based on a set of security rules to keep organisations' technology safe.
Grooming	To build a relationship, often with a young vulnerable child, with a hidden objective of sexual abuse or engaging them in criminal activity.
MMORPG	Massively Multi-player Online Role Playing Game.
Online abuse	Any type of abuse that happens online.
Online disinhibition	The loss of inhibitions that can stem from not speaking to people directly while using online platforms. This can lead to people being more confrontational, abusive and reacting in ways that they might not normally do in real life.
Online safety	Being aware of and taking measures to mitigate the possible risks that may occur on the internet. In schools, this combines digital citizenship teaching with EdTech solutions to help children learn to keep themselves safe online. An alternative term for 'safeguarding.'
Radicalisation	A process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social or religious ideals and aspirations.

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Safeguarding	Being aware of and taking measures to mitigate the possible risks that may occur on the internet. In schools, this combines digital citizenship teaching with EdTech solutions to help children learn to keep themselves safe online. An alternative term for 'online safety.'
Trafficking	A process where young people are forced or persuaded to leave home for the purpose of exploiting them.
Trolling	When someone deliberately tries to upset someone else online. It often happens by sharing negative comments about that person or the things they've shared online.
Sexting	Sending sexually explicit messages, photos or videos via a digital device.

Events

Digital Citizenship Week
Held annually during the third week of October.

Mental Health Awareness Week
15th-20th May 2023

Safer Internet Day
7th February 2023

Official guidance

Children's Internet Protection Act
CIPA - USA

Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule
COPPA - USA

Keeping Children Safe in Education
KCISE - UK

UK Prevent Duty

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Resources and solutions

Solution/Resource	Description
classroom.cloud	Three-in-one solution for online classroom instruction, online safety and IT management.
Google Lens	Google's search engine for images.
iVengers	Peer-led digital leader programme to engage, educate and empower young people to make safer choices online.
National Online Safety	Online safety education for educators, parents and children.
Natterhub	EdTech solution for online safety in primary schools that prepares pupils to thrive online.
NetSupport DNA	EdTech solution for IT Management and Safeguarding in education settings.
Persona Life Skills	Online social-emotional learning for teenagers.
Taming Gaming	A family gaming database of educational online games

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