

## Keeping your child safe online

Like it or not, technology is an integral part of our children's lives. One in three internet users are children. Children as young as 3 have their own tablet and many 8 year olds use social media. Teens and young adults have unlimited online access.

When managed well, the internet is a fantastic resource for learning and gathering information but sadly 1 in 4 children have experienced something unpleasant on a social network, including cyber bullying and hate messages. 'Sexting' – exchanging pictures or messages with sexual content – is common practice for teens and is even begin to creep into the Primary School age range. 'Stranger Danger' has taken on a whole new concept. No longer is it someone loitering around the school gate or the local park. It is far more likely to be someone your child has never seen - someone they are talking to online as part of a game or on an approved website.

Responsible parents and carers know how to lock their child's device and have controls on the sites they use. But is this enough? It is important that we teach our children how to keep *themselves* safe online. However diligent, it is unlikely that parents will be able to keep up with the latest apps and media sites their children are using or know which ones allow live location sharing. In any case, as children get older they will quickly find ways around parental controls!

So – how can we ensure our children are safe online? The secret is to *teach* our young people what they need to know and what they must look out for. If our children understand what the risks are they are more likely to make the right choices.

- Talk to your child about potential risks, openly and honestly at an age appropriate level. Don't try to scare them – give them facts and outline the dangers.
- Explore apps and games together with your child. Take an interest in the sites they use and assess any potential risks. If your child is young, set parental controls yourself. Older children should be shown how to block or report inappropriate content so that they can make decisions and take action themselves. Make sure they have a trusted adult they can speak to if they are worried and know to report any concerns immediately.
- Agree boundaries and rules, including how much screen time is reasonable. Are phones allowed at the dinner table? The same rules should apply to everyone! If you decide to ban a particular app or site, make sure your child knows why.
- Manage the family's settings and controls and review them frequently

There is a lot of information available for parents. Look at websites such as:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>