

Cyber Safety

How to make sure your child surfs the web safely

HOW SAFE IS your child online? A question that, in all likelihood, didn't concern our parents when we were children. However, advancements in technology over the past 20 years have led to a point where we need to be more vigilant than ever. Children now have access to faster internet speeds, online gaming systems and, more often than not, a handheld device or smartphone. Before these advances, something or someone highly visible and tangible was probably the biggest danger to children. Now, there are a plethora of pitfalls lurking behind a computer screen. And, if recent research is to be believed, more of us are using these tablets and smartphones as a form of 'digital dummy' than ever before – pacifying youngsters so that we can perform any number of tasks and errands on a daily basis.

What can you do? Every school has a duty to ensure that its pupils remain safe, be it online or otherwise. In the past few years, the UK government made internet safety a particular focus of their inspection process for schools. But given the incredible rise in access to the internet and its amazing functionality, the responsibilities do not lie just with schools. Now, more than ever, teachers and parents

need to work together to ensure that children remain safe.

Depending on the age of your child, it's likely that their school has already begun educating them on the subject of internet safety (sometimes referred to as E-Safety). Regardless of how old your child may be, or whichever school they attend, there are a number of strategies parents can employ at home to further strengthen the key messages behind internet safety:

Have an honest and frank discussion with your children

Can you honestly name the websites your children frequently visit? And to whom they speak? If the answer is "yes," then fantastic. However, if the answer is "no," why not sit them down and ask them to talk you through where they go, friends they might have and rules that they might follow themselves? Any alarm bells that ring can probably be dealt with then and there, in a calm and mature fashion.

Be diligent

There's good reason why Facebook has an age restriction of 13 but there are a surprising number of parents who are either unaware of it or choose to ignore it, to keep their pre-teens happy. Many other



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apps and websites also hold age restrictions as the content is considered inappropriate.

Set parental controls

You can use Parental Controls to not only set a limit on the number of hours that your child can use the computer, but also the types of games they can access and the programs they can use. On an iPad or iPhone, you can quickly set restrictions by clicking on "Settings," "General" then "Restrictions."

Set the right example

When the issue of internet safety was raised in the UK, with it came a responsibility for all educators to ensure that they were setting the right example. As a result, it is common practise now for teachers to lock their computers when they leave their classroom. Although this practice might be considered a little "over the top" to do at home, it sends the right message to children that personal information and profiles are to be respected, and not to be easily accessed by others.

Don't fall foul of common misconceptions

"My child is too clever to be caught out" is the cry from some parents when discussing this topic. I have seen first-hand evidence to the contrary. Even the brightest, most astute children need educating about how to behave online, particularly when it comes to communicating with strangers and sharing personal information.

"I am not equipped to help" - something to which people who are less confident with technology may feel. Even a conversation or some time shared on the internet together may demonstrate to your child that you have an active interest in their online behavior.

Of course, there may be times when a trusted adult may not be immediately available to deal with something children see, or find online that they don't like. This is the point at which we, as educators (be it parents or teachers), hope that children follow the examples we have set, the advice we have given, listen to their moral compass and make the right choice. ■

