

St Mary's C of E School



Bideford

Online Safety

A Guide for Parents



THINK
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KNOW

Keeping your child safe online - A checklist for parents and carers

As a parent you'll probably know how important the internet is to children and young people. They use it to learn, play, socialise and express themselves in all types of creative ways. This may be through sharing photos and videos, blogging, gaming, or even developing their own apps. It is a place of amazing opportunities.

The technology children use in their daily lives can seem daunting. You might worry about the risks they can face online, such as bullying, contact from strangers, as well as the possibility of access to inappropriate or illegal content. To help them stay safe, it's important that you understand how your child uses the internet.

By following this simple checklist, you can start to protect them and decrease the risks they face:



I have asked my child to show me sites they use – By doing so, your child is including you in their online life and social activity. Show an interest and take note of the names of their favourite sites. You can then re-visit these when you are alone. Take your time and explore the space, find out how to set the safety features and learn how to report any issues directly to the site.



I have asked my child to set their profile settings to private – Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are used by children to share information, photos and just about everything they do! Encourage your child to set their privacy settings to private. They need to think about the information they post online as it could be copied and pasted anywhere, without their permission. If it got into the wrong hands, somebody may wish to use it against them or worst of all try to locate them in the real world.



I have asked my child about their online friends – We know that people lie online about who they are and may create fake identities. It is very important children understand this. Whether they are visiting a social network or a gaming site, the safety messages are the same. Children and young people must never give out personal information and only be "friends" with people they know and trust in the real world.



I have set appropriate parental controls on my child's computer, mobile and games console – Filters on computers and mobiles can prevent your child from viewing inappropriate and possibly illegal content. You can activate and change levels depending on your child's age and abilities. You can also set time restrictions for using the internet or games. They can be free and easy to install. Call your service provider who will be happy to assist or visit CEOP's parents' site for further information. Explain to your child why you are setting parental controls when you talk to them about their internet use.



My child has agreed to tell me if they are worried about something online – Sometimes children get into situations online where they don't feel comfortable or see something they don't want to see. By opening up the communication channels and talking to your child about the internet, their favourite sites and the risks they may encounter, they are more likely to turn to you if they are concerned about something.



I know where to get help if I'm concerned about my child – The CEOP Safety Centre provides access to a range of services. If you are concerned that an adult has made inappropriate contact with your child you can report this directly to CEOP. You can also find help if you think your child is being bullied, or if you've come across something on the internet which you think may be illegal.

Visit the Safety Centre at www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre or by clicking on this button:



For further help and guidance on all the information mentioned please visit
www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents

- Thinkuknow (CEOPS) - <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>
- NSPCC Share Aware - www.nspcc.org.uk/ShareAware
- Digizen - <http://www.digizen.org/>
- SWGfL - <http://swgfl.org.uk/products-services/esafety/resources>
- Kidsmart - <http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/>
- CBBC Stay Safe - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/topics/stay-safe>
- Childnet - <http://www.childnet.com/>

Resources we will use in school:

Y3 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nMUbHuffO8>

Y4 - https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/8_10/cybercafe/Cyber-Cafe-Base/

Y5 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgCNGvL0g1g>

Y6 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_o8auwnJtqE

There are many other good information films on Youtube.

**CEOPS top tips (taken from
<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Primary/>)**

- **Talk to your child about what they're up to online.** Be a part of their online life; involve the whole family and show an interest. Find out what sites they visit and what they love about them, if they know you understand they are more likely to come to you if they have any problems.
- **Watch Thinkuknow films and cartoons with your child.** The **Thinkuknow site** has films, games and advice for children from five all the way to 16.
- **Encourage your child to go online and explore!** There is a wealth of age-appropriate sites online for your children. Encourage them to use sites which are fun, educational and that will help them to develop online skills.
- **Keep up-to-date with your child's development online.** Children grow up fast and they will be growing in confidence and learning new skills daily. It's important that as your child learns more, so do you.
- **Set boundaries in the online world just as you would in the real world.** Think about what they might see, what they share, who they talk to and how long they spend online. It is important to discuss boundaries at a young age to develop the tools and skills children need to enjoy their time online.
- **Keep all equipment that connects to the internet in a family space.** For children of this age, it is important to keep internet use in family areas so you can see the sites your child is using and be there for them if they stumble across something they don't want to see.
- **Know what connects to the internet and how.** Nowadays even the TV connects to the internet. Make sure you're aware of which devices that your child uses connect to the internet, such as their phone or games console. Also, find out how they are accessing the internet – is it your connection, or a neighbour's wifi? This will affect whether the safety setting you set are being applied.
- **Use parental controls on devices that link to the internet, such as the TV, laptops, computers, games consoles and mobile phones.** Parental controls are not just about locking and blocking, they are a tool to help you set appropriate boundaries as your child grows and develops. They are not the answer to your child's online safety, but they are a good start and they are not as difficult to install as you might think. Service providers are working hard to make them simple, effective and user friendly. **Find your service provider and learn how to set your controls**

If you have a child who is at, or is due to start, **secondary school**, read our secondary school advice to find out what you can do to support them.

If you find out your child has been sexually abused or exploited...

Discovering that your child has, or may have been, sexually victimized is very hard to bear. There are lots of feelings you may be feeling about the abuse itself, as well as about how your child responded (for example, if they didn't tell you), and any grooming the abuser engaged in (the ways they approached and related to your child and others - possibly you - to prepare the ground for abuse and secrecy).

People who have discovered that their child has been abused often find themselves experiencing a range of feelings such as confusion, anger, horror, disgust, frustration, helplessness, grief and betrayal. On the other hand, some find themselves feeling a sense of numbness. Naturally, there are no right or wrong ways to feel in this situation – the most important things are finding some ways of processing your feelings and offering effective support to your child.

Some thoughts on how to respond

Following sexual abuse, or the discovery of it, children also often experience feelings like those mentioned above. They often blame themselves and feel stigmatized, embarrassed and ashamed. They might have these feelings straight away or at some point down the line.

Aspects of the abuse will be playing into how your child and you feel, including how the abuser worked to keep the abuse secret and how they used their power. People who sexually abuse often lead the child to see themselves as at least partly responsible for it and threaten or deceive them.

If your child didn't tell you about the abuse or delayed in telling you, this is very normal and is likely to be for one or more of the following reasons:

1. They felt ashamed or embarrassed.
2. They weren't sure how to talk about it or couldn't find a space to.
3. They were worried about how other people might respond, for example:
 - 'I might be seen as *different*.'
 - 'This is going to cause problems in my family/community/school.'
 - 'I may be taken away from home.'
 - 'I don't want the police or social services involved in my life.'
 - 'I don't want the abuser to get in trouble' (because of feelings of loyalty, love, fear etc).
 - 'I'm going to be blamed.'
 - 'Images will be found which I'm embarrassed about.'
 - 'I won't be believed.'
 - 'I won't be taken seriously.'
 - 'He/she is going to hurt or embarrass me or my family or someone else.'

Your approach can help your child overcome these worries and generally feel better. We know from research that a supportive response from parents is one of the most important things that helps a child recover and put abuse behind them.

What to say

There are some key messages that are important for children and young people to hear in their parents' words and actions:

- I believe you.
- I don't blame you in any way; I blame the abuser.
- The abuse says nothing about you or who you are. I don't see you any differently (apart from recognising your strengths in surviving it).
- I trust your sense of who might be the best person to talk to (e.g. me, your other parent, other family, friends, a therapist or counsellor).
- If there is someone else you'd like to talk to, I can help to organise this.
- You can always talk to me at any point. Different feelings can come up down the line.
- There is a way forward from any difficulties and intense emotions.

What do young people need from their parents in this situation?

Naturally, every young person is different - but research exploring the views of young people has found some common themes. Much of this may be what you are already doing, and you will want to adapt it to fit with your knowledge of your child:

- Be **warm and empathetic** towards your child, recognising that they may have complex feelings about what's happened, but not predicting or assuming what they are.
- Have **a purposeful conversation** asking about their feelings, with space to talk about anything that may be on their mind about the situation.
- Avoid questions that might be felt to be intrusive or pressurizing about 'what happened'. Focus on understanding **how they are feeling now and what they might like from you.**
- Think about your own feelings first, before having these conversations. It might be useful to talk to someone else (see below). **Recognise your feelings** and which are helpful to share with your child and which may not be. It can be helpful for your child to see some of how you're feeling, but it's important not to leave them feeling anxious or burdened by your emotions.
- Young people often worry about the 'stigma' of having been abused. **Avoid treating your child as if they are different** in any way because of it.
- Do take time to **notice the strengths they have drawn upon** in surviving or in coping with the abuse and related experiences.
- If there are signs that they are struggling (see below), **don't be afraid** of asking about how they are doing and **seeking further support.**
- Think about **whether the abuse has definitely stopped.** (Often abuse continues even after a child has told someone about it.) If you have any doubts, explore these with your child and other relevant people – for more advice on this, see below.

- Think about whether there **are any things you can do to lower the risk** of further sexual abuse (by the same abuser or another) – also see below.

A few words about belief and blame

- It might sound unnecessary to say ‘believe your child’ and ‘don’t blame them’ but very often family and friends can fall into traps of disbelief and blame, because, strangely enough, they can be quite normal reactions. The message here is that if you know to look out for this in yourself, you can acknowledge any feelings like these and avoid acting on them.
- It’s a normal reaction when a parent sees their child getting hurt to feel frustrated with their child for anything they did that might have played into the abuse – these feelings can come from a place of love but, if expressed, can end up causing further hurt.
- It’s the same with disbelief – sometimes it can be hard to believe what children say because we don’t want to accept it – but, again, acting on this leaves children feeling much worse and can leave them at risk of further abuse.
- Research has shown that children who are taken seriously after they talk about abuse do a lot better than those who are not all the way into adulthood.
- Taking an accepting approach involves more than just not saying things that are obviously disbelieving or that blame the victim. Avoid any actions that could imply that you *might* blame or disbelieve them, such as asking lots of probing questions - or not saying anything. **Children are often already blaming themselves and may well expect this from others.** This means parents need to go out of their way to demonstrate that they think differently.

Seven things you will need:

- warm and caring spaces to talk
- a clear belief in what your child says
- clear communication that they are not blamed
- action to protect them
- support for you
- find support for your child if difficulties persist
- notice and appreciate your child’s strengths

What are the signs that my child may need further support?

A supportive approach from yourself and others in your child’s life significantly reduces the chance they will have longer-term difficulties as a result of the abuse. However sometimes psychological difficulties can take hold: spotting these early can lead to their being more quickly sorted out.

Signs that *may* indicate your child is struggling with abuse-related difficulties:

Unusual (i.e. not typical for your child) and persistent:

- difficulties sleeping
- aggressive or highly irritable behaviour
- withdrawal from other people
- low mood (often accompanied by changes in appetite, socializing, sleep patterns)
- spacing out
- signs of self-harm

There are a few provisos to this list:

1. It is not exhaustive. People express difficulties differently. And children express things differently at different ages. These are just some of the more common difficulties.
2. Difficulties related to abuse can arise at a later point because of certain triggers or realisations.
3. These signs could equally mean that your child is struggling or coping with something else, such as stress related to school, friendships, family etc.

If you notice any of these things, it is worth talking to your child, asking about how they are, reminding them of your support, and discussing things that might help.

One route is your child or you talking to the GP, who might then refer your child on a service or counsellor for further support. You could also find out whether there is specialist abuse-related support in your area by contacting **The Survivors Trust**.

Thinking about yourself..

Finding out your child has been abused is a traumatic experience and it is important for you, as well as for your child and other family members, that you make space to 'process' how you are feeling about it all, and receive any support you might need.

Some tips:

- The main message from lots of research is that there are lots of different useful ways of coping and moving forward from trauma, but that 'avoidance' is often unhelpful. Avoiding thoughts, feelings and parts of life connected with a trauma can be helpful initially, but lead to the trauma feeling emotionally 'raw' for a lot longer.
- Talking to someone is often helpful, and this might either be a person or people you feel close to or a stranger such as a counsellor.
- It can be useful to give yourself planned mental space. People often find it helpful to have some thinking time while doing something semi-automatic like going for a walk or a drive. Thinking while trying to sleep is less helpful and in this situation it might be good to plan for yourself a time to think during the next day.
- When you feel something difficult (for example, anger, sadness, horror) take time to notice how you feel and express it in a way that helps (for example, talking or writing).
- Think back to how you have coped in previously stressful situations and see whether there might be things that you did then that could help now.

Protecting your child and others from further abuse

If the police and the local authority child protection department don't already know about the abuse, it can feel like a complex decision whether to inform them. Your child may not want anyone else to know and you may not be 100% certain about all the facts. We do however recommend informing the police or local authority, because what you know will add to anything else they already know about the individuals concerned and will help to protect both your child and others. If talking to the police or child protection seems like a daunting first step, discussing it first with say someone from the **NSPCC**

helpline or **CEOP** might be the best way forward. They will help you weigh up the options in your particular situation and what is best for your child and others.

It is important that you moderate or even, for some time, limit your child's internet use. This is not a punishment, as they have done nothing wrong, but 'best practice' in the circumstances.

Have an ongoing conversation about what they are doing online and who they are talking too - it's an important part of their confidence that they can approach a parent if something goes wrong online.

Technical moderation packages have their place when looking at limiting 'adult' content, but overall, open regular dialogue is the most important thing.

Here are some other useful steps you can take to support and protect your child:

- Share with them personal and internet safety principles (see '**digital**' articles in Parent info or visit www.thinkunow.co.uk).
- At the same time, make clear to them that if for whatever reason they do not take this advice or do something else that puts themselves at risk, and they then experience abuse or something else harmful, you will not judge them but will be there for them – you just want them to tell you so you can be there to support them.
- Make spaces to spend good time together every, or nearly every, day.
- Find ways of showing your child how much you love them.
- If they are a teenager, ensure that, alongside your protection and love, they have space to be independent.

Parts of this guide have been reproduced from resources made available by the CEOP.



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